



July • August • September **2015**

AMERICAL

JOURNAL

DEDICATED AS A LIVING MEMORIAL TO ALL VETERANS OF THE AMERICAL DIVISION

UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

New Items Just Arrived In ADVA PX

By Wayne Bryant, Product Sales Director

The ADVA PX announces the addition of three new items now ready for sale to Americal veterans.



Item 3512 Americal Vietnam Sticker (multicolor) at \$5 ea.



Item 3513 Oval Vietnam Sticker (blue and white) at \$6 ea.

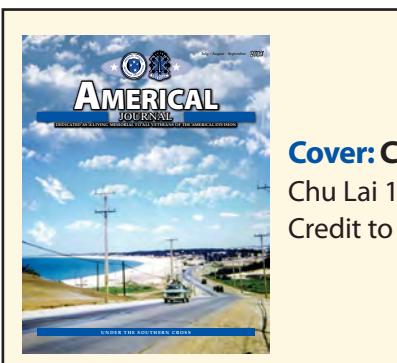


Item 3515 Americal Jungle Fighter T-shirt, multicolor on off-white, at \$18 ea.

Due to increased costs of products and postage a small price increase has been taken on some items. Many of the items previously priced below \$5 have now been raised to \$5. The PX page on the americal.org website has been out of order for several months now but we do want to bring it back on-line in the future. If you have questions as to inventory and pricing do now hesitate to send me an e-mail, call me on the phone, or write me a letter. My telephone number and mailing address is on the inside front and back covers of this magazine.

I plan to have a large selection of regular items plus some special items for sale at the ADVA reunion in Norfolk, VA at the end of October. Let me know if there is an items you think we should consider for sale.

We are able to take credit cards for orders sent to me as well as for purchases at the reunion. Thank you for your continued support of the ADVA PX.



Cover: Coastline of South China Sea

Chu Lai 1970

Credit to James B. Adams

The logo for the AMERICAL JOURNAL, featuring a stylized eagle and the text "AMERICAL JOURNAL".

The American Journal is the official publication of the Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA). It is published each calendar quarter.

- Editor-In-Chief: Gary L. Noller
- Contributing Editor: David W. Taylor
- Creative Director: Lisa Anderson

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Rest in Peace – Kay Lane

By David Taylor

They laid Kay Lane to rest on August 18th. She died of natural causes at the age of 91; no pain, just slipping away silently to be at rest with her husband John and daughter Sharon Lane. Sharon had been assigned to the 312th Evacuation Hospital in Chu Lai, the only female soldier to die from hostile fire in the Vietnam War. They are all together now at Sunset Hills Burial Park, Canton, Ohio.

A statue of Sharon Lane in her nurses fatigue uniform was erected at Aultman Hospital, Canton, Ohio where she took her nurses training before going to the Army and Vietnam. It was the very first Vietnam War monument to be erected, done so shortly after her death, during the war.

Kay and her husband were founding members of their Methodist Church in South Canton. At the memorial service as tears flowed, Kay's minister reminded us of these words (Psalm 121):

*I have raised my eyes
towards the mountains,
From where will my help come?
My help comes from the Lord,
The maker of heaven and earth"*



Kay Lane had a lot of grit. She married at a young age to a man six years older. They settled in South Canton and built their home literally from the bottom up. The first part was the basement where they lived until they could afford to build the next two levels. They built their house as they raised their children and worked hard to make ends meet. And the minister reflected on Proverbs 31:

*"When one finds a worthy wife,
Her value is far beyond pearls.
Her husband, entrusting his heart to
her, Has an unfailing prize"*

The ADVA always kept in touch with Kay. In 2001 when the ADVA national reunion was in Cleveland, Ohio, National Commander Ron Ellis and I met Kay at Sharon's gravesite to pay our respects. Ron presented Kay with a plaque making her an honorary member of the American Division Veterans Association. Each year on the anniversary of Sharon's death, June 8 (1969), my wife and I have tried to make the ceremony at Aultman Hospital, by her statue. There is a Medical Reference Library inside the hospital named after Sharon Lane as well. The annual ceremonies have always been faithfully arranged by the Sharon Lane Memorial Chapter 199, Vietnam Veterans of America (Canton, Ohio).

Each year VVA Chapter 199 gives a scholarship to a deserving high school graduate who wishes to go into the nursing profession, in honor of Sharon. Those ADVA members wishing to do so, can send a check made out to: "Sharon Lane Memorial Chapter 199" and on the memorandum line write "Scholarship". It can be sent to VVA Chapter 199, PO Box 21205, Canton, Ohio 44701.

Kay's husband John died ten years after Sharon was killed, much too young. Some say he died of a broken heart. Kay's house became a memorial to Sharon with many awards and plaques that had been given to her through the years, because of Sharon's death. Through the years this caused some consternation among Kays son



Members of Sharon Lane VVA Chapter 199, attend memorial service for Kay Lane

and other daughter, who were raising their families, because of Kay's deep devotion to her lost daughter. Pat Powell, Commander of VVA Chapter 199 for many years, told me years ago, "It's tough to tell a mother how to grieve". But Kay Lane continued living her life as a Gold Star Mother, a title she never wanted, trusting in God and the humanity of others.

As the memorial service was ending, and we knew we would pass by the casket for one final goodbye, and make the journey to Kay's final resting place on earth, Kay's minister reminded us (and the ADVA) of these words to be found in John 14 (verses 1-2):

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You have faith in God; have faith in me also. In my Father's house there are many dwelling places. If there were not, would I have told you that I am going to prepare a place for you?

Amen.



David Taylor with Kay Lane, at an annual Sharon Lane memorial service, several years ago.

Adjutant's Notes

By Roger Gilmore

For this reporting period, the ADVA added only twelve new members. This spans the months of May through July. This is the lowest number of new member additions we have had in a very long time, perhaps ever as long as I have been the national adjutant. Again, we had no WWII veterans of the Americal Division join our ranks this reporting period.

We did see an increase in new life members added to the ADVA roster, either by annual pay members upgrading to life membership or an Americal Division veteran joining the association as a life member. Four life members joined the as new members; twelve annual pay members upgraded to life member status.

Our count of reinstated members added this reporting period increased significantly, due mainly to our "re-recruiting" programs for former members. This past June, NC David Chrystal, working with PNC Larry Swank, drafted a letter inviting selected former members to reinstate their ADVA membership. The letters, with a pre addressed envelope to Assistant Finance Officer and PNC Ronald Ellis, were mailed to 450 individuals. As of writing of this column, we had 61 former members mail their checks to PNC Ellis for reinstatement of membership. Over the coming weeks, expectations are that more former members will step forward and reinstate their membership. For the reporting period, we had a total of 67 former members reinstate membership.

I want to say a word of thanks to two of our member wives who were instrumental in recruiting one of our new members this quarter. Linda Ward, wife of member Ronald Ward, and Von Gilmore, my wife, were attending a spouse's tour as part of the Army Divisions Association FAM in mid April when they spotted a veteran wearing an Americal Division hat. They asked him if he was a member of ADVA; his response was that he was not. Linda and Von got his mailing address and I mailed him an application upon returning home. That veteran, Delbert Schindler, mailed his new member application in July and is listed in this issue's new member list.

New Members

Walter P. Grooms
26th Engrs HHC
Westminster, MD
★ Self

Michael Heil
1/1st Cav D Trp
Elkhorn, WI
★ PNC Larry Swank

Bruce L. Jones
B/1/20th Inf
Bowman, ND
★ Douglas Burtell

Mickey L. Lewis
198th LIB HHC
Hannibal, MO
★ Les Hines

Irving Paige
A/5/46th Inf
Charles City, VA
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

Howard R. Pederson
B/4/3rd Inf
Zimmerman, MN
★ Les Hines

Delbert R. Schindler
198th LIB
Kimberling City, MO
★ L. Ward/V. Gilmore

Larry S. Waltman
1/6th Inf
Poulan, GA
★ Self

New Paid Life Members

Dick Elgin
123rd Avn Bn
St. James, MO
★ Self

James Farris
17th Cav F Trp
Martinez, CA
★ Self

Stephen E. Foor
5/46th Inf
Bedford, PA
★ James D. Garner

Thomas W. Peters
1/20th Inf
Reedsburg, WI
★ Self

Charles O. Aldenthaler
1/1st Cav A Trp
Moorhead, MN
★ Self

John G. Allen, Jr.
6/11th Arty
Springfield, MO
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

Philip E. Bigham
D/4/3rd Inf
Pleasantville, OH
★ Self

Barry K. Britton
E/5/46th Inf
Summerfield, FL
★ R. Thornton

Robert J. Chappell
B/5/46th Inf
Trinity, FL
★ Don Ballou

James R. Cottam
1/82nd Arty D Btry
Mountain Center, CA
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

David R. Culver
C/5/46th Inf
Sisters, OR
★ PNC R. Castranova

Paul F. Feeley
C/3/1st Inf
Universal City, TX
★ PNC Ron Ellis

Tom Luedde
D/1/6th Inf
O'Fallon, MO
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

Richard P. Mosher
196th LIB
Gurnee, IL
★ PNC R. Castranova

William W. Shugarts, III
23rd S&T Bn
Fairfax Station, VA
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

Lee B. Whitten, Jr.
23rd Admin Co
Bastrop, TX
★ PNC Bill Maddox

Re-instated Members

Albert L. Andzik, Jr.
1/82nd Arty
Monument, CO
★ David Eichhorn

James J. Barrett
196th LIB
Hazelton, PA
★ Self

Gerald Barve
198th LIB
Battle Creek, MI
★ PNC Ron Ellis

Gary Befus
198th LIB
Albion, NY
★ David Eichhorn

Dargelo Caballero
HHC/4/21st Inf
El Paso, TX
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

Sorio J. Caravalho
A/1/20th Inf
Roseville, CA
★ John McKnown

Gary L. Carlson
23rd MP Co
West Jordan, UT
★ Rich Merlin

John J. Connors, Jr.
4/3rd Inf
Rome, NY
★ Lloyd Morrell

Richard Creel Div HDQ Florence, SC ★ Fred Vigeant	Robert E. Gillan C/2/1st Inf Natchitoches, LA ★ PNC Gary L. Noller	David G. Lowery 123rd Avn Bn DeLand, FL ★ Les Hines	Gerald L. Moore 1/6th Inf La Porte, IN ★ PNC Larry Swank	Robert Rhodes 23rd MP Co Hyattsville, MD ★ Paul Stiff
Dennis R. Crouse 1/46th Inf Matthews, IN ★ Self	Glen A. Grady D/1/6th Inf Crandall, TX ★ Don Ballou	Warren J. Lucas 23rd MP Co Mt. Pleasant, SC ★ Tom Packard	Kirby E. Myers E/1/52nd Inf New Paris, IN ★ Dan Herald	Thomas J. Rizzo C/1/6th Inf Highland, NY ★ Mark Deam
Jamie Daniel 3/16th Arty A Btry Chicago, IL ★ Self	Gerald L. Hall 1/1st Cav E Trp Sutherland Spngs, TX ★ Wendell Strode	John J. Lynch D/3/1st Inf New Port Richey, FL ★ Self	Bill Noe A/1/52nd Inf Barbourville, KY ★ Dan R. Young	Robert D. Robinson E/1/52nd Inf Azusa, CA ★ Self
Jeff Dombroff 14th Avn Bn Warrenton, VA ★ Verner Pike	Timothy J. Hatten, Sr. B/1/52nd Inf Wooster, OH ★ PNC Larry Swank	William J. Lynch Unit Unknown Orlando, FL ★ Self	James Obermayer 63rd Inf (CTT) Orange, CA ★ PNC David W. Taylor	James W. Roehrig E/1/6th Inf New Holstein, WI ★ PNC Gary L. Noller
John Emmerich 723rd Maint Bn Allentown, PA ★ PNC R. Castranova	Raymond H. Hughes 23rd MP Co Loves Park, IL ★ Rich Merlin	Steven L. Madison Unit Unknown Palmdale, CA ★ PNC Gary L. Noller	William F. Ozbun 1/6th Inf Lansing, MI ★ Theodore M. Rahl, Sr.	Harvey Schwab 132nd ASHC Helena, AL ★ Bill McRae
Gary E. Fennington 57th Engrs Co C Jarrettsville, MD ★ PNC Jon Hansen	Jimmy W. Joyner A/4/21st Inf Georgiana, AL ★ PNC Gary L. Noller	Russell Mann A/3/1st Inf Marion, CT ★ Self	John F. Petrill B/1/52nd Inf Latrobe, PA ★ PNC Larry Swank	Paul M Senick A/1/6th Inf Bethlehem, PA ★ Dave Hammond
Edwin A. Forrest C/3/1st Inf Hyde Park, NY ★ PNC Gary L. Noller	Leander H. Kerfeld 23rd Admin Co Mesa, AZ ★ Dale Stivland	Daniel T. Martin 5/46th Inf Shelton, CT ★ PNC David W. Taylor	Richard Pikulski D/1/46th Inf E. Hampton, CT ★ Self	Leslie H. Sharff, Sr. HHC/1/46th Inf Simpsonville, SC ★ Self
Joseph L. Fridley 1/14th Arty Fountain, CO ★ Lloyd Morrell	Roger A. Knight Div MI Det Lancaster, OH ★ PNC R. Castranova	Peter E. Martin 17th Cav H Trp River Falls, WI ★ Paul Letsch	Herman M. Punihaole D/2/1st Inf Carlisle, PA ★ Self	Craig Slocum A/4/3rd Inf Londonderry, NH ★ PNC Gary L. Noller
Richard Frohreich D/1/20th Inf Stayton, OR ★ PNC Gary L. Noller	Kenton B. Kurtz B/1/52nd Inf Stewartstown, PA ★ Conrad C. Geibel	Thomas McGrath B/1/52nd Inf N. Scituate, RI ★ Conrad C. Geibel	Edward Query 523rd Sig Bn Martinsville, IN ★ PNC David W. Taylor	Mathew R. Spearing 198th LIB Bangor, ME ★ PNC David W. Taylor
Thomas Gabrielson 26th Engrs HHC Fairfield, CT ★ Frank Marriott	John LeCates 178th ASHC Delmar, MD ★ Robert K. Rodweller	Rickey S. McLean 4/21st Inf Puxico, MO ★ Self	William G. Query 523rd Sig Bn Martinsville, IN ★ PNC David W. Taylor	Edward Suchodolski 23rd Admin Co Plaistow, NH ★ Self
Richard T. Gibbs C/1/52nd Inf Flint, MI ★ PNC Gary L. Noller	Roscoe L. Lipps 23rd S&T Bn Ft. Worth, TX ★ PNC R. Castranova	Brad Melchior E/5/46th Inf St. Charles, MO ★ Self	Dan Reutlinger A/1/52nd Inf Bethlehem, PA ★ Dan R. Young	Edward Suits 2/1st Inf Palatine Bridge, NY ★ Ed Costello

