

# Incoming!

## ~ More About ANZAC Day ~

Thanks for the 2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter / May 2011 – Issue 27. Noted that on page 36 of 40 there is an article about ANSAC day. It is actually about ANZAC day. ANZACs were members of the Australian and New Zealand Army Corps of WW1. Ever since a disastrous landing of ANZACs at Gallipoli, Turkey in WW1, our veterans days have been called ANZAC day. And when we actually get over our rivalry for a bit, both Aussies and Kiwis are still proud to be called ANZACs. The article was great, but I just thought you should know. Cheers,

**Harold Guy, Ojai CA**  
Flt Lt, 1st NZ Services Medical Team  
Bong Son, Vietnam, '68-'69

## ~ The Cammo'd One ~

Here is a well worn Cammo "We Try Harder" button. I forgot who was looking for it.

**Ed Privette**  
HHC/2/503d



Thanks Ed. It was Jay Forbes, a Canadian non-Vet friend of the 173d who was looking for it. Damn, you guys got all the good stuff. In '65 and into '66, they gave us white 173d patches and white jump wings to wear. Hmmm.....were they trying to tell us something? Ed

## Which Company?

The 173d Association web site lists Romiro C. Rodriguez, Sp4 as KIA on December 1, 1965, while serving with Delta Company 2/503d. My understanding is Delta didn't arrive in-country until the latter part of '66. Does anyone know with which company Romiro served?

**Lew "Smitty" Smith**  
HHC/2/503d

## ~ On the Button ~

About three months into the wearing of the white buttons with red lettering, some staff weenie saw a picture of the 2nd Battalion Sky Soldiers wearing them and his boss put out the word that they were "too visible" and could not be worn.

LTC Bob Sigholtz took the matter to Avis and within a few weeks the battalion had camouflage background buttons with black lettering.

Coincidentally, when as President of the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation I was working with Avis officials, I mentioned to the director of publicity in a meeting with the AVIS CEO that I had a camouflage button. Their Publicity Director mentioned that they knew about the camouflage buttons but did not have a sample. Subsequently, I presented one to the Avis Corporation and it currently is encased in a "shadow-box" picture frame hanging on the wall outside the CEO's office.

Avis is extremely proud of the Vietnam era connection with the 2/503 but has never tried to parlay that connection into an advantage by using it in their advertising. Regards

**Ken Smith**  
A/D/2/503d

## ~ Assigned to HHC/2/503 Late '68 ~

I found this picture of Kranchick's rig assigned to HHC/2/503d. This was my brother Jack's rig. We went over to Nam at the same time. The photo was probably taken late '68. Check out the bumper with "H 4/503". As I mentioned, shortly after I DEROS'd our rigs were outright attached to each battalion. Bit of useless information but thought you might like to know. Corky....Out

**Corky Corcoran**  
HHC/2/503 & 173d Signal



Hell, Corky, that's part of our history, certainly not useless. Thanks for sharing the pic brother. Ed

(Incoming continued....)



## ~ About the Chopper ~



A little side note for you. In the May newsletter (on Page 7, photo above, cover of Chuck Dean's *Nam Vet* book) it shows a slick on a small hill top disembarking some troopers. Well, that image is part of a USPS Commemorative Stamp set of the '60s, and guess what else, the middle guy on the right skid is my brother, Sgt. Claud A. Baskin, B Troop, 1st Sqdr., 9th Air Cav, 1st Cav Div. That actual chopper is now on display at the Ft. Rucker, AL Museum. My brother earned the Silver Star, Bronze Star and a Purple Heart that day. He was also put in for the MOH but LBJ downgraded it to a DSC and when things settled the 1st Cav said nope, going to be a SS!

**Jim Baskin**  
**B/4/503d**



1st Cav chopper at Ft. Rucker Museum



## ~ Elite Bastards ~



**Steve....Sgt. Rock**

In the last week I got hooked back up with my old unit, Co. F, 51st Inf. (Abn) LRP. I accidentally came across their website ([elitebastards](http://elitebastards.com)). They hold reunions every two years.

As I mentioned earlier, almost all original NCO's who formed the unit came from the HERD. I have already heard from guys in the 51st who were with me in Charlie at the Battle of the Slopes. Many others told me they regularly go to 173d reunions and some are going this year.

I just spoke on the phone to my old team leader SSG. I was assistant team leader as an E-5. He lives up in the hills of Mississippi. I will go visit him in the future. he was fucking funny -- I don't normally talk to 'Yankees'!

Co. F 51st Inf (Abn) LRP: Constituted June 16, 1917. Fought at Meuse-Argonne; Alazce in 1918 in WWI. Redesignated again 8-11-67; deactivated January, 1969 but later reactivated in 1983 as C F LRP unit assigned to 519th Military Intelligence Bn Abn at Fort Bragg.

Upon being deactivated 1/69, Co. F and other LURP companies were reactivated by the Dept. of the Army and became RANGER COMPANIES WITH THE 75TH INF. REGIMENT.

When we came from the Herd, we completed the MACV Recondo School in Nha Trang. Recondo is a combo of reconnaissance; commando; doughboy.

When I get the June Herd newsletter, I am going to send it out to the guys; you should get a whole shit load of new sign-ups for it. Airborne!

**Steve Vargo**  
**C/2/503d**

(continued....)





In an exchange of notes with trooper Bill Calhoun, president of the WWII 503rd PRCT Association, he shared this interesting bit of paratrooper history which, I suspect, most of us were never aware of. Thanks Bill.

## The Big San Antone

I will end with a *Big San Antone* (not San Antonio). San Antone was used early before the brass in Washington instigated Airborne. This came about after the 82nd ABD followed by the 101st ABD were made special troops. As I remember from old 501st Parachute Battalion, (the horses' mouth so to speak), there was an airborne battalion in Panama with them caught wearing civilian attire. I guess they were not parachutists.



(Then) LT Calhoun on LST returning from Corregidor to Mindoro.

(Bill Bailey photo)

They were transported in C-39 transports which landed. I say 'so to speak' because I was in F Company which was the old C Co., 501st Parachute Battalion. We hated the name Airborne. As Lt Col Raft said in speaking to his men (509 PI) just before they loaded to go jump in Africa,

***"Come on men! Give me one more Big San Antone!"***

You know originally the 503rd had two battalions. One was in the 503d in the Pacific and the other sent to Europe. Back in the early days the exiting cry was "*San Antone!*" The reason was those who refused to jump were sent to Ft. Sam Houston.

**William T. Calhoun**  
President  
503rd PRCT Association



## The Brave Paratrooper

A cowboy, a former army paratrooper, appeared before St. Peter at the Pearly Gates.



*"Have you ever done anything of particular merit?"* St. Peter asked.

*"Well, I can think of one thing,"* the cowboy offered.

*"On a trip to the Black Hills out in South Dakota, I came upon a gang of bikers who were threatening a young woman. I directed them to leave her alone, but they wouldn't listen. So, I approached the largest, meanest looking and most tattooed biker of the bunch and smacked him in the face, kicked his bike over, ripped out his nose ring, and threw it on the ground. I yelled, 'Now, back off or I'll kick the shit out of all of you!'"*

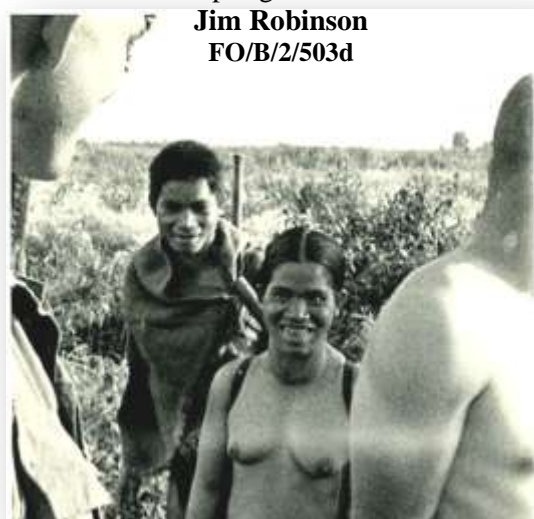
St. Peter was impressed, *"When did this happen?"*

*"Just a couple of minutes ago."*

[Sent in by Capt. Gary Prisk, C/2/503d, and reproduced here with minor modification]

## Miss July Playmate 1965

Everyone knows Jo Collins came to Vietnam to visit Bravo Company when our very own RTO Larry Paladino stole a kiss from the lass. Not many are aware of the other Playmates who came. Here's *Miss July 1965* making goo goo eyes at Gary Wright (on the left) while Sam Arnold (on the right) is rushing off to great her twin sister. Love springs eternal.