James Tidwell
E/4/21st Inf
Bishopville, NC
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

Lawrence Toppi, Sr.
B/4/3rd Inf
Arlington, MA
★ PNC David W. Taylor

Austin T. Waters
E/1/52nd Inf
Brandon, FL
★ PNC Larry Swank

Bob Whitworth
E/1/6th Inf
New Holstein, WI
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**TAPS LISTING;
MAY THEY REST IN
PEACE**

World War II

Kenneth A. Ambers
Co. B, 164th Inf. Regt.
Milpitas, CA
March 24, 2015

Albin Beck *
23 HQ Special Trp
Houston, TX
July 1, 2015

Leonard Chase *
132nd Inf Rgmt
Eugene, OR
December 10, 2012

Harry (Bud)Duckwall
unk
Bardstown, KY
May 16, 2015

Tom Edwards *
132nd Inf Rgmt
Cape Elizabeth, ME
February 21, 2011

Frederick R. Harberle
unk
Delaware, OH
March 24, 2015

E.J. McCauley *
132nd Inf Rgmt
Scottsdale, AZ
August 1998

**Nicholas
Ostapchuk ***
132nd Inf Rgmt
Cranston, RI
April 30, 2015

Antonio Pulcini *
132nd Inf Rgmt
Cranston, RI
December 31, 2014

Vietnam

John G. Becker *
E/5/46th Inf
Perrysburg, NY
April 4, 2015

Carl Craddock
C/5/46th Inf
Pilot Mountain, NC
April 5, 2015

Jose L. Cuella
A/1/18 Arty
Linn, TX
March 21, 2105

Richard E. Gullett
A/1/52nd Inf
Amity, AR
July 23, 2015

Dan Isakson *
C/3/21st Inf
Chassell, MI
February 6, 2014

Donald H. Landry *
B/4/21/11
Baton Rouge, LA
July 24, 2015

Dale Laurence
601 Radio Research
Tacoma, WA
March 18, 2015

David H. Morgan
C/5/46th Inf
Marmaduke, AR
March 25, 2015

Michael K. Neeld *
Div Arty HHC
New Boston, IL
October 24, 2014

Charles F. Rhodes
17 Cav F Trp
Marcellus, MI
August 2, 2015

Robert G. Salstead, Jr *
E/1/52nd Inf
Springfield, MA
July 26, 2015

Kenneth T. Shaver *
198th LIB
Fairborn, OH
April 11, 2015

Gary N. Thompson
1/6 Inf, 198 LIB
Rochester, NY
May 16, 2015

*** ADVA Member**

This paragraph addresses all annual pay members. Your prompt payment of your dues helps keeps the association financially solvent and funds the printing and mailing of each quarterly issue of the Americal Journal. If you have not paid your dues within the first six months of your due date, you will receive a reminder post card from Assistant National Adjutant Richard Heroux. All dues payments should be mailed to Assistant Finance Officer and PNC Ronald R. Ellis using the pre addressed envelope I mail with your renewal notice. This helps PNC Ellis properly identify incoming dues payments during peak renewal periods.

September 2015 annual pay renewals were mailed the last week of August. If you know your renewal date is September 2015 and do not receive a renewal notice by mid September, please contact me and I will re-mail your renewal notice and annual pay membership card.

Please remember to send me your address change if you move, or notify me of a member's (or Americal Division veteran) death. My contact information is listed in the directory section of this issue. Any written correspondence regarding address changes, membership status or death of a member or Americal Division veteran should be addressed to the post office box in Richardson, Texas. That address is listed on the back cover. You can also fax me your address change or any other membership changes to this telephone number: 972-412-0089. If you wish to contact me by electronic means, my email address is gilmoraces@aol.com.

**ADVA MEMBERSHIP
31 July 2015**

World War II	389
Vietnam	2,542
Cold War	8
Associate Members	209
Total Members	3148

Vietnam History News

By Les Hines

I have not been able to locate a copy of an Americal Division book that was to be available for sale. This ad appeared in the Americal Division newspaper of March 16, 1969. I am interested in locating a copy for review.

Americal Combat History To Appear In Book Form

CHU LAI—The Americal's battle record in Vietnam will be recorded in an 80,000-word book written by military historian Edward Hymoff.



RUGGED COMBAT action will be chronicled in the forthcoming history.

World War II activities of the division also will be summarized in the hard-bound documentary.

The book, which will take six months to research and write plus three months to print, should be available by this fall.

Hymoff is interested in talking with anyone who may have served with the Americal during World War II, was assigned to Task Force Oregon, or has any interesting facts to relate about the division.

He may be contacted through the division Information Office.

Order forms for the book will be available at individual units soon.

Thanks to the continuing work of Conrad Giebel and John Boyer a new milestone has been met. About 75% of the Americal Division TOC reports from the Vietnam War are now transcribed in a format that is searchable and can be shared easily by e-mail or put on a website. Conrad estimates that the entire collection of TOC reports amounts to 23,000 pages.

I concentrated on 3/1st Infantry history earlier this year as we have an Army historian writing a history for the 1st Infantry Regiment. This includes the 2/1st and 3/1st Infantry service in Vietnam. The author is Colonel Donald M. Buchwald. I spent two months getting 3/1st Inf. Bn. materials sent to him as he indicated he needed much more information for this unit. I am nearing a point where I will provide him a fourth mailing of materials.

Any 3/1st veteran who just wants historical materials may contact me. I have maps, videos, 11th Brigade, Americal Division reports and news articles by the thousand on sets of DVDs. I usually want to talk to the veteran to figure out what to put in the materials we send out. Veterans do want different items from the over 150 DVDs of materials we have on file. One of the most used sets of reports is the Americal Division S2/S3 reports. These list the unit, location, and

described action from October 22, 1967 through November 1971. A fee of \$20 helps cover postage and supplies.

I would like members of our association to make drawings of the layouts of their home firebases. The locations of their artillery pits, ammo bunkers, TOC, units, and etc. Bunker locations and numbers are sometimes provided, but make little sense without some reference. Information should include approximate dates, unit, and orientation on the drawing (North, South, East, West). This information would aid in understanding the actions described in many of the reports.

We have many brigade and battalion newsletters but we do not a full collection. Anyone who has any brigade or battalion newsletters from Vietnam is encouraged to contact me to determine if they are needed to be added to the collection. I am always looking for help to go through the thousands of names mentioned in the newsletters to see how many may be located and offered membership in the ADVA.

2015 Reunion – Norfolk

This issue of the Americal Journal should deliver to readers just a few weeks before the start of the 2015 ADVA National Reunion in Norfolk, Virginia. The reunion runs from October 28 through November 1 and is headquartered at the Norfolk Waterside Marriott, 235 E. Main St., Norfolk, VA, 23510. Lodging rooms may be reserved by calling 800.228.9290. Event fees and reservations are being handled by Armed Forces Reunions, Inc. Complete details include how to purchase event tickets can be found at www.afr-reg.com/americal2015. A registration form is also provided in the past two issues of the Americal Journal magazine.

Scheduled events include a trip to the Ft. Eustis Transportation Museum and Colonial Williamsburg on Thursday, a lunch cruise on the Spirit of Norfolk on Friday, and a spouse/guest visit to the Norfolk Botanical Museum on Saturday. The reunion concludes with a banquet and program on Saturday night.

PNC Larry Swank is reunion chairman and may be reached at lsrank@aol.com or 301.892.0855.

2016 Reunion – Albuquerque

Initial plans for the 2016 ADVA National Reunion have been set for September 14-18. A contract has been signed with the Crowne Plaza Hotel, 1901 University Avenue, Albuquerque, NM, 87102. The hotel is near the intersection of I-40 and I-25 and is a few miles from the Albuquerque airport and the downtown city area. Tentative plans for Friday tours and being discussed and will be announced in the next issue of the Americal Journal. Visitors may wish to take an open day to visit nearby Santa Fe, one of the oldest cities in the United States. A commuter train makes several 75 minute trips between downtown Albuquerque and downtown Santa Fe. Albuquerque also features the second longest tram in the world that makes trips to the peak of Sandia Mountain on the northeast side of Albuquerque.

Reunion chairman is PNC Ronald Ellis. Ron chaired the 2024 reunion in Houston as well as other previous reunions. He may be reached at re196lib@aol.com or by calling 903.657.5790.

Americal Legacy Foundation Report

By Roger Gilmore, Chairman Board of Directors

Americal Legacy Foundation Web Site

Since the last issue of the Americal Journal, a contractor working for the Americal Legacy Foundation (ALF) on created the initial ALF web site, incorporated some additional design enhancements requested by Director David Taylor, and completed the final concept for the site. ALF directors reviewed the final version and signed off on the web design and contents.

The Americal Legacy Foundation web site will be fully functional as of September 1, 2015. The web site is designed to communicate the mission and goals of the Americal Legacy Foundation, and educate site viewers about the legacy of the Americal Division.

We feel this web site is very easy to navigate and is intended to reach the general public worldwide. Features of the web site include a brief history of the Americal Division in its three eras of activation, biographies of all directors, a gallery of pictures showing the Americal Division in action and complete Americal Division scholarship program information. The scholarship link will have the scholarship application form that can be downloaded for use by scholarship applicants.

The Donation link permits visitors to make a donation to the Americal Legacy Foundation by credit card or PayPal.

Future plans are to have features within the Legacy web site that will link a user to the Americal web site.

Please plan to visit the Americal Legacy Foundation web site at www.americalfoundation.org and let us know your thoughts and recommendations.

Americal Legacy Foundation 2015 Calendar

We did not reach our goal of \$20,000.00 in donations from the 2015 Americal Legacy Calendar, but it was still a successful campaign. We raised just over \$18,000 in response to the 2015 Americal Legacy calendar mailing. We deeply appreciate the donations of all ADVA members who mailed in a donation.

Director Taylor will begin the planning and layout for the 2016 Americal Legacy calendar in the coming weeks. Plans are to mail the calendar as a package with an issue of the quarterly Americal Journal publication, most likely the 4th Quarter 2015 mailing.

If you have not mailed a donation for the 2015 calendar or feel you can make an additional donation, please mail your donation, payable to Americal Legacy Foundation, to director Gary L. Noller.

Director Noller's mailing address is:

Mr. Gary L. Noller
P.O. Box 1268
Center Point, TX 78010

Americal Monument at Fort Sill, Oklahoma

On July 23rd, I had an extensive telephone conversation with our POC at Fort Sill, the CSM of the 1/14th Artillery Regiment, and the commanding officer of the 1/14th Regiment.

I made this call because we had not heard any positive feedback regarding the status of our monument construction proposal since the last issue of this publication. We provided all requested documentation and correspondence to the POC the first week in April,

The CSM was to meet with the Master Planning Department for a review sometime after that.

During this telephone conversation, I was informed that the 1/14th CSM has made a number of attempts to establish contact with the Fort Sill Master Planning Department personnel in charge of reviewing the proposal then forwarding that document to the next level of review. The Master Planning Department was supposed to forward the proposal and gifting letter to the garrison commander for review and approval around the first of June. This has not been done due in part to personnel departures, lack of a smooth transition of duties to others in the department and recent changes in business rules for Fort Sill projects.

I was also informed that our expectations for a timely approval of this project were much higher than they should have been. The length of time for a proposal of this nature to progress through the different levels of review and approval is extraordinarily long, due to the amount of bureaucracy and obvious disconnects between departments that has become a part of these types of projects.

With these facts in mind, and awaiting further word from the 1/14th CSM on any progress by the Fort Sill Master Planning Department, the Foundation directors will consider future options for this project in the coming weeks. This includes considering completely dropping the project if continued inaction stalls the approval process.

Legacy Foundation Successes

Since its inception in 2008, the Americal Legacy Foundation (started as the Americal Legacy Committee under ADVA) has completed or been a significant funding partner in several monument projects.

The "crown jewel" of these projects is the Americal Division monument on the Walk of Honor at the National Infantry Museum in Columbus, Georgia. The monument was completed in 2012 at a cost of \$77,000.00 and dedicated during the ADVA annual reunion held that year in Atlanta. The ADVA Legacy Program assisted with other Americal Division related monument projects in the past few years. The Legacy Program provided a \$1,000 grant to partially fund a monument at the Kentucky State Veterans Cemetery-Central just outside Ft. Knox at Radcliff, Ky. In 2014 the program provided \$1,000 for partial funding for a monument in Spokane, Washington honoring Americal Division veterans and Congressional Medal of Honor recipient Jesse Drowley.

Americal Legacy Foundation 2015 Scholarship Awards

By Bill Bruinsma, Scholarship Chairman

The Americal Legacy Foundation is pleased to announce the award of \$35,000 in scholarships to eligible scholars. The awards were made to the college or university in the name of the scholar on August 1.

The top award of \$4,000 was earned by Alex Pistole, son of Larry Pistole. Alex will attend Radford University in Radford, Virginia.

The scholarship committee decided to increase the amount of the top awards and to continue to hold to a minimum of \$500 per award. A total of 42 awards were made for 2015. Funding for scholarships comes from donations from ADVA members through the annual raffle and from supplemental funds from retained scholarship investments. The deadline for applications is April 1 of each year.

We wish great success to the scholars and extend heartfelt gratitude for the generosity of our donors.