**Jim Robinson**  
FO/B/2/503d

There is absolutely no truth to the rumor Jim has an 8x10 glossy copy of this photo on the ceiling over his bed. It's simply not true.



# ~ 75th Ranger Regiment Association Reunion ~

July 25 - 31, 2011

Fort Benning, GA

## Lurps & Rangers of the 173d Airborne Brigade



### Part of the lineage of the 75th Ranger Regiment:

173d Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol  
74th Long Range Patrol  
75th Inf. N/Company Rangers  
74th Long Range Surveillance

### Reunion Headquarters:

#### Holiday Inn

2800 Manchester Expressway  
Columbus, GA 31904

**Reservations: 706-324-0231**

(Mention "75th Ranger Reunion" to receive special room rate of \$79. per night)



(All 173d and sister units welcome to attend)

### Reunion Registration Rates:

Members: \$40.

Sat. Banquet: \$40.

### Reunion Contact:

Robt. 'twin' Henriksen

Unit Director

**360-393-7790**

For more information go to:

<http://rangerrendezvous.soc.mil/>

Our reunion will be held in conjunction with the  
current 75<sup>th</sup> Ranger Regiment  
*Rendezvous and Change of Command*

### Tentative Activities:

- Visits to the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial and the National Infantry Museum
- Massive tactical jump by active airborne troops, Fryar Field DZ
- Ranger School Class Graduation
- Weapons displays by active military soldiers
- Bicycling along the River Walk & Horseback Riding
- Introduction to Yoga & Stress Reduction for Spouses
- Seminars on Veteran's Benefits & Navigating the VA
- 75th Ranger Regiment Association meeting & business meeting
- Fort Benning Change of Command ceremonies
- Be Airborne again – Jump at a small Alabama airport (Fri.)
- Banquet at the "Iron Works" historical building (Sat.)
- Ranger Hall of Fame inductee at River Center for Performing Arts. Carl Vencill is our nominee
- Services at Ranger Memorial – reading names of fallen heroes

**90 members and several widows of KIA have already registered to attend. REGISTER TODAY! [RLTW!!](#)**



# And More Reunions Of The Airborne Kind



## 3/506th Parachute Infantry, 101st Airborne Division

June 28 – July 2, 2011, Tunica, Mississippi.

### **Contact:**

Jerry Berry

Tel: 408-293-7678

Eml: [jerryberry@currahee.org](mailto:jerryberry@currahee.org)

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## 503rd Parachute Regimental Combat Team

Association WWII, September 21 – 25, 2011, Denver, Colorado.

### **Contact:**

Yolonda Goad

Tel: 303-682-0004

Eml: [yolo@live.com](mailto:yolo@live.com)

## ***“The Year of the Pathfinder”***

***July 19-23, 2001***



### ***2011 Convention***

***Sponsored by the  
National Pathfinder Association***

**Golden Nugget Hotel and Casino  
Las Vegas, Nevada**

### **Contact:**

[nationalpathfinderassociation.com](http://nationalpathfinderassociation.com)



**11th Airborne Division Association**, 68th Reunion,  
September 25 - 29, 2011 Tucson, Arizona.

### **Contact:**

Charles Magro

Tel: 256-247-7390

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## **Special Forces Association National Convention**

June 23 - 26, 2011, Orlando, Florida.

### **Contact:**

Tel: 561-252-6080

Eml: [sfachapter85.com](http://sfachapter85.com)

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**506th Association Rendezvous**, (Fort Campbell),  
November 8 – 11, 2011, Oak Grove, Kentucky.

### **Contact:**

COL Sean M. Jenkins

Tel: 270-439-1499

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## **82nd Airborne Division 65th Annual Convention**

August 10 – 14, 2011, Dayton, Ohio.

### **Contact:**

Tel: 937-898-5977

Eml: [srgabn@aol.com](mailto:srgabn@aol.com)

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**101st Airborne Division Association 66th Annual Reunion**, August 17 – 21, 2011, Lexington, Kentucky.

### **Contact:**

Tel: 931-431-0199

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***AIRBORNE....AND THEN SOME!!***

**Note:** If you're aware of any upcoming Airborne Reunions please send details to: [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com)

See Pages 11 & 12 for 173d Airborne Reunion details.  
See Page 40 for Lurps & Rangers Reunion details.



**2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter / June 2011 – Issue 28**

Page 41 of 58





~ I want to go back, I'm not done ~

By George Rivera, SGT  
A/2/503d

It is sad that I have no pictures of me from that time. For some reason, there is very little footage of me and the Herd on operations. During two tours, I only once saw a combat photographer and he did not shoot a foot of film during the few days he had spent with us. I had a few of those Kodak disposable cameras in my foot locker in my recon tent, but I was evacuated one day to be rotated back to the U.S. and I cannot believe that my good friends never sent its contents to me. Well, I know it was because they did not know my status.

It happened like this. I received a radio call from my First Sergeant, *"There is a chopper on the way out to pick you up. Get on it."* This is how I moved between companies, so I did not think it odd. Then he called and told me that there was a C-123 waiting for me at the airstrip at LZ English. A C-123 waiting for me? But this too had happened before. It was exactly how I had been sent to An Khe along with NO DEROS ALPHA to cover for some fuel transportation units that had been ambushed through the Mang Yang Pass, and how I got to IFOR for the Artillery Officer's Course. I didn't question the order, I just went. I thought I'd be back. I hate the Army.

When I got to An Khe, someone met me to tell me to go to Cam Ranh Bay. That sounded weird. I said to the guy, *"There must be some mistake. I am assigned to the 173d. I was ordered to An Khe. I am not supposed to be going beyond An Khe."* Then he said something like *"Today is your lucky day. You are going home."* I said, *"Home, home where? There must be some mistake. I have to go back to LZ English."* He said, *"Let me see your ID. Yes, that's correct. It's you. It's RA12784186. You're on orders to DEROS."*

I was short, but I had intended to extend to stay with my friends. I did not want to go back to Fort Bragg. I said, *"I'm going home."* To me home was LZ English with my friends and my unit. He said, *"That's correct."* Then I told him, *"Okay, then, where can I go to find out when there's a ship going back to English?"* He said pointedly, *"What is it with you infantry guys? If you attempt to return to English you will be violating your orders and you will be subject to court martial."*

At this point I was unhappy, but as diplomatically as I could I said, *"What the fuck are you talking about? I'm not even supposed to be here. I don't care what it says*

*on those orders, I have to get back to my unit. They're expecting me to come back. There must be some mistake. I want to talk to someone else."* *"There is nothing more to talk about,"* he said, *"here are your orders. Start clearing over there,"* and he mentioned a building number.

I felt as if I had been smacked on the head with a mallet. From then on everything was a cloud or a fog. I thought about my friends, my stuff, the letters I had received, my foot locker with my personal things in it. I had pictures, mostly copies of pictures other guys had taken with me in them, and it was all in there. I figured, once I get to where I'm going, they'll see it has all been a mistake and send me back. I want to go back. I'm not done. My friends are depending on me. I literally dragged myself to the first clearing point on my instruction sheet to surrender my weapons and ordinance.



I was an idiot. It had not been my lucky day at all. When I got back to Bragg, I immediately filed for return and was denied.. It would be 9 months before I could apply for transfer back to my Herd. By the time I got back home, some of my friends had been wounded and evacuated out of country while the others DEROSD.

I went straight to the "New" Recon, which meant no real missions, no more night ambushes, no more combat patrols, just short patrols, artillery ambushes, and H&I plotting -- dead beat work. My friends were no more. The thrill was gone. I did some interesting and some exciting things, but gone were the days where we went out to the range limit of our radios hunting. It was early June of 1971 when I became short again.

(continued....)





**LZ English, home to the Casper's Platoon from 1968 to 1971. Casper's "Ghost Town" was located on the east side of English and right next to "Sniper Village".**

LZ English photo from Casper Platoon web site.

I took to standing on the high ground, where the outdoor theater had been, looking all around at LZ English in bewildered disbelief. I turned 360s dizzily looking, scanning the base, remembering all the places where I had last stood with many of the men who had died. Most had been strangers, men I had seen moving back and forth going or returning from patrols, night ambushes, or digging endless holes to fill sandbags we seldom used and which were left behind prefilled for enemy use. I helped them dig holes for and construct fighting positions we would never use. We had seen each other every day. They had known who I was and I who they were, but we really had not known each other except on sight.

Even though I had never known them, all of them had been my brothers. Now, standing in the darkness with the sound of generators running all around me powering the air conditioners, and stereos of the privileged, I could feel that I was standing in their presence. They stood near me seeing what I was seeing, asking the questions I was asking, feeling what I was feeling. I teared and snorted like a pig as I fought against the need to cry aloud. I was tearing uncontrollably until my tears ran out. I could tell that I was changing, but I had no idea how.

I was sad to have left them behind. That had been our land. We had fought for it, suffered for it, bled for it, and died for it. I did not want to leave it. But I was

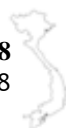
made to go. I went home alone as I had arrived. Soon after, the Herd was rotated back to the "States" and it was all over. As long as it had lasted, I could not wait to forget about it.

***I wanted to go somewhere to forget, but I would finally accept there was no such place.***

I tried to enlist in the Israeli Army, but I was told that I would have lost my American citizenship, that I would be considered a mercenary and not have Geneva Convention Protections or a country to call my own. A man needs a country.

In all of my life since then, for all the places I have lived, for all the friends I have had, I have never left it behind. I have tried, but Vietnam has followed me everywhere. It haunted me at my places of work, in my thoughts and in my endless dreams of dread. Like an old scratched record, everything, the places, the faces, the incidents have kept playing over and over. So many years later and sometimes, I still stare at an unknown fixed point in space and end up back there. I am tired. I want to go home.

All The Way!





# DIGGER IN THE MEKONG

## Operation Marauder

South Vietnam

1-8 January 1966

By Ken Baker, 1RAR

It is a bad operation; right from the word go. From the time I get out in the bush until the day I get back. I am no newcomer to these operations now, and I'm accustomed to the prickly heat, sweat, mossies and leeches, but going to the Mekong Delta, I'm going to be wet all day from wading chest deep in canals.

I served with 1RAR as an infantry medic (stretcher-bearer). We were the first battalion in South Vietnam back in 1965. Most of my tour of duty was with 3rd Platoon A Company, although for this operation I was with 1st Platoon. My previous experience as a medic prior to Vietnam was absolutely zero. Incredible as it may seem, my experience in the bush with an infantry battalion before I came to Vietnam was limited to two days and nights. The situation was no fault of 1RAR, more the haste in sending troops to maintain the battalion's numbers.

The preparations for the operation had begun in earnest; we had been issued all of our "C" rations and ammunition requirements. I had completed my check on the platoon medical kit and in particular made sure that my shell dressings and morphine supplies were in good condition. The routine of test firing and cleaning weapons helped to control the building tension we felt.

It is time to go; the various companies climb aboard the "cattle trucks" and head towards the waiting helicopters. It is as hot as hell and the bull dust clings to our already sweaty bodies and our greens turn to a murky muddy colour within minutes of our departure. As we move away from the battalion lines we yell abuse at those bastards fortunate enough to be staying behind; they are left choking in the black smoke of our exhaust fumes.

We follow what has developed into a tradition (our fathers probably did the same) and give the American military police a hard time as we pass their compound. Our officers pretend not to notice, they know this small act of defiance is good for morale. No doubt the military police will get their own back sometime after the operation when we are on local leave.



After a bumpy and very noisy ride we arrive at the airstrip. The searing heat rising in waves from the concrete tarmac hits us. The humidity combining with the fumes of the trucks and the aviation fuel leave me choking and gasping for breath. The assault on our ears is incredible as the roar of jet fighters taking off, with afterburners fully open hit us. The sergeants and corporals are forming their troops into flights yelling to be heard over the banshee created by the many jet engines around us. We can feel the thumping of the Hueys (UH10 helicopters) rotor blades slicing the thick air as we climb aboard and begin our own "Ride of the Valkyries".



**Ken in the boonies.**

As always the flight is spent in silence other than a few instructions from the section commanders and the flight crew, my pulse is racing in the face of a supercharged adrenaline rush as the gunners opened fire, spraying the perimeter of the landing zone in a hail of tracers as we leap from the chopper only to find ourselves waist deep in a bloody big swamp.

*(continued....)*





Any wonder this place is known as Plain of Reeds; my surprise quickly turns to sudden shock as the gunships fly a few metres overhead blasting the edge of the jungle with both rapid fire machine guns and rockets screaming just over our heads. Thank Christ they are on our side.

There are no Vietcong to greet us on arrival, which is hardly surprising, for who in their right minds would lie in ambush in a waist deep swamp. I for one am not disappointed, it seems the “powers that be” made an error and landed us in the wrong place.

The company moves away from the rest of the battalion as soon as we clear the swamp and head towards a distant village that has been targeted for a visit. It seems this village harbours a number of Vietcong. The company’s task is to take the high ground surrounding the village; our platoon will enter and search the village, looking for weapons and the suspected VC. Our movement through the jungle is slow and seemingly never ending as we wade through endless leech infested creeks and canals. We could cut the humidity with a knife.



**Ken on patrol with escorts.**

We reach the forming up point late in the afternoon. The rest of the company is in position and we move into the village, and just for once young men are found in the village, caught by surprise, there are weapons found in the huts, and we are instructed to take these men as suspect VC. We blindfold them, and tie their hands, then lead them from the village towards company headquarters, situated on a large feature nearby.

As we start climbing the slope towards our objective, a message is passed by the radio “*You are being followed by an armed cell of VC*”. The platoon commander questions “*Can you fire over our heads?*” showing concern about our position on the slope and the relative position of the enemy. The answer is swift. Machine guns of the company fire inches over our heads! Jesus wept! This is the second time today “so called” friendly fire has passed just over us.

We scramble to the top of the hill in bloody quick order, ready to brain the first machine gunner to look sideways. The initial burst of firing halts, artillery support is and, thank Christ it’s there, courtesy of the US 7th Fleet. Talk about overkill, I swear they are shooting 44 gallon drums in our direction, the barrage is incredible. I lie on the ground, hands over my ears, I can’t believe how painful sound can be. God help those poor bloody VC down at the bottom of the hill.

Adding insult to injury, the company commander decides, since our platoon invited the VC to the party we had to finish it off by completing a sweep of the fire zone. We go down the hill, this time searching for bodies! By the time we get into the area of the last enemy sighting, the smoke is lifting, the stench of cordite is foul, and we can hear quiet moaning coming from under a bush. Investigating, we find a VC horribly wounded, hit by machine gun fire and then was brutalised by artillery, I can do nothing for him. Mercifully he dies as we watch. We find just one body and an AK47 assault rifle, there is no further trace of Vietcong.