\$4,000

Alex Pistole

Radford Univ.
Larry Pistole

\$3,000

Elizabeth Keil

Univ. of Col.- Boulder
Richard Keil

Colton Miles

Univ. of Calif. - Davis
William Miles

\$2,000

Brooke Sears

Salisbury Univ.
Thomas Dolan III

Elizabeth Hall

Youngstown St. Univ.
Bill Bevins

\$1,500

Natalia Wohar

Duquesne Univ.
Paul Delvitto

Grant Hobar

James Madison Univ.
Larry F. Henry

\$1,000

Alissa Heroux

East Carolina Univ.
Richard Heroux

\$500

Daisy Agurrie

So. Oregon Univ.
Roger Miller

Colin Alsbro

Univ. of Minnesota
Donald Alsbro

Mary Alsbro

C. Michigan Univ.
Donald Alsbro

Daniel Anders

Lincoln Univ.
Robert Anderson Jr

Shaun Bouley

U L.- Lafayette
Eugene Bouley Jr

Cole Bowers

Ga. Inst.of Tech.
Alto H. Coleman

Brittany Chubb

Univ. of S. Indiana
H.J. Logsdon

Kaitlyn Davis

U.of Tenn.-Knoxville
Fred G Davis

Alexis DeVault

Frostburg St. Univ.
Robert Miller

Erryn Egeland

Univ. of N. Dakota
Marlin Egeland

Samantha Essers

U.of Wisc.-River Falls
Kevin Kauanaugh

Lunden Farris

U.of N. C.-Chapel Hill
Michael Lee

Michael Farris

U.of N. C.-Chapel Hill
Michael Lee

Morgan Garman

Connors State Coll.
Gary Bray

Erin Green

Paul Mitchell Sch.
John R. Green

Alec Heroux

Elon Univ.
Richarf Heroux

Parker Johnson

Univ. of New Haven
James Treacy Jr

Emily Logsdon

Univ. of So. Indiana
H. J. Logsdon Jr

Hannah Logsdon

Univ. of Alabama
H. J. Logsdon Jr

Shyley Marcott

U.of Wisc.-River Falls
Gary Schafer

Brooke Mullins

Kent State Univ.
James Mullins Sr

Alyssa Nace

Univ. of R.Island
Eugene Bouley Jr

Justin O'Dell

Ozark Christian Col.
Larry Taff

Madeleine Poisson

U.S.A.F. Academy
Rejean Poisson

Courtney Post

Univ. of N. Iowa
Robert Frey

Felicia Roach

Greenville Coll.
Vernon Pesek

Sarah Smethurst

Univ. of St. Francis
Richard Smethurst

Mikayla Sobjak

Montgomery Co. C C
Bernie Sobjak

Elizabeth Tullos

Mid.e Tenn. St. Univ.
Robert Tullos Jr

Melissa Waggoner

Iowa State Univ.
Richard Waggoner

Ashley Walters

Univ. of Mobile
Michael Walters

Malaina Watson

Sam Houston St. U.
Charles Watson

Joshua Williamson

Univ. of Akron
Robert Williamson

Alexis Yenser

DeSales Univ.
Bernie Sobjak



Dear editor,

I enjoyed the feature story in the previous issue of the Americal Journal about the dedication of the Americal Division monument in Cebu. I was impressed to see the monument erected where the Americal accepted the surrender of the Japanese on Cebu.

The story also brought back the memories of the last days of combat by the 182nd Infantry Regiment of the Americal Division. I would like to report that I believe that I was with the last unit to make contact or be involved in combat with the enemy in late August 1945.

We were located near Cebu City and received word that the Japanese were harassing the engineers that were building roads near the location where the surrender took place. We were ordered to investigate the enemy soldiers that were sniping at the engineers and to put a stop to the harassment.

My Executive Officer (XO) called me and gave me orders to take my squad up there and stop the harassment. I was briefed and advised to take care not to get anyone killed as the war was about to end and we did not want anyone killed at this late date. We were trucked out to the location of the action and put on foot patrol in the area. We were cautious and after we located the enemy we ran them off as they did not want to fight.

We soon departed the Philippines for occupation duty in Japan. We boarded ships, set to sea, and arrived in Tokyo Bay just as the surrender treaty was being signed. We debarked on September 8 and immediately started occupation duties. I was shipped home on November 26 as was discharged from the Army on December 10, 1945. I was home just in time for Christmas. I thank God daily for being able to be alive today.

Ray E. Poynter; 1SG Retired

Dear editor,

The Veterans of Foreign wars Department of New York held its 2015 annual convention in Albany. On June 12 a group of Americal Division veterans present at the reunion got together for this photograph. All have served in leadership roles at post, district and/or department levels. Three have held the high office of Department Commander in the last thirteen years.

Arthur L. (Art) Hanley



Standing L to R: Ed Bergman; Guy de Veaux; Karl Rohde, PSC; Mike Pascal, PSC; Harold "Mick" Leavor, PSC; Art Hanley; Jan Milles; Mark Shoemaker. **Seated L to R:** Andy Veiga; Dave Czarnecki; Bob Spicer; Conrad Steers.

Dear editor,

An entry in the TAPS section of the previous Americal Journal did not have complete information. I would like to provide the following information: Lloyd Allen Luker, 1/8 H Troop 17 Cav 198th Infantry Bde. He was in country 1967—1968. Born 3 May 1947, Died 23 Feb 2015. He lived in Austin, Texas.

Donald Wingo

Dear editor,

I am looking for information about my brother's service with the Army. He was Gregory John Bennett; he served in Vietnam '69-'70 with 123d Aviation Bn. He passed away in March 2013. Messages may be sent to marla.walker1993@gmail.com.

Marla Bennett Walker;

Dear editor,

Al Cotta and I say that the recent edition of the Journal was the best ever. The featured story about New Caledonia was of special interest to Al because most of his military years were spent there. You did a great job describing the Armed Forces Retirement Home (AFRH) to everyone who might be interested in retiring here. We were honored that Roger Gilmore, Ron Ellis, Ron Ward and you visited us. Unfortunately Al is unable to attend this years reunion in Norfolk Virginia in October because of medical reasons. He and I are wishing everyone a great time.

Bob Macy



Dear editor,

On May 2, 2015 the VA Medical Center in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania was officially renamed the Corporal Michael J. Crescenz Department of Veterans Affairs Medical Center. Crescenz, 19, was killed-in-action on November 20, 1968 while fighting off an enemy ambush near Hiep Duc. He served with 4/31st Infantry and posthumously received the Medal of Honor for his actions on the day of his death. His Medal of Honor was presented to his family by President Richard M. Nixon in a White House ceremony on April 7, 1970.

The speakers at the renaming ceremony included LTG Robert Wetzel (USA, Ret.). Wetzel is a former commander of 4/31st Infantry (Polar Bears).

Michael Crescenz was one of six sons of Charles and Mary Ann Crescenz. His grandfather served in World War I and his father served in World War II. CPL Crescenz is laid to rest in Arlington National Cemetery.

Jim Simms; C/4/31

Dear editor,

I just finished reading James Gales Vietnam tour story in the previous issue of the Americal Journal. I enjoyed his writing. We grunts forget what frame of mind we got ourselves into after many months of combat, and I know for the layman to understand our mental capacity at the time - is simply not understandable. He explains that when his mother had a baby who died, he put his gun to a captain's head to approve his emergency leave. Sounds far out, eh?

He should read my "Good Friends" story at the following link: http://facesonthewall.com/Faces_

[On_The_Wall/Paul_Thomas/paul_thomas.htm](#). I would have shot our own chopper (a loach) down if he did not immediately medivac my two wounded and dying soldiers.

Lastly, I was curious what Uncle Sam registered Sgt Raul Losoya's death as? Non-hostile...same as my men - Thomas and Smitty. He had spelled Losoya name wrong - but I found it. Here's Losoya info from Vietnam Virtual Wall. If you also click on "the data-based page" link - you see "Non-hostile." <http://www.virtualwall.org/dl/LosoyaRx01a.htm>

Keep up the good work with the journal, it is much appreciated.

Jerry (LT) Hughes
B 2/1 196; Sep 69/Sep 70

Dear readers,

It is very probable that a major changes will soon take place with regard to the Americal Journal magazine. David W. Taylor, Contributing Editor, and I have discussed a new plan to provide ADVA members with timely news as well as a forum for their personal stories.

At the current time the Americal Journal is published four times a year, once each quarter. It is a 36 page, full-color magazine. Approximately 20 pages are devoted to personal stories and the remaining pages to news stories and the administrative needs of the ADVA.

Production costs have risen to the point that continuing in this format will not be sustainable beyond a very few more years. In order to ensure longevity to ADVA publications several ideas are under consideration. They includes continuing mailing four publications, one each quarter, to ADVA members. Two publications will be the Americal Journal while the other two publications will be a revitalized Americal Newsletter.

The Americal Journal will center on personal stories while the Americal Newsletter will concentrate on news and administrative announcements. The journal will remain at 36 pages but the number of pages in the newsletter is not yet set. The newsletter will be of a simpler format to cut production costs. It is also the case that the editors have noticed a significant drop in news stories in the past few years as the use of internet resources is slowly replacing the way people stay informed.

Another consideration is to combine mailings to ADVA members. For example, members receive election ballots and scholarship and legacy fundraising requests through the mail. An analysis is underway to determine if mailing costs can be cut by including these items along with publications.

The ADVA executive council approved a 2015-16 budget that will allow four issues of the Americal Journal in this period. But changes may be put in place before the end of the current business year. Additional information will be available in the next issue of the Americal Journal.

SEVENTY YEARS LATER—CEBU

By Michael John O'Dea

Company G, 182nd Regiment
(As told to Heather Corace)

The trip from our campaign on Leyte to Talisay Beach on Cebu took about two days. Once we arrived to the gulf we were put on Landing Craft Infantry (LCI) boats. Each LCI held an entire rifle company, more or less. My men and I were out on LCI #609 about two hundred yards from shore during the Navy's bombardment of Cebu. That was really an impressive show. They had multiple rocket ships that were about the size of our LCI boats being manned by a couple of hundred men. They were just blasting those rockets in there. The bigger guns from Destroyers were way back out of sight sending shells in over our heads. Again, it was very impressive ... overwhelming, really. There was a lot of smoke, dust and noise. The first thing we heard was the shells from the big ships going over our heads and making big explosions on the island, but the thing that impressed me the most were the rocket ships firing a lot of explosives in from close range – right along the beach.

After the initial bombardment, we were all set and started heading into shore. When we were about a hundred and fifty yards from shore we got stuck on a sandbar. We whammed to a stop on that damn sandbar and the ramps on each side of the nose of the LCI dropped down. My first two guys darted off and went right down into the water out of sight. It's hard, if not impossible to get back up with all of that equipment. The Navy had a couple of sailors up in the nose of the LCIs and as soon as my guys ran down and didn't come back up those sailors jumped right in and brought them up to the surface. That was a good thing since my men probably couldn't

have come up without that help.

So there we sat on that sandbar. And sat and sat. However, we were the reserve company at that time so we were scheduled to be last in anyway. Because I was the Executive Officer (XO) of the Company, I was the very last man in the very last LCI. We must have sat there for close to a half an hour. Everybody else from the 182nd's "E" and "F" Companies were still on the beach waiting for us, not moving inland. Finally they got some Higgins transport boats freed up on the beach and sent them out to pick us up. The ramps on our LCIs dropped down and we walked down them to water level and got into the Higgins boats, each of which holds fifteen to twenty men. When "G" Company finally made it to the beach "E" and "F" Company were right there waiting for us.

I saw our Company Commander, Jack Murphy standing near the front end of the group on the beach. When I got close enough to him I called out: "What the hell's going on?" We were wondering why they were staying there. To my eye, the beach itself didn't look like it was hardly touched - until we got there ourselves. The first thing I saw when I dropped down on the beach was a fella that had stepped on a mine and was blown in half. That slows you down a bit. To confirm what I had seen, Murphy replied: "It's all mined out in front of us." I looked up and there's an old stub of a tree with some of the branches burning. There was a parachute bomb hanging in those burning branches. All of the damn trees around it were burning, too, and I said: "Well, that parachute's going to burn and those cords are going to burn and that bomb is going to come down and go boom." It was really close to us but we were able to move out of the area before that thing came down. I'm not sure if it ever did or not. At that point, Jack said:

"We've got to get out of here." He took off walking very carefully. He said to me: "As soon as I get through it, you are following in my footsteps." I started to get the guys going, stepping in Jack's exact footprints. We went right on through the mined area that way. After about fifty yards we could see that the going was going to be pretty clear, but those fifty yards took quite a while to complete. After "G" Company blazed the trail, somebody from each company, either brave or careless, eventually took the initiative and got going and followed us.

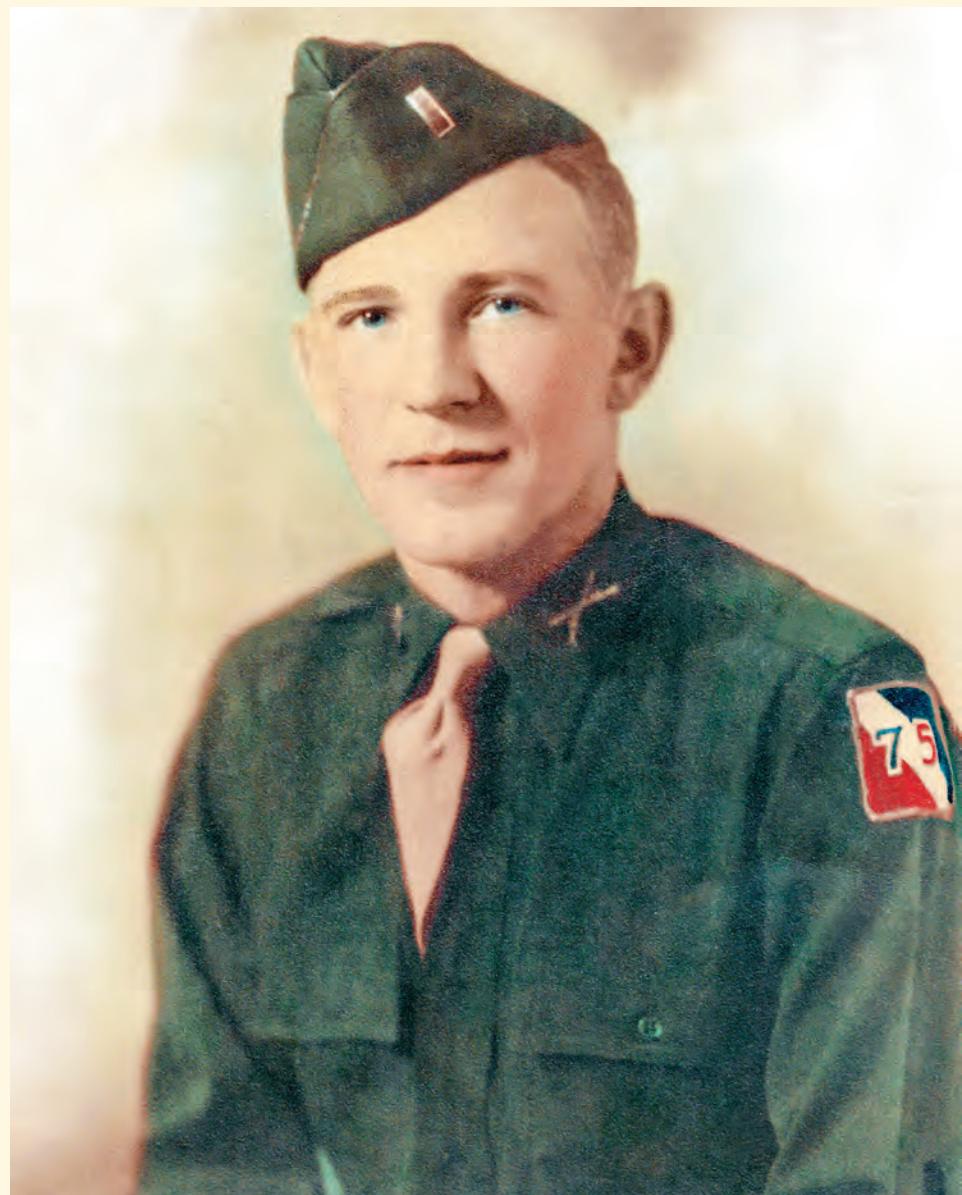
The Japs offered no resistance on the beach, so we got off the beach fairly early in the day, before noon. We headed inland and within a mile we veered north, to the right and headed towards Cebu City, located about eight miles further in. Cebu City seemed to be very well populated although there were no civilians left around there when we arrived. They had probably cleared out the day or two before. Once we arrived in Cebu we spent our first night right near the Provincial Capitol Building, a large, white, domed building that looked to be the main offices of the city. Although that area was already cleared, we did receive some sniper fire that night, but just occasional shots. The fire came from Nambu automatic rifles - I know this because they have a very distinctive sound. After spending nine months in jungle operations, being in the city was an entirely different experience. We had received no training beforehand for any type of city warfare. Cebu looked like it was pretty well torn up as far as I could determine, but we didn't get into the downtown area of it. As we moved through Cebu city, we took security measures, carefully moving through areas with buildings and making sure that the buildings were clear.