Completing the sweep the platoon heads up the slope and rejoins the company, which is digging in for the night. They had chosen a section of a rubber plantation for an overnight defensive position. Our section of the perimeter is on the edge of the plantation looking back towards the place of carnage we had just left. As I started to dig my fighting pit, I remember thinking that maybe things are not so bad as the local soil was rich red and good easy digging; besides I had just been offered a good job for the night. The platoon sergeant had asked me to do a radio watch during the night instead of my usual 2 hours sitting on the machine gun up front. I thought, “*You bloody beaut!*” It means someone will bring the radio to me in my shelter at midnight and I then would take care of the radio checks for 2 hours and take the radio to the platoon signaller (RTO), who does the next shift. I would only be out of my bed for about 5 minutes at the most.

(continued....)



I happily finish my fighting pit and consider the path I would have to clear in order to find the signaler in the dark at 0200 hrs. I clear a small track by getting down on my hands and knees and brush the leaves aside exposing the red earth creating a path about 6 inches wide and some 30 yards long direct to the signaler's tent. I knew it would be as "black as the ace of spades" as there is no moon and it is raining off and on. I have no choice but to crawl along the ground to find my path.

As a platoon we go through our usual ritual of weapon cleaning, take our anti-malarial tablets, feed ourselves and complete our "stand to" at last light. At last I'll get a decent night's sleep and quickly drop off. I am roughly shaken awake at midnight and given the radio, my shift has begun. I carry out my duty in the relative comfort of my shelter, dozing between radio checks with the command post, thinking that I never had it so good, and the time flies. Soon it's time to hand the radio on to the next bloke.

It's still raining outside and as I expect, totally black. Not even able to see my hand a foot from my face, I am a bit concerned that I won't find the path I've made. I clear the last remnants of sleep from my mind, gather the radio and my rifle and move into the night.

Thinking this won't take very long and I will be back to sleep, I start crawling along in what is rapidly turning into mud with my face a few inches from the ground searching for my narrow path. I have to be totally silent not wanting to draw any attention from our own blokes quietly sitting beside the machine gun.

After what seems an eternity, I find the shelter at the end of the path. I shake the signaler in much the same way, as I had been a couple of hours ago, thinking this'll teach him to sleep so soundly. "Jesus wept!?" I've managed to wake up the bloody company sergeant major. Thinking I'm about to be beaten to a pulp, he tells me to "*Get the fuck out of here!*" He then threatens to have me chained up. I retreat back into the rain, thanking my lucky stars it was so dark, he could not have recognised me as the interloper shattering his sleep.

Someone else had by chance constructed a path crossing mine confusing me and forcing a retracing of my steps back to my shelter to start all over again. It seems simple enough, so off I go, nose a couple of inches from my not so trusty track and tail up in the air awkwardly carrying radio and rifle, crawling for what seemed forever and then the cold realisation hits me – I am lost! I had somehow picked up yet another track in the darkness and I haven't the slightest idea where I am! My gut knots in fear. Should I try to find my way back again? A second wave of fear, no, terror hits me. Where is our machine gun? After yesterday's events (was it

only yesterday?) the gunners will be mighty nervous and probably trigger-happy as we couldn't account for all of the enemy force we fired on. It seemed reasonable they could be lurking around in our vicinity or worse in my vicinity, wherever that is!

In the face of these insurmountable problems I decide to stay where I am until daylight. The worst part of my predicament is in the fact I have a radio but don't dare speak for fear of either alerting the enemy to my position or, worse still, my own mates shooting me to pieces like the VC was yesterday.

So I sit and wait, shivering with cold and fear in the rain, not daring to make the slightest sound. The radio operator at the command post must know something is wrong as each time he calls for my allotted radio check, I squeeze the pressel switch on the hand set, but I can't do more than that. He should know I'm there somewhere.

When the sun starts to rise I realise my worst fears, I am sitting out in front of our platoon gun pits and the gunner has not yet seen me! I call quietly to him, praying I don't startle him into firing, he answers immediately, saying he thought he could see someone out front but held his fire as he was not convinced. I have rarely known such relief, although it is mixed with embarrassment and the sure knowledge I was extremely lucky to be alive.

The next few days prove to be uneventful, just ceaseless patrolling, hot and sweaty and forever picking off leeches or wading through endless canals, gathering fresh leeches from the bushes as we push through the jungle. I am feeling a little "off colour" but we are always thirsty, as we don't stop long enough to fill water bottles; the water was probably full of disease anyway.

Thankfully, I hear nothing about my night of misadventure either from the mates or, more importantly, from the CSM. The whole series of events rapidly fades from my mind as I start thinking the worst of this operation is behind me. Surely with just a few days to go, not much else can go wrong, besides what could be as bad as what I have already endured?

It is the sixth morning of the operation and when I get up for "stand to" I feel as sick as a dog with a fever, and I knew it, I feel as if I have no strength. One minute I am sweating the next chilled to the bone, but, on the bright side my mind is as clear as a crystal.

(continued....)





For a few hours I soldier on, but, in my own mind I'm in an awkward situation. I know I am not going to be much good to anyone for very much longer as I am getting worse by the hour and I feel I'm reaching the point of collapse. I know I can't organise a "medevac" for myself fearing facing my mates after it was over.

A couple more hours go by and the platoon sergeant realises there's a problem and suggests I see the next platoon's medic. On arrival, the medic puts a thermometer in my mouth and hits the panic button! My temperature has reached 104 degrees Fahrenheit. He promptly organises a helicopter to take me to an American field hospital. I'm thinking nothing else can go wrong now, I'm being sent to a hospital and from there I will most likely be sent back to base about the same time as the Brigade would arrive back.

The helicopter arrives creating its own swirling dust storm at the same time and whisks me away. We fly towards Saigon for all of 7 minutes and land in another self-created dust storm, much to the annoyance of the hospital staff. I am immediately disarmed; after all you can't have a dirty, smelly, unshaven soldier who looked half mad, running around their hospital armed to the teeth with all forms of destruction hanging from his body.

The hospital is in reality a very large tent out in the middle of nowhere, containing about thirty beds all full with patients, mainly Black American. I am put under a shower and cleaned up so not to dirty up the bed too much, and promptly put into the said bed. About this time it is decided it is time to take everyone's temperature, and all the male nursing staff quickly fill all mouths with thermometers and just as quickly leave the room. The whole procedure seems strange to me, and the next thing I hear is the clicking of 29 Zippo lighters as all the other residents in the hospital fire up their thermometers to what they felt was the required temperature to stay on in the hospital's care, I guess they were all trying to survive any way they could.

The next morning it is decided to send me back to the 93rd Evacuation Hospital at Bien Hoa as my condition had worsened without the aid of a Zippo. Although my condition has worsened I am still thinking quite clearly and continue to do so for the duration of my illness. I am told to get dressed and there is an ambulance waiting outside to take me to an airfield where I will be picked up and be taken by fixed wing aircraft to the Bien Hoa airbase. I dress quickly and sure enough, there was an ambulance waiting for me.

I'm transported along a very dusty track for some 10 to 15 minutes of hectic driving, and at this point I started to get a very bad feeling about the whole scenario. The driver is looking a bit nervous, as the jungle seemed to

be closing in around us. Then I realise the hospital had not rearmed me; I suddenly feel naked and completely reliant on the ambulance crew. We come to a halt in another cloud of dust! We have apparently reached our destination; an old disused rice paddy. There is no one to be seen in any direction, I look at the driver and ask, "What happens now?" His firm answer is to indicate I am to wait here until the aircraft picks me up. He says it won't be very long, and with that I was left in the middle of nowhere, unarmed! I just knew all along, this was going to be a bad operation!



**Aussies of the 1RAR with Vietnamese locals. Lady on the left must be thinking.... "họ chắc chắn đội mũ"**  
(Translation: *They sure wear funny hats*).

I think to myself, here I am, sitting out on the edge of a jungle, no rifle, in a land where a fair few of the locals would like to see me looking down the wrong end of a rifle. I'm as sick as a dog, what else could possibly go wrong! I close my mind to the myriad of answers to this question, and sit back under a tree and wait. After about two and a half-hours which felt like two and a half months, I hear the sound of a Caribou aircraft on an approach to land. When the aircraft taxied to a halt I could have hugged the flight crew except they looked as dirty as I must have looked only yesterday. I climb aboard, once again safe for the moment, I dare not think what else could possibly go wrong, I am learning fast.

After what was an uneventful flight, we land at the Bien Hoa airbase. I ask for my transport to the 93rd Evac. Hospital, I might have known! No transport had been organised! I have to hitch a ride to 1RAR base, only to find the battalion is still out in the bush. For a change my luck is good, I find one of those fortunate bastards I abused as I was leaving the base at the beginning of the operation. He ignores my past abuse and agrees to drop me off.

The events that take place at the hospital are another story but, for now, the operation was over, and nothing else can go wrong, I was out of it!



## More about "The Letter"



WWII 503rd trooper Jim Mullaney

In last month's issue (*The Letter*, May 2011, Issue 27, Page 5), Jim Mullaney of the 503rd PRCT told the touching and sad story of the time he came upon the remains of a U.S. soldier on the Island of Corregidor whom had given his life in a final face-to-face battle with enemy soldiers. This is a follow-up to Jim's letter which ultimately caused the Pentagon to become involved.

[Sent in by Paul Whitman, 503rd PRCT Heritage Battalion web site]



**MEMORANDUM FOR** Executive Officer, 41st Infantry Brigade

**SUBJECT:** Private First Class (PFC) John Skelton Commemoration

*"An investigation of records at the Army Archives in St. Louis revealed that PFC John Skelton had been awarded the Bronze Star<sup>2</sup> and Purple Heart for his actions on Corregidor, but the medals had never been posthumously awarded to his family. It also was learned that he had not been awarded the Combat Infantry Badge, which he also had earned. Plans are underway for a formal presentation ceremony in Eugene this spring. The medals, accompanied by a certificate of appreciation signed by the Secretary of Defense will be presented to the family of John Hundley Skelton."*

## FAMILY FINALLY LEARNS JOHNNY'S LAST CHAPTER

by Eric Mortensen

It is strange to read Johnny Skelton's letters. They are so full of life – just ordinary life with all its promise – that it's tough to think he never came home. "Well, I'm in the \_\_\_\_ Army."

He wrote that on Aug 24, 1941, aboard what he described as a "G-D-mn" train bound for infantry training at Camp Wolters, Texas. The attack on Pearl Harbour was less than four months away. Johnny Skelton's fate was about to become a 53-year mystery. "Well, I am in Texas now. It is hotter than the devil." Johnny Skelton wrote that on Aug 30, 1941. He'd been drafted into the Army and didn't mind going. He'd worked in a mill after dropping out of Santa Clara High School north of Eugene, but America was still coming out of the Depression and jobs were shaky.



*The Rock*

*I think I have a steady job with the government now. I have just about decided to join the regular Army and go to the islands."* He wrote that on Sept. 6, 1941, after discovering career soldiers were a breed apart from the stumbling draftees he was stuck with. "They have what they call the 'awkward squad' for guys who are so dumb they can't tell their right foot from their left", he wrote to his sister, Lucille Bowman, and her husband, Clifton.

*"They make them carry about a 10 pound rock in their left hand so they can tell them apart", he wrote. "That's the honest to God truth."*

Johnny Skelton figured he could join the regular Army, go to the Philippines and maybe make sergeant in six to eight months. He enjoyed the regimentation, the officers were "sure enough swell guys," and he expected to qualify as an expert rifleman.

(continued....)







**Japanese celebrating their short-lived victory on the island.**

He'd always been one to plan ahead and take care of things. He was the oldest of the Skelton children and looked after Lucille, Tom, Helen and Aura. Lucille recalls picking cherries with him when she was young. When she got tired and cranky he'd tell her, *"Lucille, it's OK if you want to take a little nap over there."*

*"When I woke up, I'd see my bucket had more cherries in it than when I went to sleep,"* she says. *"He'd always worry about the rest of us kids first,"* she says. *"He took being the oldest very seriously."*

*"Well, kids, how are you making it? I hear you have been doing pretty well. They say you have named him John. . . is that right?"* Johnny Skelton wrote that on Oct. 1, 1941. Lucille Bowman had given birth to a son and named him after her brother, who was in Fresno, Calif., waiting to ship out to the Philippines

The war in Europe had been raging for two years and Japan was on the march in Asia. The United States was not yet at war, but it was in the wind. U.S. troops stationed in the Pacific were ill-equipped. They still wore World War I-style helmets and carried bolt-action Springfield rifles. They wore leather leggings and wool uniforms.

Johnny Skelton wrote that it would take at least 28 days to reach the Philippines by boat. *"It is going to be a good adventure,"* he wrote. *"When I get to the Philippines I will write you kids more and send you pictures and souvenirs. Pass this letter around to the other kids and tell everybody to drop a line sometime. I have went about 6,000 miles since I saw you kids last. I have several thousand more to go. Well, I wish you luck. Your brother, Johnny*  
(P.S) *Be sure and take good care of the young one.*

That was the last Lucille Bowman heard from her brother.

The Japanese fell upon Pearl Harbor and, in rapid fashion, knocked out U.S. and Filipino forces in the Philippines. Corregidor, a two square-mile rock island at the entrance to Manila Bay, was the last outpost to fall. U.S. and Filipino soldiers there surrendered in May 1942.

PFC John Skelton was listed as missing. After about three years, the Army declared him dead.

*"All these years, we wondered what really happened,"* Lucille Bowman says. *"If he'd survived Corregidor, he would have been on the Bataan Death March. I always felt sure that if he was a prisoner, he wouldn't have been one for long. He wouldn't think it was right, and he wouldn't put up with it, and they would have killed him."*



**Bataan Death March**

U.S. troops didn't return to Corregidor until February 1945, when they retook it in the "island hopping" campaign that led to the Japanese homeland. The first Americans to return were Army paratroopers who landed on what was called the "top side" of the island. They spent several days battling their way to an airfield, blowing up caves filled with Japanese defenders. Among the paratroopers was 1st Lt. James Mullaney.

*(continued....)*





**Liberators from the sky. 503rd jump on to Corregidor**  
(503rd PRCT Heritage Bn web site photo)

During a break in the fighting, Mullaney spotted the skeletal remains of 15 to 20 Japanese who had fallen in a rough semi-circle. About 20 feet away, facing them, was the skeleton of a lone American.

*"The uniform he wore had weathered the tropics much better than his body," Mullaney was moved to write five decades later. "The shoes and leggings were still in place around bones. The pants were frayed and brittle but still covered tile backside and lower spine. The wool shirt was torn."*

The man's helmet, a World War I type, was cocked over his skull and cheek bones. His Springfield .03 rifle lay under his right arm, and the bone of his forefinger was inside the trigger guard. There was no ammunition left in the rifle.

*"It scared me somewhat," Mullaney says by telephone from his home in Louisville, Ky. "I was afraid it might be my brother. It was one chance in 10,000, but he was in the Philippines. We knew he'd been on Bataan."*

Mullaney gently moved the man's helmet strap and looked at his dog tags. The last name was "Skelton." The first name looked like "John." His hometown, included on dog tags at the time, was listed as "Eugene, Oregon."

The scene haunted Mullaney for years. He marveled at how the man had apparently battled courageously to the end. And his brother - whom he later learned had been captured and died a prisoner in Japan - was named John, too.

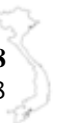
Fifty years flew by.

Royal and Darlyne Jaynes of Eugene took a 103-day trip to countries in Southeast Asia and the Pacific. It included a stop on Corregidor, and Darlyne Jaynes wrote an article about the island for *International Travel News*, a monthly magazine. As fate would have it, James Mullaney subscribes. He saw the article, learned the author was from Eugene and contacted Jaynes. He followed up on July 12 with the letter he'd been meaning to send, somewhere, to someone, for years.