One of the next objectives for

the 182nd was the Lahug Airfield. We were supposed to go right across it and secure the hill on the opposite side, the north side. The armed forces aircraft that were there supporting us impressed the hell out of me. We were advancing across the airport and they were coming in from the sea behind us and firing. They were strafing over our heads into the hills beyond the airport. The noise was overwhelming. The Japanese were firing 20 caliber explosive shells at the aircraft and hitting us instead. Those shells are about an inch in diameter and explode into small pieces of shrapnel. One of the kids in my Company came up to me and said: "Lieutenant, I think I'm hit." I pulled up his shirt and he just had a piece of lead about the size of a pencil eraser stuck into the meat of his shoulder. I said: "Well, I think I can fix you." I got ahold of the shrapnel and pulled it right out. I said: "Now get some medic and get some antibiotics or sulfa on that."

Other than the Japs firing at the planes and hitting us we went across the airfield fairly easily. Once we got on the other side we stayed there overnight. Our orders the next day were to start up the main road. We got on a short distance and then got held up, the orders had changed. We were to go back and do something else while another unit came, pushed through us and headed up north to the hills in our place. Some tanks were brought up to work with us. Some bad things about the tanks, though, were that they drew fire and they didn't stay all night. When it started getting dark they wanted to get out of there and go back into the rear areas. We had secured Cebu City and the Lahug Airfield within a couple of days.

Once we were north of the airfield, we were finally able to proceed forward and take the lead. We were ordered to run up into the hills where the Japanese were



Second Lieutenant Michael J. O'Dea in home town of Owosso, Michigan, just before shipping out to war in 1944 (Source: O'Dea family photo)

entrenched and having a bad time of it. So we moved into the trench area and, after shooting at us, some Nips ran out and we engaged them in a fire-fight back and forth. I had about four of my "G" Company men with me, but I'm not sure how many Japanese were there. I know we killed four or five of them, but I don't know how many got away. A few of my men were hit, and getting them back to safety was the biggest thing. I had to carry one of my guys back and when I returned for another fellow he was already dead. I don't know if his body was ever recovered. I didn't know him,

as we had a lot of replacements at that time. I really didn't want to get too acquainted with anybody because they probably weren't going to last. Some of them had been trained fairly well, or had come over from other units, but some were just as green as grass. They had been through Basic Training and that was it. I tried my best to put them with somebody that had some experience, but the experienced guys wanted nothing to do with a green guy (Editor's note: The above described action, told in condensed form by Michael O'Dea, involved heavy combat

and in that action O'Dea earned the Distinguished Service Cross (DSC). See the side article with his citation for the DSC).

Right after that action, word came up to us from Captain Murphy. He said: "Come on back. Bring everything back, we're moving out." I said: What the hell? We just went through this fire fight to get to this place and now you want us to leave?" I found out later that the reason for that was that Murphy had received orders to go around the airfield and go up to Gochan Hill.

Company "A" had just been blown up and decimated on Gochan Hill, also called Watt Hill. We heard the big boom and had seen the big cloud of smoke and dust, but we had no idea what was going on. The sound of the explosion was more of a boom. At the time I guessed it was some kind of aircraft missiles or something. Others thought that the Japanese had exploded it. I heard or read later that there was ammunition stored in the hill and a tank had fired into it and set it off. I don't know, really. I didn't hear that "A" Company had gotten blown up there until we were almost up to the hill. Now we were ordered up the hill but when we got on it we could hardly dig in. It was so pulverized by the explosion it was almost like flour. When we got over on the other side of Gochan Hill we stayed there that night. Our chow was brought up to us, carried by hand by the Kitchen Patrol. A hot meal was a nice treat.

Captain Murphy got orders to continue on past the hill and go on as far as we could. I said, "I don't know. They're firing on us right now, you know. You want us to walk into this?" He said: "We're supposed to go on." And I then said: "Well, listen. Instead of us getting a platoon started, let's take out a patrol." He said: "No. We're supposed to go." I said: "Okay. I'm going to go,

but I'm going to go slowly." He said: "Okay. Get going." So now we're in the foothills of Babag Ridge. It wasn't over-grown; it seemed to be pretty bare, with clumpy brush. There were roads or paths down in the low areas, but of course then we got up into the hills, and boy, were they really sharp and lumpy. The trails kept going up or through, between, along the sides, and up to the top. When we were advancing, we took whatever cover we could find. We had only gone a couple of hundred yards and we got the command from Murphy: "Hold it up. Pull it back." I don't know how Captain Murphy received the word, either through radio messages or runners, but we were taking fire to our front from up above us in the hills and were ordered to pull back.

Once we pulled back we stayed there overnight. The next morning we were transported by truck to an area nearby. I don't know why we were trucked up there because it was pretty close. We got off of the trucks on the side of Hill 21 where we lost a man from one of our platoons. He jumped off his truck and landed right on a mine. He lost a leg, but luckily there were medics right there and they immediately took care of him. That fellow might have made it through the war and gotten his ticket home. When we went up on the side of our next hill we were joined by two or three tanks. A half of a mile away from us there were Japs on the hill beyond the ridge we were occupying. They had small canons inside caves that were carved in the hillside. They would run the canons out to the front of the cave, fire, and then run them back in. That's why the tanks had joined us. They were getting a little target practice in, firing on the Japs' caves.

We weren't far up the hill of Babag Ridge at this point, and we were still on a road located on the forward face of the hill. There

was a valley separating us from the big, cave-pocked hill beyond it that was receiving the fire from the tanks. The tanks pulled out that night and that's where we bedded down. The next day a Naval Officer joined us. He was going to direct in fire from a destroyer located out in the Gulf of Cebu. He started firing his destroyer at the caves with the canons inside. He was pot-shooting them. We had some of our men going up the side of the hill advancing towards the caves. We had to order our men to not get too close to the caves because the destroyer was laying fire down trying to destroy the caves. The Naval Officer said: "Well now, where are your guys?" I gave him my binoculars so he could take a look. I don't know why I did that because he had his own set of binoculars that were probably much better than mine. He looked up there and said: "My God. They're (the men) not supposed to be that close! We're not that accurate." He hollered orders for the ships: "No more firing!" because our guys had gotten up to the caves at that point, discovering that the Japs had already vacated them.

Fighting started getting nasty up towards the top of that hill. Company "E" was already in those hills in front of us. I was in command of "G" Company at this point and we were following "E" Company into the hills. "E" Company ran into some Jap resistance and dug in. It got dark, so we all thought we were in for the night. Everybody had settled in when the Colonel came up to me and said: "I need an Officer to go up and take over "E" Company. Since I was the only officer left in the Company besides Murphy I suddenly found myself in command of two Companies. It was darker than hell, but I went crawling up to where "E" was. Their First Sergeant had become ill so they were left with no commanding officer. I



Sergeant Michael O'Dea (right) while on grand maneuvers in Louisiana as a member of a Reconnaissance Platoon, just before the attack on Pearl Harbor. O'Dea would be selected for Officer Candidate School (OCS) and ship out to the Americal as an officer (Source: O'Dea family photo)

crawled in all of their holes dug for protection, introduced myself to everybody and told them to hang on. When it started getting light the next morning I told everybody: "We got word. Okay, let's take off down the hill." We started going slowly. The Japs that been holding them up had pulled out during the night and took off, so there was nobody down there.

The next night was when we made the nighttime bayonet attack

on Hill 21. I wasn't involved in the front end of it because I was back with the First Sergeant in the company headquarters making sure everybody was getting to where they were supposed to go. Captain Murphy had received word from the battalion commander that we had to get up that hill. We couldn't see what was going on from where we were ... it was too dark and there was too much stuff in front of us in the way. About midnight Captain Murphy

said: "Well, let's do it now." He ordered the men to fix bayonets and advance up the hill. They got most of the way up, probably a couple of hundred yards from the top of the hill when they ran into some trenches and crawled into them. They were taking a lot of casualties, so they held up there. I gathered everybody that was with me and took them up to where the other men were holed up in the trenches. But by then it had started getting towards daylight. Murphy and I talked it over and decided that we were in a very bad place to be when it got light. We knew we had to advance up the hill right away. We didn't have very many men that were able to advance so I gathered up all that could move and started up the hill. We encountered very little resistance, so we got right up on top of the ridge and stayed low. Very soon we had enough men to take control of and keep the ridge. By that time it was getting light and we could see where we were going. The Japs could also see us, but there were very few of them left to defend their positions so it made no difference. We could see then that the Japs had been defending that ridge primarily from individual fox holes, there were very few trenches. That was the end of the resistance on Babag Ridge, and since there was a heavy Japanese presence further north we were ordered to continue onto the next ridge and take that one.

There is an interesting story associated with the fighting to take Babag Ridge. It involved two brothers, twins, named Kenneth and Gordon Vander Molen that had recently come under my command when they joined "G" Company as replacements on Cebu. They were identical twins, and I mean identical. I couldn't tell them apart to save my life. When we were crawling up Hill 21 after daylight, we were encountering a lot of enemy fire. I saw one of the twins, Gordon,



Americal troops land on Talisay Beach, March 25, 1945. Note Amphibious Tractors (Amtrac's) that are disabled on beach. Those were used to bring the first waves of troops ashore in case of heavy Japanese opposition. Photo was taken just at the point of a Japanese mine exploding (Source: National Archives)

who was my radio man at the time, go sliding down the hill on his back ... he had been hit. In an ironic twist, I grabbed a man from another squad that was near me to carry the radio after Gordon was sent to receive medical care. The man I commandeered was the other twin brother, Ken! The twin that had been shot, Gordon, was not seriously wounded but he was sent to get patched up and went to recoup somewhere like Fiji for a while. When Gordon returned from his convalescence it was finally easy to tell the brothers apart. Gordon had been well fed and was nice and tan and his poor brother Ken who had been stuck with us was pale,

scrawny and beat up like the rest of us.

I had "E" Company in addition to "G" Company for about a week or so. We lost track of dates and times completely. We just took one day at a time, one hour at a time. Since I was the only officer besides Murphy (who had just been promoted to 1st Battalion Commander), between "E" and "G" Companies, I had thirty-seven enlisted men on the line ready to go. That didn't include the others on the books that were back in the kitchen and supply areas. When we were put back into the rear area after taking the ridge, we started getting a lot of men back in from the hospitals and wherever else they were.

In addition to getting some replacements, a couple of the "E" Company officers came back, so I was able to go back to only having command of one Company ... "G". I was promoted to Captain around this time. I was twenty-five years old ... just a kid ... but that seemed old at the time.

After Babag Ridge was finally taken by the Americal Division, we received orders to move over to the west coast of Cebu with a couple of other companies and run patrols out into the island from there. Command wanted companies spread all over the place making sweeps to clear out all of the odd Japanese that were scrounging around

there. There had been reports of instances where other companies had run into trouble with the Japanese that were holed up in huts and buildings. The Japs were using the cover to ambush and kill our men. We received the order to burn every building out there. We were making a lot of smoke. When my Company came upon a little one-room schoolhouse, just like the kind we had in Michigan, I radioed back: "I don't want to burn that." The reply was simple: "Burn everything". So I had my men take all of the desks and school supplies out and move them under the trees to stash them there. Then we burned the building. I understood, because we were running into Japs that were holed up in the buildings.

The terrain on the west side of the island where we were patrolling was mostly flat farming country and grazing areas. It wasn't forested and hilly like it was on the eastern side. We were out in the field doing that for a couple of weeks. We stayed out there in the field, and command would have carriers come out from camp on the coast where the kitchen was set up to bring us our chow and supplies. I don't know how they found us ... we were scattered all over the place. One time they brought out pork chop sandwiches. I ended up breaking a tooth on one of those sandwiches ... they left the damn

bone in the thing. However, we were on "C" and "K" Rations most of the time. Of the two, I liked the "C" rations better.

We would run into locals occasionally and they were very happy to see us. We were their buddies and they treated us great. Our sweeps were pushing the Japanese towards the North, and reports started coming in that they were committing atrocities against the Filipino people on their way there. We didn't run across any of that personally, but we knew that that was the Japanese "M.O.", even against their very-own people. The Japanese Sergeants would treat the Privates like dogs. We would occasionally take a Jap prisoner and send them back to Headquarters for interrogation. We were supposed to get a case of beer for each prisoner, but the beer seldom showed up. We had about a dozen Filipinos soldiers who were attached to our unit. We captured a sick Jap who was barely walking. I didn't want

to spare any of my men to take him back because we were short-handed as it was, so I got a couple of Filipinos to take him back to Headquarters. They left with him and returned back to us in about fifteen minutes. I asked them: "What the hell happened here? It's a two hour trip back to headquarters and you're back here in fifteen minutes?" Their curt response was: "He tried to escape". We left it at that.

After spending a couple of weeks in the field hunting down Japanese, we went back to the east coast where the Regiment and Company had set up. There were probably about fifty men from "G" Company back there: officers, KPs, the supply men, and men that were returning from the hospital. They had our area all set up for us upon our return and we moved right into it. Sergeant Jack Morton was part of the group back there waiting for us. Murphy and I talked Jack into taking a field commission.

We were always short on officers and a lot of times we didn't know what we would get when a new officer came through the system from the States. Some men would jump at the chance to get a field commission, but Jack didn't know if he could do it or not. However, Murphy and I knew that Jack was already doing a good job as Sergeant and that he could do it, so we convinced him.