*"As I write to you people I am hoping that John Shelton can in some way be remembered in your thoughts and prayers. If any of his family or friends can be located, let them know what a soldier he was. Show them this correspondence and tell them that here in Louisville, Kentucky, is one person who never met John Shelton but will never forget him."*



*"I shall return". (1942)*





# A Letter From a 503<sup>rd</sup> Trooper

I am a little late in answering your very welcome letter. It sure was great to hear from a 503rd Airborne friend.

I was born May 1, 1924. When I left school, I joined the Civilian Conservation Corps which brought me to Lancaster, Pennsylvania where I entered into Hamilton Watch School. Seven months later, the war broke out and I was drafted into the army.

After Basic Training in the Army, I volunteered for the Airborne and was assigned to the 503rd Airborne Regiment. The only serious thing that happened to me was a bad case of malaria. After the war was over, I went back to work at Hamilton Watch where I stayed for 42 years and then retired in 1984.

This February 14th, my wife and I will be married for 63 years with one son and 2 grandsons. I guess that is the story of my life.

Thank you for the great letter and may you always have a soft landing.

Your Brother in Arms,

**Robert L. Lenhart**  
Lancaster, PA

*Airborne, All the Way Robert!*



## A note from a Sky Soldier:

The Greatest Generation! All he did was save the free world, raise a family after getting married on Valentine's Day (the romantic devil), preparing to celebrate his 63rd anniversary, and stayed gainfully employed at the same company for 42 years.

*"I guess that is the story of my life," he says.*

I wish we all could have such a life!

AATW!

**Jack Schimpf**  
B/2/503d



# Special Invitation to Sky Soldiers

This is strictly in regard to the DEEP SOUTH 503RD CORREGIDOR REUNION. It will be in Savannah, Georgia July 7-10 and we would be honored for as many of the 173d Sky Soldiers as can be had to join us.

Following is reunion information and a Registration Form. We would appreciate it if you will include the information in the next 2/503d Vietnam Newsletter in June.

*AIRBORNE, ALL THE WAY!*

**Chuck & Dee Breit, Charley & Edith Hylton**  
503rd PRCT WWII



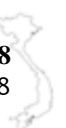
503rd Trooper Chuck (Clark Gable) Breit ready to blast.

**Note: Chuck, Charley and their wives attended our reunion last year in N. Myrtle Beach, SC. This will be a great opportunity for us to rub elbows with some of our country's original paratroopers. Ed**

[Reunion registration form on following page]



2/503d **VIETNAM** Newsletter / June 2011 – Issue 28  
Page 51 of 58





**503rd PARACHUTE RGT ASSOCIATION, WORLD WAR II, INC.**  
**503rd Parachute Regiment 462nd Parachute Artillery Battalion**  
**161st Parachute Engineer Company**



**503rd DEEP SOUTH CHAPTER CORREGIDOR REUNION**  
**SAVANNAH, GEORGIA**  
**JULY 7-8-9-10, 2011**

The Deep South Chapter invites you to the *Corregidor Reunion* July 7-10, 2011, hosted by Chuck and Dee Breit and Charley and Edith Hylton. It will be held at the

**Quality Inn (Mid-Town)**  
**7100 Abercorn Street**  
**Savannah, GA 31406**

**Tel Reservations:**

**912-352-7100**

**Room Rates:**

**\$66.67 per night, includes taxes**

**(rate is good for early arrival and stay over)**

**Cutoff date for reservations is July 1st**

**Reunion Registration Fee:\***

**\$90.00 per person**

**\*Includes a hot breakfast each morning, hospitality room, trolley tour, riverboat harbor cruise and dinners on Friday and Saturday nights.**



**TAKE THE TRAIN!**

The train is an inexpensive way to get to Savannah and we will pick you up at the train station if you let us know when you are arriving.

**TROOPERS**, we are without a doubt aging. Do all you can do NOW as time is not passing us by, it is **RUNNING US OVER!** Ask your children and/or grandchildren to bring you if you can't make it on your own. School will be out so invite Grandchildren to join us. **ALL GUESTS ARE WELCOME.**

**ALL MEMBERS OF THE 173d AIRBORNE**, you are our heritage and we welcome you to join us for our reunion.

Please assist the Reunion Planning Committee by completing and returning the following Registration Form as soon as possible which will help us make this a great reunion for everyone.

Also, don't delay in making your hotel reservations with the Quality Inn.

**~ Registration Form ~**

**(Please print & copy form for additional names)**

**Your name:** \_\_\_\_\_ **#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Your Unit:** \_\_\_\_\_ **#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guest 1:** \_\_\_\_\_ **#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guest 2:** \_\_\_\_\_ **#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Guest 3:** \_\_\_\_\_ **#** \_\_\_\_\_

**Mail address:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Phone:** \_\_\_\_\_ **Email:** \_\_\_\_\_

In the “#” space above, please indicate “1” for roast beef, “2” for grilled chicken, or “3” for salmon for the Saturday night dinner.

Enclosed is my check in the amount of \$ \_\_\_\_\_, at the rate of \$90. per person named above.

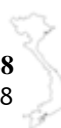
Please make check payable to Charles E. Breit and mail to:

**Chuck Breit**  
**34 Garden Mall Court**  
**Inglis, FL 34449**

**Tel: 1-352-447-3983**



**AIRBORNE....ALL THE WAY!**





## Sigholtz Capital Chapter Hosts Arlington Ceremony



On Saturday, 9 May 2011, the Sigholtz Capital Chapter hosted on behalf of the Association the dedication of the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial marker in Arlington National Cemetery. For many, it brought back memories of a similar ceremony held in 1998 when the original Brigade marker was dedicated. LTC (R) Ed Anthony was the Project Officer and Master of Ceremonies for both dedications, and our Australian and New Zealand Brothers-in-Arms enriched the ceremony by their attendance and remarks.

In 1998, the Society/Association leadership had given up hope that the Sky Soldier Brigade would ever be reactivated. Consequently, the 1998 Memorial Marker, with language oriented on the Brigade's Vietnam service, contained both an activation date and an inactivation date. With the reactivation of the 173d Airborne Brigade in 2000, the Brigade's Memorial Marker needed to be revised.



**LTC Andrew Shaw from new Zealand**

Australian Military Attache' Brigadier Barry McManus spoke of the long standing relationship existing between our two Armies and the pride that the Australian military took in being associated with the 173d Airborne Brigade. New Zealand Lt. Col. Andrew Shaw, who previously served in New Zealand's 161 Battery, reminded us of the collective service and sacrifices of our units.



**The new marker**

Following remarks by Sigholtz Capital Chapter President Terry Modglin, the names of the Australian and New Zealand warriors who fell while attached to the Brigade in Vietnam, as well as the Brigade's warriors who fell in Iraq and three Afghanistan deployments, were read. The three distinguished speakers presented a wreath, final honors were rendered, and Taps and the Last Post were sounded.

### White Elephant Auction

On 7 May 2011, the Sigholtz Chapter dedicated a new 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial marker in Arlington National Cemetery reflecting the Brigade's service since its activation in 1963. It replaces a marker dedicated in 1998 reflecting the Brigade's service during the Vietnam era. The challenge that the Chapter now faces is -- what does one do with a 350 pound (white elephant) inscribed granite marker?

In order to close a budget shortfall between what was raised and the cost of the marker, installation and the ceremony, the Chapter Officers have decided to conduct a "Silent Auction" for the 1998 marker.

The minimum bid for the marker is \$150.00. Bids must be received by 1 December 2011. The Chapter reserves the right to disqualify any bidder who cannot demonstrate that the marker will be treated with the dignity that should be accorded such a monument. Bids may be mailed to the Sigholtz Capital Chapter mailing address (P.O. Box 15133, Arlington, VA 22215-0133), or emailed to [kvsmith173@gmail.com](mailto:kvsmith173@gmail.com). The Chapter will work with the winning bidder to transport the marker to its final destination.