This was around the first of August, of 1944 - right about the time we were getting ready to invade Japan. The camp area was a consolidation of the Americal Division, although part of the 164th was up on the northern end of the island performing some special operations in the area where the Japs had congregated after they were blown out of Cebu City. But most of the Division - artillery, engineers, medical, etc., were all consolidated in the camp. We were busy getting replacements in, getting reorganized and outfitted with new equipment in preparation for the big push up to Japan. We weren't ready for the maneuver end of the invasion yet, because the Army hadn't begun preparing us for that. In addition, we most certainly weren't ready for the invasion mentally. We were all still trying to recover from what we had just been through. That was right about the time in the war when men were starting to get sent home on points. A different number of "Points" was allocated for certain things like, per month of Army service with additional points for overseas service, marriage, having children, etc. When a G.I. reached a certain number of points, I think it was 85 or 95 or something, they were eligible to go home, and then they filled out an application to leave. I don't know who made the final decision on who went home, but when any of my men became eligible I'd say: "Go ... fill it out and go home. You've done it."



Lahug Airfield as seen from Cebu City; just beyond the airfield are some of the foothills which lead up to Babag Ridge. The foothills were the Japanese "First line of Resistance" and the scene of heavy fighting, where, on March 28, 1945, Lieutenant O'Dea's courageous actions resulted in the award of the Distinguished Service Cross (Source: National Archives)



Michael O'Dea was never personally awarded the Distinguished Service Cross. On March 17, 2015 (appropriately St. Paddy's Day) and 11 days shy of the 70th anniversary of the day he earned the award (March 28, 1945), O'Dea was awarded the medal by representatives of the military, in his retirement community of Naples, Florida. O'Dea is ninety-five years young, golfs twice per week and shoots his age or less! On January 1, 2016 he will be 96.

This was all happening at that same time the first atomic bomb was dropped on Japan.

We really didn't know much about the bomb or how effective it was, only that it was new technology and it was really going to blow cities apart. After that first bomb dropped we were really listening to the news then! We had the Armed Forces Radio on in the mess hall tent all the time after that. We hadn't considered that it could end the war until we heard that a second bomb was dropped. Once that second bomb dropped we figured: "Well, maybe that'll

do it." It was quiet in our area until the men started considering that this could really end the War. One night we were back in the rear area in the mess tent and the announcement came across Armed Forces Radio that the Japanese had surrendered. I tried to make sure that all of our ammunition was picked up and stored so there was none of it floating around, any cartridge belts or anything like that. All rifles were unloaded. I didn't want anybody hurt. Of course there were some shots fired, but it wasn't really bad. Everybody was

just really happy. There was a lot of singing and drinking whatever they could get their hands on.

Some of the officers had accumulated quite a lot of stuff to drink. When I joined the Company in Bougainville, Jack Murphy had a case of fifths under his bed. Of course at that time, each officer got a monthly allotment of alcohol, usually a fifth of whiskey or a bottle of wine. All of the officers would get their allotment and the guys that would get hit and evacuated or get sick and get admitted to the hospital didn't take their allotment with them. So Jack had been

accumulating quite a bit. Needless to say, the officers were in pretty good shape as far as the drinking materials were concerned. Jack was a funny guy and I really liked him. I think most of the men respected him because he'd been through a lot of war, but anybody that knew him liked him. The day after the news of the surrender, we started getting the Company ready immediately. Of course, we didn't know whether we were going to go home or go to Japan or what. Within a couple of days we got word that we were going to Japan. Oh, damn!

I had no idea what was going on with the remaining Japanese forces on Cebu. We were still there on the island at the time of the surrender ceremony, but I did not attend it. I heard that some guys from the 182nd were there, but I was not. I know it was on the 28th of August, before the formal surrender in Tokyo Bay, but I never saw any Japs after the surrender date.

It was about a week after the surrender when Murphy came up to me and said: "You want to go take a shower?" I replied: "What the hell are you talking about? Who's got a shower?" He said: "Come on." We got in a Jeep, went down to the docks in Cebu City where the LCI we

had come in on was sitting there at the dock. Murphy had been in communication with the skipper of a ship so we took the LCI out and we went on board that ship. We got our shower, and also had some drinks, ate, and stayed the night. It was great. We got back to the Company the next day and they had a bit of a ruckus while we were gone that night. A couple of Nips had tried to infiltrate our camp before our guys shot them.

When we loaded on the ships to go to Japan we all knew where we were headed. We had to get all packed up. It wasn't real travel gear and wasn't real invasion supplies, but we needed to be prepared to fight when we got there, if necessary - if something went wrong. We all had live ammunition in our weapons. After three or four days at sea we landed in Yokohama. We didn't see hardly any Japanese at all; we certainly didn't see the "Yokohama Mama". That city was a Japanese Naval base so there were a lot of barracks there. It was just like going to Fort Custer where I trained at in the states. We were stationed at that Naval Base, which I forgot the name of. The Company hadn't started performing many duties yet, but I wasn't there for much more than ten days. As soon as we landed in Yokohama I saw that I had enough points to go home, so I applied right then. I said: "I've been here, done that. Let's go." Golly, when I left the barracks to go home, I left a four-gallon jug of alcohol sitting right there at the end of my bed!

(WWII Historian's note: The ADVA is indebted to Heather Corace; granddaughter of Michael O'Dea, who spent many hours interviewing her grandfather to prepare this article. Other parts of O'Dea's memoirs with the Americal will be published in subsequent issues of the Americal Journal).



**GENERAL HEADQUARTERS
UNITED STATES ARMY FORCES, PACIFIC**

GENERAL ORDERS

NO 327 14

APO 500

November 1945

I. DISTINGUISHED-SERVICE CROSS. By direction of the President, under the provisions

Of the Act of Congress approved 9 July 1918 (Bulletin 43, WD, 1918), the Distinguished Service Cross is awarded by the Commander-in-Chief, United States Armed Forces, Pacific, to the following names officer:

Captain Michael J. O'Dea, 01312439, (then First Lieutenant), Infantry, United States Army. For extraordinary heroism in action in the Southwest Pacific Area, on 28 March 1945. During the operations which culminated in the clearing of Japanese forces from Cebu, Philippine Islands, Company G, 182nd Infantry Regiment, was advancing on a series of heavily fortified enemy positions, the approaches of which were guarded by a double-apron barbed wire fence and interspersed with ground mines, when the assault platoon, under the command of Captain O'Dea, was pinned down by devastating fire. Disregarding intense resistance, Captain O'Dea resumed the advance and led his platoon toward the objectives, cutting the wire fence and disarming the mines as he progressed. Although the enemy launched a murderous mortar barrage, he led his men in a charge against the strongholds and succeeded in securing a portion of the objective, killing 20 Japanese, and wounding many more who fled in disorder. Suffering heavy casualties in the assault, he deployed his men advantageously and directed the neutralization of scattered resistance, thereby facilitating the reorganization of other elements of the company. During an enemy counterattack, which was successfully repulsed, he constantly supervised the activities of his depleted platoon and directed fire upon enemy fortifications detected from forward positions. When two men lay seriously wounded in an exposed area, Captain O'Dea, with utter disregard for his own safety, carried them to a defilade position for evacuation to the rear. Finding two men unaccounted for while reorganizing the platoon into new positions, he returned, found one of the seriously wounded, and carried him under sniper fire to a rear area for medical treatment. Returning once more, he searched the entire area only to find the missing soldier had died of wounds sustained in action. Through dynamic leadership and unremitting determination to destroy the enemy at all costs, Captain O'Dea made a distinct contribution to the successful completion of his company's mission and his outstanding performance of duty was in keeping with the highest traditions of the military service. Address: 717 North Pine Street, Owasso, Michigan.

Point of a Bayonet – Guadalcanal

By John B. Foisy

(WII Editor's note: This article was originally published in the Apr-May-Jun 1997 issue of the Americal Newsletter. We believe it is worth reprinting with the addition of archive photos from the Guadalcanal campaign).



It all began when the 1st Battalion of the 182nd Infantry was ordered up to the line across the Matanikau River near Point Cruz, on November 21, 1942, about noon. Patrols had been down there checking for mines and booby-traps along the road for a couple of days and said it was safe to use. We started down a rough path from hills in in back of the river, to see if the road was bringing other units going the same way on foot. There were a few vehicles, jeeps and trucks hauling what we needed.

It was quiet for a while and suddenly there was an explosion up front. One of the jeeps was lifted up a few feet – came down and bounced over on its side. The explosion scattered us quickly to the sides of the road for a few minutes. Word came back that the jeep hit a mine on the road and disabled it. No one was hurt, however, but it put us on the alert for whatever else might be around.

After an hour or so we stopped for a break, a little water and a light snack. Sweating now, for more reasons than one, a few scouts went ahead to look around. It was Okay to move on. We approached the river area in an hour or so and we began to spread out; each unit dropping off the road. We finally reached the end of the road and A Company was now the only unit left. Then we were told we had to occupy the area near the mouth of the river on the extreme right flank, so we moved our platoons into position right up to where the ocean stopped us.



The Matanikau River was a swift-flowing jungle stream mostly enclosed by dense growths of vines and low palms. Closer to the coast the dense terrain around the river opened up somewhat and that was where the Japanese assaulted Foisy's unit. After the Japanese were pushed far back by the Americal, the Matanikau became a haven for bathing and laundering by Americal troops (Source: National Archives)

It was fairly flat there and we were not in the best place to defend ourselves and our flank, should the Japs launch an attack across the river. B Company was on the left, next to us and on higher ground. They had an advantage which we lacked.

We were then ordered to dig foxholes for protection (it was about 6:00PM). We moved quickly into this area and there was not much time left to dig in before darkness would set in. We were not too well organized and some guys were almost in front of us, instead of in line. This could cause problems later and did, as it blocked our line of fire. The Japs must have heard us digging in and moving guns up, and they held off their attack until well after dark. At about 9:30PM-10:00PM we began to hear voices and noises across the river and sounds of gear being moved. We were again told to stay in our positions and not move around or we would be shot. Anyone moving around would be assumed to be the enemy. There were lots of nervous trigger fingers by now.

Suddenly a couple of muffled "booms" rang out, and Jap mortar shells dropped in on us. Then we received rifle fire from the left. The attack we were expecting began on our left. Japs were attempting to cross the river in force and firing picked up considerably all along the river front. We could hear jabbering and shouting, some screaming when some of them were shot. Tracers were in both directions all over the place, along with mortar rounds coming in not too far away.

A few minutes later our end of the line was being hit as Japs coming across the river to our front, crossing on sand bars, got to our side. Unknown to us was the fact that some of them had infiltrated through our lines and they were behind us, directing mortars on our line with deadly accuracy. Our BAR's were working overtime trying to stop them. It was hard to tell what our mortars were doing.

It was very noisy now, everything seemed jumbled together. It was so damn dark; we couldn't see what was around us—chaotic. Every now and then a flare would light things up for a few seconds, the black again. The Japs had found us and the whole front line was engaged. Enemy fire was more continuous and coming from behind us as well. We were getting our close experience of what close combat was like. A terrifying fear came over us that A Company was about to get slaughtered. We were in a bad situation, so near the water in front and to our right. If they were getting by us over the water beyond the beach, we never saw them or heard them with all the noise. We even heard a few rounds go over us from heavy guns – whose I don't know.

Suddenly I heard movement behind me and (get this) a voice said something in Japanese very close by (no answer), and I whirled about with my rifle pointed at the sound. I never got to pull the trigger because I was struck from behind in the throat and neck with cold steel, which dazed me, but instantly I had the presence of mind to grab the blade and pull to the left with my right hand, badly cutting my thumb and index finger, and screaming something like "help me" or "I'm hit".

The blade had hit my jaw bone in front on the left-hand side, which also prevented further penetration to my throat. I was bleeding pretty bad, I could feel the blood going down



The decayed and rotting remains of a Japanese soldier near the Matanikau River, abandoned by his comrades as the Japanese retreated from the Americal (Source: National Archives)

the side of my face and in front of me. All this in seconds, still conscious, when my guys heard me yell, they opened up at once with their rifles. I was their squad leader and in trouble.

The last thing I heard was the smack of bullets hitting bodies and their screams then a thud as a Jap fell on me; another yell from his buddy, then silence. I must have passed out awhile.

They couldn't get to me with the battle still raging and no medic around then, because the Japs were everywhere. They risked being shot trying to get to me. That's how I got trapped, not expecting to be attacked from the rear. I later learned that the Japs were in pairs, one had a small radio. They must have been spotters for mortar crews, to direct fire on us.

I finally came to, again to the awful noise and tried to find my first aid packet. I found it and was able to open it and somehow get a bandage over the wound and pull the collar of my jacket over it. It was enough to stop the bleeding. I had to move the Japs arm to do this then lost consciousness again from the effort. Next time I awoke it was almost daylight and a few minutes later I could see a little better. I guess what saved me from being found by the Japs and finished off was the fact I had two Japs with me and I was partially covered by their bodies. Any other enemy passing by may have figured we were dead. God was with me, I think.

The heavy fighting had stopped by now. Bodies lying around were mostly Japs. I couldn't see them but guys who came over to help me told me so. After a while the Japs resumed their attack on our positions and broke through upon the ridge. We got orders to pull out of there. My Platoon sergeant sent one of my guys down to check on me and get me out of there. He knew by now I was alive. It's a good thing because our outfit was pulling out and almost left me there.

If they had, I wouldn't be telling this story. Pete got to me about 7:00AM finally. I was very weak by this time – loss of blood – partly conscious – covered with blood (Japs had bled on me, plus my own). Wasn't sure I'd make it. Pain was setting in, also from wounds. I had no feeling from wounds when I was cut. He put his first aid bandage and powder on top of mine, got me on my feet (which made me very dizzy and sick to my stomach) and we started back towards the field hospital, just behind the lines, about 1/2-mile or so.

We had to stop quite a few times because of Jap snipers in coconut trees taking pot shots at us, dangerous for us both as we pulled back. Each time we got down, poor Pete had a hell of a time keeping me moving. At one stop we damn near fell on a well-rotted Jap body, he stunk to high heaven, a grim reminder, we moved on. Hadn't passed out again, we finally reached the aid station and Pete turned me over to waiting medics. I thanked him for his help and Pete went back to his outfit. I didn't see him again until after the war.

At the field hospital after a long wait, they took me inside, cleaned me up threw out bloody clothes, dressed my wounds, gave me plasma and a shot of morphine, and I was out again.

I woke up to the sound of noisy motors and discovered I was on a DC 3 evacuating wounded off Guadalcanal. There were about 50-60 of us. Some were in tough shape. We had a fighter escort for safety reasons. After two or three hours we landed at Naval Air Station Hospital on Espirito Santos. It was my very first airplane trip, which I can't say I enjoyed. They had us strapped in on cots to the side of the fuselage (could carry more patients

doing that). They got us off the plane into ambulances (Navy that is) and went to the hospital. It was a beautiful day but plenty busy.