[  
[Submitted by Col. Ken Smith, A/D/2/503d]



# Another Bad Day In Vietnam

May 27, 1968

By George Rivera

A/2/503d

Pat Steele was killed the day after a guy named Pough, or a name pronounced 'Puff' was KIA with Delta 2/503d. Puff had a buddy out in the open being shot every time he moved for a total at the time of three hits. Pat told me that Puff, a grenadier, jumped up from behind a boulder to return fire when the sniper shot him in the chest. He died instantly. It was a big rescue op from the beginning for us and a story about stupidity, the heroism that followed, and ending in more stupidity.

Pat and the remainder of the platoon from Delta were evacuated, while we, 2/No Deros, stayed on the mountain. The only reason I know what happened was because Pat told me, "*Puff was my best friend.*" Then he said, "*Do not let them take him,*" referring to the fact that the wounded were Dusted Off, but not the KIA. So I spent the night hardly sleeping because I was lying next to Puff's body to protect it from any gooks coming along trying to grab it.

Pat and I coincidentally met at the E/203d Company orderly room at approximately 1700 the next day. I went to pick up my mail, and asked Pat and my other friend, William F. Brice, if they wanted me to pick up their mail too, and I did. William F. Brice, nicknamed FEBE, was short at the time and he was the company driver. As you know, we had a fire support base, LZ English North, and FEBE used to ferry supplies and mail back and forth. LZ English North was exactly 5400 meters north of the center point of LZ English, the maximum range of a 4.2" mortar. This happened to be the reason there was a 4.2" mortar platoon at LZ English North -- to strike as far away as the center of LZ English in case the base was overrun. This I am not sure of, but it is the only thing that makes sense; that if the southern perimeter of LZ English were attacked, the perimeter would reform north of the center of the base at which point, the remainder would be under the fire umbrella of the 4.2s of LZ English North. I could be totally wrong, but these facts concerning the distances between the bases I knew to be true, and accurate. I was an observer remember. Okay, maybe you didn't know.

A Captain wanted to spend the night at LZ English North. I was fully field armed as always. I say this because I had just returned from the field and I never secured my gear or weapon. I carried it everywhere. No one on that Jeep was armed with anything. It was as if they were going on a ride through Central Park. A guy named Darby was set to go too, and I was supposed to go along for the ride with my two friends, but the 1/4 ton

truck was only rated for four people, and I would have been the fifth. I was already on the right rear fender when the Captain said, "*The MPs are going to stop us at the gate, and one of us is going to have to get off.*" Then he turned to me and said, "*Rivera, why don't you get off and wait here. They'll be back in twenty minutes.*" Liar.

They left and about twenty minutes later I heard a distant explosion, followed by AK auto fire. Looking north towards the direction of the blast, I saw a plume of black smoke, like a petroleum fire. Then I heard over the battalion radio in the company orderly room,

***"Echo, you have two KIAs. I say again, you have two KIAs."***

At the same time two cobras lifted off, and then settled back down. There was nothing to be done. No enemy to assault. It was over in seconds. A few minutes later the names Steele and Brice were broadcast in the clear over the battalion administrative frequency.

At first light, I drove with some Wildcats to LZ English North. FEBE's Jeep had had a command detonated mine set off between it and the utility trailer it towed, then some gooks had opened auto fire with AKs -- even that I had heard from where I had stood originally. It had been mad fire, but it had been brief. LZ English had M-2s and M-60s all over it and two M-42 40MM Dusters. Nobody had fired a round in retaliation or in defense. I would have driven a Duster out to the fight and cleaned out the gooks if I had been there, and if I had known how to drive it and shoot it, but no one there had done anything. I would have lit up the village with a .50 cal. I would have done something. No one there had. All night I had wondered why.

I did not sleep. I was still dead from not having slept the night before guarding Puff. But I was up all night staring at the sky, talking to Pat and FEBE, telling them how sorry I was that I had gotten off the Jeep, that I had let Darby go instead. I should have been the one to go. I would have made the difference. They might have died, and me as well, but not the way they had, and not alone. I used to say that if I had to die, I was showing up at Hell's Gate with company.

When I questioned the people there, they told me that the gooks had first set off a mine, then run out onto the road shooting. The mine had blown up the tires on the trailer and it was dragging.

(continued....)





Then when they opened fire, FEBE had been shot in the hip and had tried to make a left U-turn, but the Jeep rolled over onto its right side trapping Pat's right leg under it. A gook had then run up to the Jeep, shot up the gas tank so the gas poured out onto Pat, then set it on fire.

He had deliberately, manually set it on fire. Pat had not been shot. He had burned to death in a roaring gasoline fire. That had been the black smoke I had seen. FEBE tried to crawl away from them, but one of them ran up to him as FEBE held his hand up maybe asking, pleading, but the gook emptied his magazine into his face, then turned and ran into the village.

I know there is a lot of detail concerning the ambush, and that is what made me so angry. I was yelling at them. I called them cowards. I hated them. They had seen all that detail and not given a fraction of an instant to returning fire, or responding aggressively in any way. I know it was wrong, but I wanted to shoot them and if I had been alone, I might have, but my Wildcat buddies made me go. It had not been their fault. It was the Captain's fault. He knew it was after curfew. He should not have let them leave the base, or been stupid enough to want to go spend the night at LZ English North. It was his fault.

Anyway, this wasn't about me, it was about my friends and how they died. I'm still angry, and sorry.

*~ On the Wall ~*

**Patrick Matthew Steele**

**Corporal**

**E CO, 2ND BN, 503RD INFANTRY**

**173RD ABN BDE, USARV**

**Army of the United States**

**Roseville, Michigan**

**May 19, 1949 to May 27, 1968**

**PATRICK M STEELE is on the Wall at**

**Panel 64W Line 002**



*Help!*

Sky Soldier brother George Rivera mentioned he does not have a single photo of himself taken in Vietnam. If anyone has a Nam pic of George please send it to me and I'll see he gets it, or I can put him in touch with you, thanks. [rtol173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rtol173d@cfl.rr.com) Ed

## 173d Ranger on T.V.

To all: LRRP/Rangers:

Tome Roubideaux participated in an interview with Paul LaRoche of the "Hidden Heritage" program to be televised on Tuesday night, May 31st, at 7:30 p.m. (Mountain Time).

The station is called "Rural Farm Deliver," RFD-TV, [www.rfdtv.com](http://www.rfdtv.com) Check with your t.v. server for the channel in your area or call RFD-TV at 402-289-2085 for details. Some may wish to record the program for others of us who do not receive that channel.

Call or email your teammates letting them know of the upcoming broadcast.

Thanks to Tome for doing this interview where he explains our operations while serving our country.

**Robt 'twin' Henriksen**

**Unit Director**

**173d LURPS/Rangers**

**Tome "Mad-Monk" TEAM KILO 1971**



**Of Memorial Day**



*I have never been able to think of the day as one of mourning; I have never quite been able to feel that half-masted flags were appropriate on Decoration Day. I have rather felt that the flag should be at the peak, because those whose dying we commemorate rejoiced in seeing it where their valor placed it. We honor them in a joyous, thankful, triumphant commemoration of what they did.*

*— Benjamin Harrison*



**2/503d VIETNAM Newsletter / June 2011 – Issue 28**

Page 55 of 58

This is Part II in a series of reports by Ranger Roy covering the early days of the 2/503d/173d. See Part I, *Preparing for War*, in our April 2011 newsletter, Issue 26, Pages 28-29.

## PART II

# THE JUNGLE IS NEUTRAL

By LTC Roy Lombardo  
CO B/2/503d

In my efforts to stay in the good graces of our editor and to provide some info of the 173d Airborne Brigade in the early days, I segue into Brigade Jungle Training.

Okinawa had been denuded by air and naval gunfire in 1945. What we encountered and trained in on Okinawa, was less than 20 years of sparse, secondary growth and not particularly difficult to move through, except in some deep ravines of which there were many.

The Lieutenants of note about which I have written previously had all read a book about the OSS in Burma and Malaya in WW II, seen as the title above -- the point being that the jungle was not your friend or enemy but simply the terrain through which you would move and fight. With skill that movement could be mastered.