Note: Another side story (in addition): How they closed my wounds (unbelievable in those days). After a couple of days in the hospital, the doctor finally got to talk to me. He told me the delay in operating on me was due to the more seriously wounded being helped first. He explained to me what I had sustained and that surgery would be local and that I would be awake, figuring I was strong enough. Instead of general anesthesia he would use Novocain.

They put me in a very small room, where I saw an opened dental chair. They put me on it and the doctor came in and he put a couple of big syringes of Novocain into both ends of the cut. While waiting for the Novocain to work, he explained that he had to do two operations: Close and tie up tendons inside first, which was dangerous, pulling the tissue over the jugular, then close with 40-50 stiches; then repeat the procedure outside, which was much easier to do. Then, pull tissue and skin together to stitch the wound (another 40-50 stiches).

He told me also, that another 1/4-inch penetration of that Jap bayonet blade would have killed me. He worked very fast and kept talking to me. Finally I was done (two hours or so). I never found out who he was except he was southern, a Johns Hopkins Graduate, and very pleasant to talk to. He was good. Then he put me back in a room to rest for a day or so before I was shipped to Fiji to recover, at the 9th Station Hospital. I never went back to the 182nd.

As Paul Harvey would say, "Now you know the rest of the story", as to how I experienced the rare incident of surviving a bayonet wound to the throat and being able to tell about it. I received the Purple Heart in the Fiji Hospital, around Thanksgiving time in 1942.

I was re-assigned to the 491st Quartermaster Company on Fiji. I went back to Guadalcanal, a second time, in early 1944, quite different from the first visit; sent home from there on rotation, June 1944.

R and U Shop, Chu Lai

By James B. Adams

Most of us probably had some idea of what we might do when we got to Vietnam. But I had no idea that my job in the Americal Division would end up being what it was.

I entered the U.S. Army on November 26, 1969, the day before Thanksgiving Day. I completed Basic Combat Training (BCT) at Ft. Jackson, SC and Armor Crewman (11E) training at Ft. Knox, KY. My training group was one of the first to receive training on the new M551 Sheridan tank.

In June 1970 I arrived in Vietnam and was assigned to the Americal Division. My first stop was at in-processing at the Americal Combat Center. A NCO came into the room and asked if anyone present was an electrician. No one replied. The NCO left but soon came back into the room and said, "Is James Adams here?" That was me. I wondered why he singled me out of the group.

I went into a side room and the NCO told me that he had reviewed my records and found that I had worked as an electrician's helper for the school district in my hometown of Elberton, GA. He asked me what type of work I had done. He seemed especially interested that I had experience repairing lights and fixtures.

The NCO told me that an electrician was needed at division headquarters



Headquarters Commandant,
Americal Division, Chu Lai, 1970



Street scene, Americal Division headquarters area, Chu Lai, 1970



SP4 James Adams, Chu Lai, 1970

but since I had an 11 series MOS I may not qualify for the job. He instructed me to report to Major Roman at the Americal Division Commandant office. After a short interview I was told that my duty would be with the Repair and Utility Shop (R and U Shop). My unit assignment was Headquarters and Headquarters Company (HHC), Americal Division. I guessed that I would never see the inside of a tank in Vietnam. My guess was correct.

Most of my work involved repairing and installing electrical lines and lighting. I completed some repairs on controls of air conditioning units to include some at the 91st Evacuation

Hospital. I also did some work on telephone lines. On two occasions I made repairs in the commanding general's living quarters. I met Maj. Gen. James Baldwin, commanding general. I remember him as a friendly man. One of my duties was to make sure that the water tank to his quarters was always full.

As a draftee I had a two-year active duty obligation. I extended for an extra month in Vietnam so I could get out of the Army on my return to the United States. I separated from the service on July 1, 1971 with 19 months and a four days service. I retired from manufacturing management a few

years ago and continue to reside in Elberton, GA and pursue my hobby of working on old cars. I am very proud of my service in Vietnam.

Old Friends

By Gary L. Noller

I first met James B. Adams in early 1970 at Ft. Knox. We reported to E-2-1 to begin training as 11E Armor Crewmen. The Army saw fit to make me a squad leader and James was one of its six members.

James had a car in the parking lot just outside the gate. We had a couple of Sunday afternoons off and we made good use of the free time. On one



Helicopter Landing Pad at Americal Division command area, Chu Lai



Officers quarters, Americal Division HQ area, Chu Lai, 1970



Display of captured enemy weapons, Chu Lai, 1970

outing we went to Louisville and saw the movie M*A*S*H. On another we visited Abraham Lincoln's log cabin.

After our eight weeks at E-2-1 we were assigned to D-1-1 for six weeks training in the Sheridan Tank (M551). After a short leave we were on the same sheets of orders to Oakland Army Terminal, Long Binh replacement station, and the Americal Division Combat Center at Chu Lai.

We thought that we would continue to serve together. But as James describes he was assigned to the division R and U Shop. Many of the other 11E trained soldiers, including me, were assigned as 11B infantrymen and went to 1/46th Infantry.

I visited James in Chu Lai two or three times. He recalls that one day I showed up and simply asked if I could take a nap in his bunk. He always had hard to get PX goodies such as canned potato chips waiting for my arrival. It was a comfort to me to know that I could slip away to James' hootch for a few hours and get away from it all.

James and I have kept in touch over the decades. I enjoy our meetings at ADVA reunions and on visits to his home. I was especially happy to see the photos he had of the Chu Lai area. He also has several sheets of orders that detail our moves while in the Army.

Needless to say, if one or both of us had not been drafted we would not be friends. I am glad we are friends. Old friends are best friends.



Panorama of Chu Lai beach from commanding general's quarters



James Adams installing electrical wire, Chu Lai, 1970

San Juan Hill, Life Above The Clouds

By Slater Davis

I joined 4th Platoon of Bravo Company, 4/21st Infantry in December 1970. At the time of my arrival Bravo Company (also known as Big Bad Bravo or BBB) used LZ Debbie as our support base and respite from the missions in the area. In April 1971 LZ Debbie was closed and we moved to San Juan Hill. SJH was quite different from LZ Debbie- no Rice Bowl, no Coke girls, no Highway 1, as a matter of fact, no highways at all.

The firebase stood over 1,000 feet high, approximately 18 klicks west of Duc Pho, and was often covered with clouds obscuring the valley below. Other times the views were really beautiful. The only way on and off SJH was by foot or by helicopter.



Above the clouds from San Juan Hill



The valley below San Juan Hill



Water delivery by Chinook helicopter

BBB walked off one time that I remember. All other trips were in the comfort of one of the Hueys we were accustomed to. San Juan Hill may have been in the middle of nowhere but it still offered a place of rest from missions in the rough terrain of the new AO. We looked forward to our returns to the "hill" after each mission where we could get some hot chow (in a new mess hall), shower, relax, and learn how to use our new 35mm cameras some of us had purchased. There we lots of things to take pictures of, including each other.

One of my favorite pictures was taken by one of my buddies of me during an interview on my interest in re-upping. What a joke that was. I kind of felt sorry for the re-up guy. What a job he had. Here I was a draftee, in a place I didn't want to be and his job was to try to interest me in signing up for more.

In late spring of 1971 the

rumors of stand down became reality. Soon 4/21st Infantry would be standing down and leaving Vietnam. Before that would happen we had one more



Skycrane helicopter delivering bulldozer



Bravo Co. walking off San Juan Hill

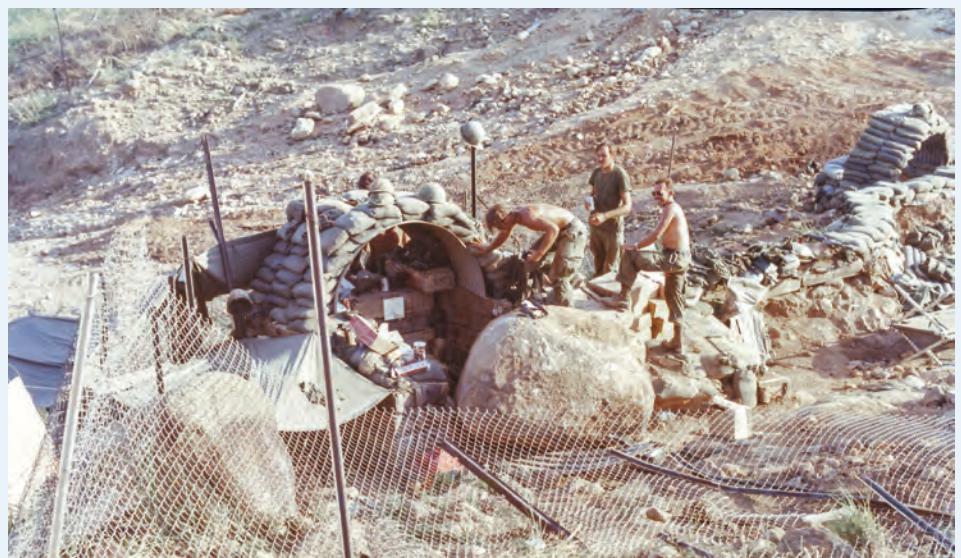
mission, not in the bush, but on San Juan Hill. We were given the task of renovating the hill to turn it over to the ARVN.

I remember a lot of hard work and a few touchy moments. There were bunkers to be torn down, terrain to be cleared and the overall size of the firebase was to be reduced. Army engineers used a sky-crane to bring a bulldozer out for the heavy work. While grading one side of the hill the dozer pushed a large boulder down on our squad's bunker. Fortunately, no one was home. We were all at "work". It wasn't long before San Juan Hill had a new look and the ARVN arrived to take over.

So, America's time on SJH was over. The "hill" had offered us a refuge for a few days between our missions. Now it belonged to the ARVN (1st Company, 2nd Battalion, 4th ARVN Regiment) and to our memories. We still carry many of those.



Boring re-up discussion



The rock that got away



Demolition work on San Juan Hill



Skycrane hekicopter close-up

(To see more photos of SJH and other experiences of 4th platoon visit <http://bbb4thplatoon1971.webnode.com/>).

My Friend John

By Raymond "Duke" Moriarty

May 1968 - Fort Polk, Louisiana

With only a week or so left to go, basic training was coming to an end. Our company had been dismissed but we were informed there would be another formation shortly after chow. We would then learn what our official military MOS would be.

Without doubt most everyone pretty much already figured out where we would end up. Vietnam! If you were drafted and your basic training was at Fort Polk then chances were almost certain you would be infantry and on your way to Nam. But, there was always hope; a small chance that maybe someone would screw up your paperwork. Or better yet, the war would suddenly come to an end and Uncle Sam wouldn't have a need for all those "Grunts". There was always hope...

It was a beautiful evening. Warm, sunny, and clear with a small gentle breeze blowing through the ranks as we all stood in company formation outside our barracks waiting and wondering what our fate would be. As the names began to be called out they were all being



Raymond "Duke" Moriarty, LZ Gator 1969
(Photo from author)

followed by 11 Bravo Infantry, again and again. And then there it was: 12 Bravo Engineers. Was that right? Did I hear that right? Yep. There was still hope. As the names continued to be shouted out alphabetically, there would be an occasional 12 Bravo, or 13 Bravo Artillery.

It seemed like an endless stream of 11 Bravo Infantry over and over again. And when my name was shouted out there it was "Moriarty, Raymond A. 11 Bravo Infantry". SHIT !!! I don't remember hearing the rest of the names called out. My stomach was in a knot and although I always had a feeling I would end up a "Ground Pounder", there was always that little sliver of hope. No more. Hope was gone. It looked like I would be headed for Nam.

All the names had been called out and the company was dismissed. A few lucky guys had dodged the 11 B Infantry bullet. The rest of us would be dodging real bullets in a few short months.

I was headed back to my barracks when it finally sank in and I got really pissed off. My first reaction to anything that went wrong was to instantly get mad. I was a hot head with a short fuse. I climbed the stairs to the second floor of the barracks and when I reached the top landing I grabbed my M14 by the barrel, swung it over my head and threw it as hard as I could down the barracks aisle all the while shouting out a long list of cuss words. The M14 hit the floor about half way down the aisle and then slid and spun around the rest of the way almost to the other end. There were two other guys standing down the far end by their bunks and they were looking at me like, "What the hell is that guy's problem?" I walked over to my bunk and flopped down, a million things going through my head all at the same time.

The rest of the guys were slowly starting to filter back into the barracks. They were forming small groups and started discussing how



On LZ Gator just prior to going to CAP 143
(Left to right) John Martin, Duke Moriarty and
Bob "Birkie" Birkholtz (Photo from author)

they felt about their new future jobs in the U.S. Army. I didn't want to talk to anybody or have anyone talk to me. I just wanted to be left alone. After laying there in my thoughts for a half hour or so I decided there was still time to walk down to the PX and get a beer.

It was just starting to turn dark but there was a full moon coming up and it was a peaceful quiet night. I walked around to the side of the PX where the walk-up window was at and got myself a long neck bottle of Lone Star beer. There were picnic tables and benches in a large patio-type seating area surrounded by big pine trees. I walked way towards the back and sat at a table by myself. I still wasn't in the mood to talk to anyone. The music was playing and the big speakers hanging on poles outside were blaring out POP A TOP AGAIN by Jim Ed Brown. It sounded great on those big outdoor speakers as it echoed through the still night air and filtered its way through those big pine trees-

"Pop a top again..."

I just got time for one more round...

Set 'em up my friend...

Then I'll be gone and you can let some other fool sit down..."

As I was sitting there sipping on my Lone Star I was doing a lot of thinking. While peeling away at the

label on the bottle I noticed this guy walking past all the other guys and tables and headed my way. He also has a long necked bottle of Lone Star in his hand. I didn't recognize him and I wasn't interested in making any new friends. I was still in a pissed mood. He glanced at me and then walked by and headed all the way to the back table on the far right. "Damn" I thought to myself. He must be really anti-social or in a worse mood than me. He can't get any further away from the rest of us.

A few minutes later this same guy is walking past me and headed up towards the walk-up ordering window again. I was taking my last slug of beer from the bottle when I see him coming my way again. Now he has a Lone Star in each hand. As he passed by my table he reaches out and sets one of the bottles down in front of me and just keeps walking. I turned around to look as he walked back to his seat but then I turned back away as he sat down. I never looked back his way again or thanked him for the beer. I drank about half the beer, got up and headed back to the barracks. As I was walking away I could hear that music still sounding loud and clear flowing out of those big outdoor speakers. It was EL PASO, by Marty Robbins.

"OUT IN THE WEST TEXAS TOWN OF EL PASO...

I FELL IN LOVE WITH A MEXICAN GIRL...