The Brigade trained annually on an island called Iriomote, the southernmost island in the Ryukyuan Chain, which was a few hundred miles from Okinawa and near Taiwan. The Brigade trainers in their "planning wisdom" scheduled jungle training to take place beginning in January 1964. Rain was fairly constant and the temps were in the 60's and 70's, which meant if you were wet, you were also cold.

The instructors would be those Lieutenants, Ranger-qualified and trained additionally in a "jungle" school. Some of us had been to the US Army Jungle School in Panama and a very few to the British Jungle School in Malaya (now Malaysia). The British school was more highly regarded because of the skills taught and the opportunity to train with Gurkha soldiers, who were also students.

The transport to Iriomote was by Navy vessel. There were two: the first was a passenger transport, with a mess and sleeping quarters and the second was an LST which transported two 2 1/2 ton trucks on the deck and a rolling vehicle in the hold, called a LARC (Large Amphibious Rolling Craft), which could drive into the water, be propelled by the movement of the tires, then roll up onto a beach. The instructors had been asked the day before travel, "*Do you have a preference between one or two??*" The operation officer would then state, "*Well you're going on the 613.*" This turned out to be

an LST (Landing Ship Tank) only unusual because the Opns officer and the School Commander (MAJ William White) traveled on the troop ship.

The instructors and the troops from E/17th Cavalry all traveled on the LST. There was a mess hall but it was a crew mess only AND the crew was Japanese, contracted to the US Navy. The first conversation I had with the Captain was for him to tell me that he fought the French in WWII off the coast of Indochina. Other than that he allegedly "spoke" no English.



**Iriomote Jungle Training at Ryukyu Islands, E/17th Cav, HQ 1/503d**

Roughing it was no new deal to the instructors and troops and we even understood we'd eat C-rations for the journey (about 12 hours). The lieutenants got the troops on board and assigned to quarters, gear stowed, etc., which didn't take rocketry skills. We boarded only to learn that the quarters, for the Officer Instructors, were adjacent to the crew latrine and above the engine room. When the hatches were open, heated air from below and perfumed air from the latrine passed through our "cabin."

As soon as we sailed we began to suspect that the South China Sea was not a friendly place. Many of us carried Dramamine tablets, taped to the chains of our canteens, so we could easily get to them on a bumpy parachute flight. The winds increased, the seas rose, and our flat-bottomed LST proved that it was not intended for the typhoon, in which we found ourselves.

We arrived off Iriomote as scheduled but then had to wait five days for the seas to subside, allowing the cargo doors to be opened for the LARC to exit. By this time, all aboard were almost ready to try to swim to shore using poncho rafts for flotation. I can only tell the readers that it was astounding for a city-boy like me to stand on a pitching deck to see the sea rise 20 feet above my head and then to be lifted on the next wave and be able to see to San Francisco.

(continued....)







### 173d Jungle warfare training on Iriomote,

We landed without incident and set-up in GP Large tents.

The training provided individual skills; squad skills; a few platoon exercises, and a three day battalion FTX which crossed the island. Training is training and we were training in the rain, wet all of the time, seldom with an opportunity to dry off -- not unlike operations in the Vietnam Highlands. No reader would be interested in the specifics of the subjects, so I'll gloss over them with a few exceptions. Bridging (one rope, two rope, and three rope bridges); Australian bush raft; climbing and rappelling, jungle living; E&E were all significant because they taught and developed self confidence.

The three-day FTX was an opportunity to apply all the training skills into one exercise. A graduation exercise of sorts!

Now the island and our training area on the ocean was dominated by a single peak, called Komi-dake, 469 meters high. The contour lines were 20 meters apart and on the map (which I still have) the contour lines almost touch, from which you could conclude that that one was one *steeeep* motor scooter. I did a personal recon of every route, assigned to the battalions (nine days of jungle reconnaissance). The zone of action was about 6-7 kilometers long to cross the island but I knew because I had already done it, that it would take 3 days. Each company zone was about 1 KM wide. Five hundred meters/hour would be fast for small units.

There was no way for me to know (just a 1st LT) that this maneuver scheme that I proposed would be similar to many search and destroy missions in later years. When briefed to the incoming battalion commander, he retorted "*Why do we have to search for the aggressors?? Let them sit and they'll starve.*" Not the school solution but he finally agreed to accept the requirement.

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**Note:** Ranger Roy will continue these reports on our unit up to the date of his DEROS. We will then invite another 2/503 company commander to continue reporting on the history of our battalion from his perspective. Ed

### Honoring our Medics

In the July issue of our newsletter we will feature and honor those brave souls of the 173d Airborne (all units) who were so important to us all, *our Medics*. Please send your brief stories and photos of your Medic buddies to [rto173d@cfl.rr.com](mailto:rto173d@cfl.rr.com) by no later than June 15. Thanks.



# REMARKS OF VICE PRESIDENT LYNDON B. JOHNSON

MEMORIAL DAY, GETTYSBURG, PENNSYLVANIA

May 30, 1963

On this hallowed ground, heroic deeds were performed and eloquent words were spoken a century ago.

We, the living, have not forgotten--and the world will never forget--the deeds or the words of Gettysburg. We honor them now as we join on this Memorial Day of 1963 in a prayer for permanent peace of the world and fulfillment of our hopes for universal freedom and justice.

We are called to honor our own words of reverent prayer with resolution in the deeds we must perform to preserve peace and the hope of freedom.

We keep a vigil of peace around the world.

Until the world knows no aggressors, until the arms of tyranny have been laid down, until freedom has risen up in every land, we shall maintain our vigil to make sure our sons who died on foreign fields shall not have died in vain.

As we maintain the vigil of peace, we must remember that justice is a vigil too--a vigil we must keep in our own streets and schools and among the lives of all our people--so that those who died here on their native soil shall not have died in vain.

One hundred years ago, the slave was freed.

One hundred years later, the Negro remains in bondage to the color of his skin.

The Negro today asks justice.

We do not answer him--we do not answer those who lie beneath this soil--when we reply to the Negro by asking, "Patience."

It is empty to plead that the solution to the dilemmas of the present rests on the hands of the clock. The solution is in our hands. Unless we are willing to yield up our destiny of greatness among the civilizations of history, Americans--white and Negro together--must be about the business of resolving the challenge which confronts us now.

Our nation found its soul in honor on these fields of Gettysburg one hundred years ago. We must not lose that soul in dishonor now on the fields of hate.

To ask for patience from the Negro is to ask him to give more of what he has already given enough. But to fail to ask of



him--and of all Americans--perseverance within the processes of a free and responsible society would be to fail to ask what the national interest requires of all its citizens.

The law cannot save those who deny it but neither can the law serve any who do not use it. The history of injustice and inequality is a history of disuse of the law.

Law has not failed--and is not failing. We as a nation have failed ourselves by not trusting the law and by not using the law to gain sooner the ends of justice which law alone serves.

If the white over-estimates what he has done for the Negro without the law, the Negro may under-estimate what he is doing and can do for himself with the law.

If it is empty to ask Negro or white for patience, it is not empty--it is merely honest--to ask perseverance. Men may build barricades--and others may hurl themselves against those barricades--but what would happen at the barricades would yield no answers. The answers will only be wrought by our perseverance together. It is deceit to promise more as it would be cowardice to demand less.

In this hour, it is not our respective races which are at stake--it is our nation. Let those who care for their country come forward, North and South, white and Negro, to lead the way through this moment of challenge and decision.

The Negro says, "Now." Others say, "Never." The voice of responsible Americans--the voice of those who died here and the great man who spoke here--their voices say, "Together." There is no other way.

Until justice is blind to color, until education is unaware of race, until opportunity is unconcerned with the color of men's skins, emancipation will be a proclamation but not a fact. To the extent that the proclamation of emancipation is not fulfilled in fact, to that extent we shall have fallen short of assuring freedom to the free.