NIGHT TIME WOULD FIND ME IN ROSA'S CANTINA...

MUSIC WOULD PLAY AND FELINA WOULD WHIRL..."

That weekend I was at the PX with some of my friends having a beer when I see this guy walk up to the window. It was the same guy from the other night that gave me the beer. He didn't see me and headed towards a back table again and sat down by himself. I was thinking what an ass I was the last time I saw him. And I never even

thanked him for the beer. So, I went up and got a couple bottles of Lone Star and headed his way. I walked over to his table, sat a bottle in front of him and said, "I think I owe you one." He looked up at me and never said anything. I apologized for being an ass the last time I saw him. He shrugged his shoulders, gave me a little smirk of a smile and said, "Ain't no big deal. I could see you had a lot on your mind and figured you could use another beer."

I reached out to shake hands with him and told him my name was Duke Moriarty from Illinois. He replied back, "John Martin. Is Duke your real name?" I noticed he had a slow drawl when he talked. "Nope, that's my nickname. Where the hell you from John?" "I'm from Lamesa, Texas," he replied. Then I asked him in a smart-ass way, "Ain't that part of Mexico?" OOPS! I probably shouldn't have said that. These Texas boys don't have a sense of humor when you start kidding them about their home state. Maybe I should have gotten to know this guy a little better before making that remark. He looked at me kind of funny and then said, "Not anymore it ain't." We both laughed and seemed to hit if off right away.

We talked for quite a while that evening. He had already been through basic and was in AIT here at Polk. I always looked forward to seeing John and talking with him. He was that kind of easy going guy you just had to like. We had become good friends in just a short period of time and I still can't figure out why. We were really the opposite of one another in so many ways.

He was an only child born later in life to his parents L.D and Sybil Martin. I was from a family of eight with five older brothers and two younger sisters. He was from Texas and I was a Yankee from Illinois. John was a smart guy who had gone to college and I was a smart ass who made it through high school. He was single with no serious girl friend and I was already married

with a baby on the way. He was soft spoken and thought things out before making a decision. I talked loud and fast and most of the time would open my mouth without thinking first. John was a patient kind of guy where I had none at all. Do something even if it's wrong. Shit or get off the pot! That was my thought process.

I don't recall ever hearing him cuss and I don't think I ever finished a sentence without at least one cuss word in it. He was always calm and I would blow my top about any little thing that went wrong. His appearance was always neat and his hair always looked like he had just combed it with a perfect part in it.

About the only thing we did have in common was that neither one of us could sing. Difference was, I knew it and John didn't. Actually he did know it I'm sure. But he just liked to get a rise out of me and whenever we got together sooner or later he would start singing softly almost under his breath the same song- EL Paso. In Texas miles Lamesa was real close to El Paso and he loved that song. He never would get past the first three or four lines though. Maybe because I would jump in with a



CAP 143 and An Hai Refugee camp, on the infamous Batangan Peninsula and near Pinkville (Map provided by David Taylor)



Members of B Squad, Company A, 5/46 Infantry Battalion, on CAP 143. Duke Moriarty is second from left in back row. (Photo from author)

comment like, "John, you can't sing worth a shit." Or maybe he just didn't know all the words. He knew just enough though to get a reaction from me. Then he would get that little smirk of a smile on his face and say something like, "You know y'all like my singin' Duke; might just as well admit it." My reply, "No I don't John. You can't sing." He would go on, "Come on now...I know you look forward to it." "No John. I don't. You can't sing and besides you don't even know all the damn words. Thank God for that."

We ran into each other off and on and since John was a few weeks ahead of me I would always ask him about different things he had been through and I was about to start. I was constantly asking him how things were going and what he was doing. There was always the talk about how bad this or that was going to be, and most of the time it turned out it was not a big deal after all. Never as bad as you heard it was going to be. I made up my mind early on not to get myself all worked up about anything until it actually happened. And if it turned out to be as tough as they made it out to be then I would just have to deal with it. Seemed like whenever I would ask John about something, he would explain it to me and then say, "It ain't that bad. You can handle it."

John had told me he was going to NCO school when he was done with AIT. He had been offered the opportunity and was going to take it. He would come out with the rank of E5 Sergeant and he would have more time in the states and get more training before going to Nam. That sounded good to me and when offered the same deal I took it.

As chance would have it John and I would meet again at Fort Benning, Georgia while at NCO school. He was already on his way and I was just beginning. I was outside the barracks talking with some guys when I heard a voice saying, "Hey Duke." I would know that voice anywhere and that greeting was always the same every time we met. It was John for sure.

We were known as a couple of "Shake N' Bakes" to some of the older NCO's that took years to get their rank. It rubbed a lot of them the wrong way that we could attain the rank of Sergeant so fast but it was what it was. We made it through the school and got the rank, now we had to accept the responsibility that went with it and prove ourselves. And with Vietnam in full bloom Uncle Sam needed NCO's and needed them fast.

I couldn't wait to tell John about my new baby girl Carey. We talked for quite a while that day. When I asked him about his family he got a serious look on his face and said now that he would be on his way to Nam soon, his mother was really getting upset and worried about him. Said he knew his dad was too but he didn't say much about it. He then told me he had a brother that was born about ten years before him but died shortly after. I could understand why his mom and dad were so upset. It had to be heart breaking to lose a baby and now your only son is about to head off to war. They had to be worried to death and I could sense that John was worried as much about them.

I never saw John again after he got through NCO school. After a short leave he was headed for Nam. Of course we exchanged addresses and home phone numbers and promised we would look each other up once we got back from Nam.

NCO school flew by for me. I was living off base with my wife Sue and baby girl and it all went by way to fast.

One thing that I do remember vividly is a sergeant that was giving us a jungle survival class one day. He had just returned from Nam and was finishing up his hitch with the Army. He was a 1st Cav. squad leader and you could tell he knew his shit. He had a look about him that I never noticed in any of the other instructors. There was something about his eyes. The very first thing he said to us was, "This ain't no God Damn joke. You wanna stay alive you better listen up and do what I tell you and you might have a chance. I can promise you one thing for sure. You will all come back home from Nam. But, you all won't be coming back alive." Holy Shit !! That's reality. He instantly got everyone's attention. I can still picture him and hear every word he said.

March, 1969. LZ Gator. Vietnam.

I was assigned to the Americal Division. Company A, 5th Battalion, 46th Infantry Regiment, 198th Light Infantry Brigade. I was dropped off at LZ Gator and headed to company headquarters to report. The company happened to be back at Gator for a couple days after being out in the bush for about a month. The company clerk was Leonard Porter, another

Illinois guy who landed a job in the rear after spending time in the field. After some small talk he said, "You're going to be in second platoon and probably take over B squad. Grab your stuff and I'll take you over to second platoon's tent." He was a really nice guy and I was eager to meet new friends.

There were some guys in the tent broke up into small groups talking and playing cards. Most were drinking beer and a few were writing letters. As I made my way through the tent towards an empty Army cot in the rear I was feeling uncomfortable. A few of the guys I made eye contact with just gave me a nod of the head or a half as "How ya doin?" But I could tell they didn't give a shit about how I was doing. Most of them didn't even acknowledge me.

I didn't realize it at the time but I was the "FNG" of the bunch. And the rank didn't seem to help. In fact it probably made it worse. Now I really had to prove myself to be accepted into this bunch. And at the time I didn't know how tough that would be. I would later come to understand why it was so hard for a FNG to be "let into" a small group of these guys. It wasn't proving that you would hang in there and be brave in a fire fight, or that you could hump all day in the heat and humidity of the jungle and rice paddies and not bitch about it or not ask someone for a drink of water if your canteen was empty. Fact was, they had all lost close friends, either killed or badly wounded and they were gone. They weren't about to welcome another potential friend into their group with open arms knowing they would have to suffer that same old pain again if something would happen to them. And their way of dealing with it was to shield themselves. If you kept these new guys at a distance and didn't let them get too close to you, then when and if something were to happen, it would be a bad deal but

not as painful as if they were good friends. That was the cold but honest truth.

As I was unpacking a few things from my duffel bag I could overhear some of the conversation going on behind me. "Yeah, that poor bastard didn't know what hit him. He set that mine off and that was it. Blown to pieces. They had us pinned down for hours and I don't know how many guys we lost, four wounded and one killed I think." They were talking about guys getting killed and wounded like they were discussing the weather. No big deal. Shit just happens and you go on. Were these guys that cold and hard or were they just putting on a show for the new guy? Yeah, that had to be it. I just acted like I wasn't hearing them but I was hanging on every word.

As I sat there listening with my back to them I thought I heard a familiar voice. No, Can't be. "Hey, Duke." I spun around and there he stood. John Martin. Holy Shit!! What were the odds? We shook hands and I told him I couldn't believe we ended up in the same company and the same platoon in Nam. He said, "Why not? You've been following me around for over a year now." He never lost that little grin but there was something different about him now.

As we talked I realized what it was. He had aged. Not a little, but a lot. I remembered an innocent faced young man, but standing before me now was the tanned face of a much more mature man. He had a confidence about him and a familiar look in his eyes. Fact was most of these rag tag grunts had that same look. It wasn't just one thing. I think it was a combination of a lot of things all mixed up together- homesickness, fear, determination, fatigue, pride, toughness, and a "Kiss my Ass" attitude to top it all off.

John helped break the ice by introducing me to some of the guys. It helped but there still wasn't

anyone going out of their way to be friendly. I was still a FNG even if I was John's friend. Some of the guys had nicknames like me, but most everyone was called by their last name or some form of it. John is the only guy I remember calling by his first name. Some of the guys called him Martin. Others called him "Sarge". I always called him John.

I couldn't wait to ask him about what it was like here. He had always been so reassuring to me through Basic, AIT, and NCO school and I could sure use some words of encouragement now. I just didn't know what to think when he told me, "It ain't good Duke. We just so happen to be in the worst damn part of the whole country of Vietnam. More bad-ass VC booby traps and mines here than in probably any other part of the country. I ain't gonna lie to ya. It's a real bitch here." I was already nervous and now things just got worse. I never heard John cuss before or after that. He was serious and he wanted me to take it serious.

John headed up A squad and I headed up B squad. Because of that we worked close together and talked almost every day. Mostly it was just bullshit. And usually without fail just to keep me on my toes, somewhere in the conversation, he would start humming or singing under his breath a few lines from his favorite song- El Paso. I recall telling him once, "John. If you ever get captured all you need to do is start singing and them Gooks will turn your ass loose right away."

Sometimes our talks got serious. On a few different occasions the subject would be about our feelings regarding the chance of getting killed or wounded. I'm pretty sure most of the guys had talked about it at one time or another and I know we all thought about it often. We were both in agreement on this one. We would rather be killed than to

go home severely wounded. That's just the way we felt at the time. At least that's what we were telling each other. When it comes right down to it I would guess the will to live would win out over any injury or wounds no matter how bad they might be.

Over the next couple months I learned a lot from John. I admired the way he ran his squad and interacted with his men. He was a good squad leader and his men always did what was asked of them. Not because they had to but because they knew he always had their best interest in mind and they trusted him. That's not something that automatically comes with rank. In fact, when you are out in the boonies with a bunch of these grunts just having rank never meant that much. You might have the rank, but if you don't have the trust and respect of your men, you're screwed.

Often times John would walk point for his squad. It was a dangerous job that required staying cool and alert. If one of his guys was getting "short" he would give him a break from walking point. Or if he had a FNG in the squad he would take his turn because he knew inexperience could end up getting everyone in big trouble.

After being in country a little over four months now and heading up B squad, I was feeling more comfortable with my role as squad leader. I had a great bunch of guys surrounding me and we would do whatever it took to take care of each other. These guys were all tough, brave, and extremely close and loyal. We had formed a life-long brotherly bond between us that neither time nor miles could break.

13 July 1969. Quang Ngai, CAP 143

None of us wanted anything to do with this place. We had been there before and it always ended up bad. Right near Pinkville, as we called it, and just a few miles from the villages of My Lai and My Khe, it was a bad-ass area our company had to patrol. All you had to do was see the looks on the villager's faces in the area and the hate in their eyes and you knew sooner or later there was going to be big trouble. That's the way it had always ended before and there was no reason to think this time would be any different.

CAP 143 was a sandy topped hill on the Batangan Peninsula and not much more than a stone's throw from the South China Sea. Close by below were the villages of Tan Duc and An Hai. It was a Sunday, about mid-morning and my squad and I had gotten back to camp an hour or so earlier from an uneventful all night ambush. There was a large dirt path that ran up and down from the hill we were on and near the bottom which slowly curved to the right and towards the villages. I and the guys in my squad had come up that



Duke Moriarty (third from left) with B squad members on the Batangan Peninsula (Photo from author)

very same dirt path just a short while earlier. Tired and hungry we got to the top and just found a place along the edge of the path to sit down and eat some rations, fix something to drink, and rest.

As I was sitting there on the ground facing down the hill I heard some guys coming up behind me and I hear that soft Texas drawl saying, "Hey Duke". It was John headed out with a group of men and he was on point. "Hey, John, where you headed off to?" His reply was, "Got a patrol through the villages. Be back later." "Ok," I said. "Talk to you then." And as he turned and started walking away I'll be damned if he didn't start singing softly, but loud enough for me to hear. Yep. El Paso.

I cupped my hands up to my mouth and yelled out, "John. You can't sing worth a shit!" A few guys in his squad that knew about our ongoing joke started laughing as they were passing by. Still walking slowly away and without even looking back my way he shouted out, "Yes I can. Y'all love my singin'." Chuckling to myself, I went back to heating up my hot chocolate over a red hot burning ball of C4.

It wasn't but a few minutes later that we heard the huge blast from an explosion and saw the black and red colored dust cloud belching up from down below us.

We all knew what it was and we all knew it wasn't good. This was no Toe Popper or even a Bouncing Betty. This was big and ugly and it was scary.

Startled, I jumped up and splashed hot chocolate all over my hand and arm and dropped my canteen cup to the ground. I got this sick feeling down deep in my gut and a strange notion that something had happened to John. I reached down and grabbed my M16, a belt of ammo, and took off running down the hill with a couple of other guys at my side. As we came tearing around the bend in the path there was still some smoke and dust from the blast hanging in the air and it looked like a dance between good and evil as it mixed in and blended with the yellow smoke that was popped to

mark the position for the Medevac chopper.

That's when my worst fears had come true. There lying on his back near a small ditch next to a hedge row was a soldier facing away from us. I knew right away it was John. The medic was at his side trying desperately to help him and a couple guys were standing around him with shocked looks of disbelief on their faces. A few others who just couldn't take the horrific sight were standing off to the side. I could hear the RTO yelling into the radio calling for an emergency dust-off. Everything seemed like it was happening in slow motion and for a moment I just went numb, froze, and couldn't move.

Then I ran up to John, knelt down by his side and placed my hands on his chest and left shoulder. It was bad, real bad. "No, this can't happen." "God Damn it!" "Fuck!" "I hate this Fuckin' place!"

His legs were gone, one completely gone and part of the other. He was peppered in shrapnel all over the rest of his body. What clothes remained were ripped and torn apart. He was completely covered in dirt, dust, and blood.

I had all I could do to stay there at my friend's side and see him in that condition. As the medic tried frantically to work on John I could tell that it was a losing battle. I hated myself for thinking that. John kept going in and out of consciousness and I was afraid he was about to go into shock at any second. I kept yelling to him, "John. Hold on John. You're gonna be OK John. Don't give up John. The chopper is on the way. We're gonna help you John. You're gonna be going home soon." There was no reply back.



Duke Moriarty (front left) with refugees at An Hai Refugee Camp, CAP 143 (Photo from author)

When he did come to he would try to lean forward and sit up. The medic kept yelling at me to hold him down and keep him still. He would struggle for a few seconds and then black out. Once again he came to and fought to sit up and lean forward. It was then I realized he was trying to see his injuries. I think at that point he knew he had lost his legs. I kept telling him over and over again that he was going to make it and it was going to be OK. All the while I just knew it wasn't going to be OK.

When he lifted his head up and forward once more, he leaned far enough so that he did see how bad his wounds actually were. As his eyes opened wide in shock I tried holding him back down. Suddenly he got this very calm peaceful look on his face. He seemed to relax, and laid his head back into the palm of my right hand and slowly closed his eyes. That was the last time he came to.

The dust-off chopper was there within minutes. The medic, a couple other guys, and I picked John up, carried him to the chopper, and laid him inside on the floor. As the chopper roared and powered up for lift off, the air churned up and the dust and dirt flew everywhere. Then I noticed something I will never forget. I can picture it as clearly today as that day I saw it. As John was lying there on the floor of that chopper facing the other direction, I saw his hair swirling around as the chopper lifted off. His hair was all messed up and dirty. I don't know why of all things that bothered me so much and sticks in my mind. And as I was standing there in a daze rubbing the back of my arm across my face in an effort to wipe away the tears, I kept thinking to myself, "Why did something like this have to happen to such a good young man?"

THAT WAS THE LAST TIME I SAW MY FRIEND JOHN...

All the rest of that day I kept trying to convince myself this was all a bad dream- but it wasn't. It seemed like there were a lot of things that happened in Nam that were just too horrible to be real. But they were real. Things you saw and, yes, things you did, and as hard as you try you can't forget them. Just one more nightmare you throw on that pile of shit we called Nam. And then you get to carry it around in your head forever if you are lucky enough to make it out alive.

After all these years hardly a day goes by that I don't think of John. But now instead of always remembering that day he died, I try to focus on the years he lived and how lucky I am to have known him even for such a short while. And when I'm alone in my pickup truck driving somewhere and I think of him, I slide in that Marty Robbins CD and listen to song #1. Yep. El Paso. That's when I realized John was right after all...I did love to hear him sing!

CHAPTER 15

MY WORST MISSION

PART II.a

By Andy Olints

It was February 12, 1971, and our platoon received word that Charlie Company would be flying out in helicopters to somewhere near our area. With the trees so tall, I never got to see the helicopters landing, but I could hear them. Along with the five helicopters that were used to transport Charlie Company, there were two gun ships for support. I'm guessing Charlie Company landed about three miles from where my platoon was located. Out in mountain country we could hear helicopters that were miles away. Our platoon was taking a break to call in our location and I was sitting along a trail listening to Charlie Company landing. I was so relieved that some other company was coming out to help us. I just felt there were a lot of North Vietnamese in the area.

Minutes after Charlie Company landed I could hear the sounds of M-16s being fired. Another minute or two later I could hear the gun ships firing their mini-guns. Then our radio operator received word that the helicopter pilots spotted a lot of NVA walking on trails. A few minutes later our radio operator said that Charlie Company hadn't been on the ground fifteen minutes when, without anyone being wounded, they captured over 100 weapons, ammo, and some rockets. It was frustrating to hear that Charlie Company captured all these weapons so easily. A few days earlier, three of our Delta Company men had been killed and about another ten men had been wounded,

and all we captured were a few wooden boats. What dumb luck for Charlie Company to land on top of a weapons cache.

By late afternoon on February 13 my platoon was in their night laager. Not too far off in the distance I could hear the sounds of some AK47s going off and then some M-16s being fired. The first thing I wondered was who was in a firefight? I didn't expect the firefight to last long, but I could hear rifle and artillery fire from Fire Base Mary Ann. Our platoon wasn't more than two miles away from the firefight, but that was a hell of a long way to go in the mountains. I felt bad for whoever was in the firefight, but there was no way we could help. Our platoon just sat there in silence and listened. We heard gun ships firing their mini-guns and rockets for possibly an hour, and soon it would be dark. Finally, our radio operator got word that one of the platoons in Charlie Company had been ambushed. Two men had been killed and a lot more were wounded. One of the men killed was Staff Sergeant Carney. Sergeant Carney was one hell of a tough guy. If you had ever met him or even seen him, you would never forget him. I saw him once at an NCO club in Chu Lai where he looked and talked like the toughest guy in the place. Sergeant Carney was one of the guys you never thought would be killed. I sat there in disbelief when I heard he was. He was on his second tour in Vietnam.

The firing stopped and I could hear a helicopter in the area. I got word that a Medevac helicopter was arriving to pick up the wounded. I sat there listening to the helicopter hovering above the trees. I'm

sure a jungle penetrator had to have been used to pick up the wounded. Then all of a sudden the sounds of a NVA AK47 went off. The medic in the helicopter was wounded and the helicopter had to fly out of the evacuation area immediately. The platoon in Charlie Company had to clear the area of NVA soldiers so other Medevac helicopters could pick up Charlie Company's wounded. It was very hard to accept that my platoon was within two miles of this ambush and we could not do anything to help theThe next day, February 14, both Charlie Company and Delta Company combined forces. First platoon in each company worked together, second platoon in each company worked together, and third platoon in each company worked together. I was in second platoon and we linked up with Charlie Company's second platoon, which was located atop a hill that had a very steep slope heading down to a stream.

It just happened to be resupply day and our platoon had to go down this slope to get resupplied. The stream below our location was beautiful. The stream was about twelve inches deep and fifteen feet wide. Steep slopes on both sides of the stream were covered with beautiful rocks and boulders. Some of the larger boulders were at least six feet in diameter, and some of the small rocks were about a foot in diameter. There were twist and turns in the stream and I just felt comfortable there. About fifteen minutes after our platoon arrived at the stream a helicopter landed and dropped off supplies, ammo, and mail. The helicopter then returned to Fire Base Mary Ann to pick up the soldiers who were needed to replace the men

who had been wounded the day before. I was lucky enough to receive mail and I took the mail and walked upstream to find a nice rock to sit on. I made sure I had some protection in case some NVA sniper was near by.

It wasn't long and I could hear a helicopter flying up the stream the same way he had come the first time. The new replacement men got off the helicopter and once again the helicopter flew back to Mary Ann. I got my case of C-rations, filled my pack, and got ready to climb back up the steep hill. We were told to stay where we were because the helicopter had one more trip back to our re-supply area. I grabbed a John Wayne bar (a chocolate bar) and my mail and sat on a rock with my feet in the water. I was one contented guy. The helicopter landed for the third time with more supplies and then took off. Ignoring proper procedure, this chopper pilot took the same route in and out each time. No more than one hundred yards from our re-supply area at least five NVA opened up their AK47s on full automatic aiming at the helicopter. The helicopter was hit by many bullets but fortunately did make it back to Mary Ann.

When I heard the AK47s go off it scared the hell out of me. We were told to get our packs on and head back up that steep hill. With full pack and ammo it was an ass kicker to get up that hill, but that was a lot better than knowing there were five NVA with weapons near the stream I had been dangling my feet in.

About 7 o'clock in the morning on February 15, Lt. Art Schmidt came over to me to explain the orders for the day. I was told my squad would be walking point. Lt. Schmidt also said the point men would be wearing flak jackets. The jackets weighed about ten pounds but could save a soldier's life. I was also given a location on the map that we hoped to reach by nightfall. Lt. Schmidt told me that if in any way I didn't feel right about what was ahead of us (like if I thought we were walking into an ambush), I could recon by fire. "Recon by fire" means to shoot your weapon into an area where you think North Vietnamese are located.

I had Donald Moore walk point to lead the patrol. Second in line was David Ray. I walked third in line with Lt. Schmidt walking right behind me. Lt. Schmidt had his radio operator behind him, and walking sixth was Bill Meek, who carried an M-60 machine gun.

When the squad began walking on the patrol, I felt really good. I was wide awake and just felt

good about the day. As we started moving away from the night laager, the terrain went downhill for about fifty feet and was covered with lots of tall trees and shrubs. Then the terrain went uphill for about one hundred feet. Once we reached the top of the hill, I noticed that a few feet in front of me was this well-worn trail about two feet wide. In a loud whisper I told David Ray to get off the trail. I stepped off the trail and in seconds a North Vietnamese soldier with a machine gun started shooting down the trail. I have no idea why, but I turned my body 90 degrees to the right. At the same time I squeezed my M16 under my right elbow and with both my hands free, I pulled the emergency straps on my pack, which dropped to the ground.

Because I initially had turned 90 degrees to my right, I was then looking in the wrong direction away from the trail but wasn't aware of it. I looked for a good place to get on the ground and start shooting my M16. I noticed to my left was a large tree, and the ground underneath the tree had a slight rise so my plan was to run to the tree and use this slight rise in the ground to protect myself. I didn't realize when I selected the large tree to my left for a position that I was running alongside the original trail in the direction of the NVA with the machine gun. I was running off the trail, and I ran by but didn't see my two point men. They were wounded and lying on the ground.

Once close to the tree, I dove to the ground and started shooting my M16 on full automatic. The NVA with the machine gun was shooting at me and the noise from his weapon was so loud I thought he was next to me. In infantry training you learn that if someone is shooting at you, you have to shoot back to get fire superiority. I had no idea where my point men were, so I was aiming high. I didn't want to shoot one of my own men on the ground. I fired four magazines of ammo on full automatic. While firing my fifth magazine of ammo, I finally saw the barrel of the NVA machine gun. I never saw the NVA soldier, but I did see the barrel. I could see the bullets coming out of the barrel.

At first I saw the bullets coming at me really fast. Then I began to see the bullets in slow motion. I could see each bullet come out of the barrel, and as the bullet got closer to me, it seemed to get bigger. By the time it got to me, the bullets appeared to be the size of baseballs. Amazingly, none of the NVA bullets hit me, but I thought I could feel the bullets

go right through me, and I remember telling myself that they didn't hurt that bad. I was shocked that I had bullets going through me and I could still function. I fired my sixth magazine of ammo on semi-automatic. As I put my seventh magazine into my M16, I realized that it was the last of my ammo so I decided to save the ammo I had left and stop shooting.

Seconds later a hand grenade was thrown at me, and the concussion of the hand grenade really hurt. Then another hand grenade was thrown at me, and the second concussion hurt so bad I thought my whole body was hit. Suddenly, the ambush was over, dead silence. All this happened in no more than three minutes. With everything going on I could still hear Bill Meek yelling to me to hang on, that he was coming up to help. I heard him call out to me three or four times. I heard voices behind me calling for a medic. I didn't know where my point men were and I just didn't understand why people were talking behind me. Finally, someone walked up to me and said he needed help with the wounded. I was lying on the ground very disoriented and I couldn't believe that I wasn't wounded. No bullets went through me, and I had no wounds from the hand grenade. How could my body hurt so much when I didn't even get a scratch on me?

I hurried back to the wounded men and saw Donald Moore lying on the ground. A few of the men were tending to him. Donald had been walking point, and when he saw the NVA with a machine gun, he dove to the ground. Somehow he was shot in the cheek of his ass. Donald seemed OK and was talking. David Ray, who walked second behind Donald, had a lot of cuts on his face. David had been holding his M16 about two inches from his chest at a 45-degree angle. One of the bullets from the NVA machine gun hit his M16 and metal fragments from his rifle flew into his face. If he had not holding his M16 in that manner, the bullet would have gone right through his stomach.

Ten feet away from David was Lt. Schmidt, lying on the ground with the medic next to him. When I first looked at him I thought he was going to die. He looked very weak and I could see a lot of fear in his eyes. As bad as he looked, he still was trying to give me orders. He was telling me to call in artillery and then to call a Medevac chopper. Either Captain Kirkey or Staff Sergeant Wolfe had already called in artillery and a Medevac chopper. I then noticed that the medic had hooked up Lt. Schmidt

to an intravenous injection. Once the intravenous medications started working on Lt. Schmidt, it was like a miracle happened. Lt. Schmidt became alert and talked clearly. He still was giving orders, but the biggest relief for me was he wasn't going to die. Lt. Schmidt had been carrying a paperback book in his front pocket. The bullet from the NVA machine gun first hit the book and then went right through his leg. I'm sure if he hadn't had that book in his pocket, he would have been in real bad shape.

A few of the men in our platoon made two stretchers, and Donald Moore and Lt. Schmidt were put onto the stretchers. One of the other men in the platoon located an area for a helicopter to land. It was an area where a bomb had previously been dropped and a lot of trees were on the ground. I helped carry Lt. Schmidt and when we got to the area where the helicopter was supposed to land, the helicopter couldn't land due to the trees lying on the ground but had to hover about two feet above the ground. As hard as it is to carry someone in a stretcher, it's even harder to lift that person two feet higher to get him into the helicopter. There were four of us carrying Lt. Schmidt and we needed all the strength we had to get him into that helicopter.

Once the three wounded men were in the helicopter and they flew off, I went back to my pack. I sat on the pack and was totally exhausted. In seconds I broke into a real cold sweat and wanted to throw up. The only thing that felt good was to sit there and kind of put my head down between my knees. Then I felt one of the guys (I never knew who) put his arm around me and say, "You'll be OK."

That night Bill Meek had guard duty from 10:30 P.M. to 12 midnight. I had guard duty from 12 midnight to 1:30 a.m. Bill woke me up when it was my turn for guard duty and told me he was wide awake so did I mind if he stayed up with me. When a guy had guard duty at night, he sat on the trail right next to the machine gun. In his hand he had the radio and every 15 minutes he got a call from Fire Base Mary Ann to make sure the platoon was OK. I was so uptight that night that if I had seen any movement from the NVA, I think I would have had a heart attack. Bill and I just sat there and talked (whispered). We talked about home, and just having someone to talk to had a calming effect on me.

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