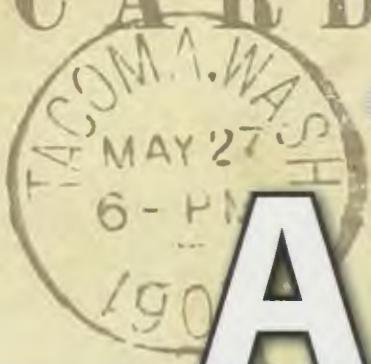


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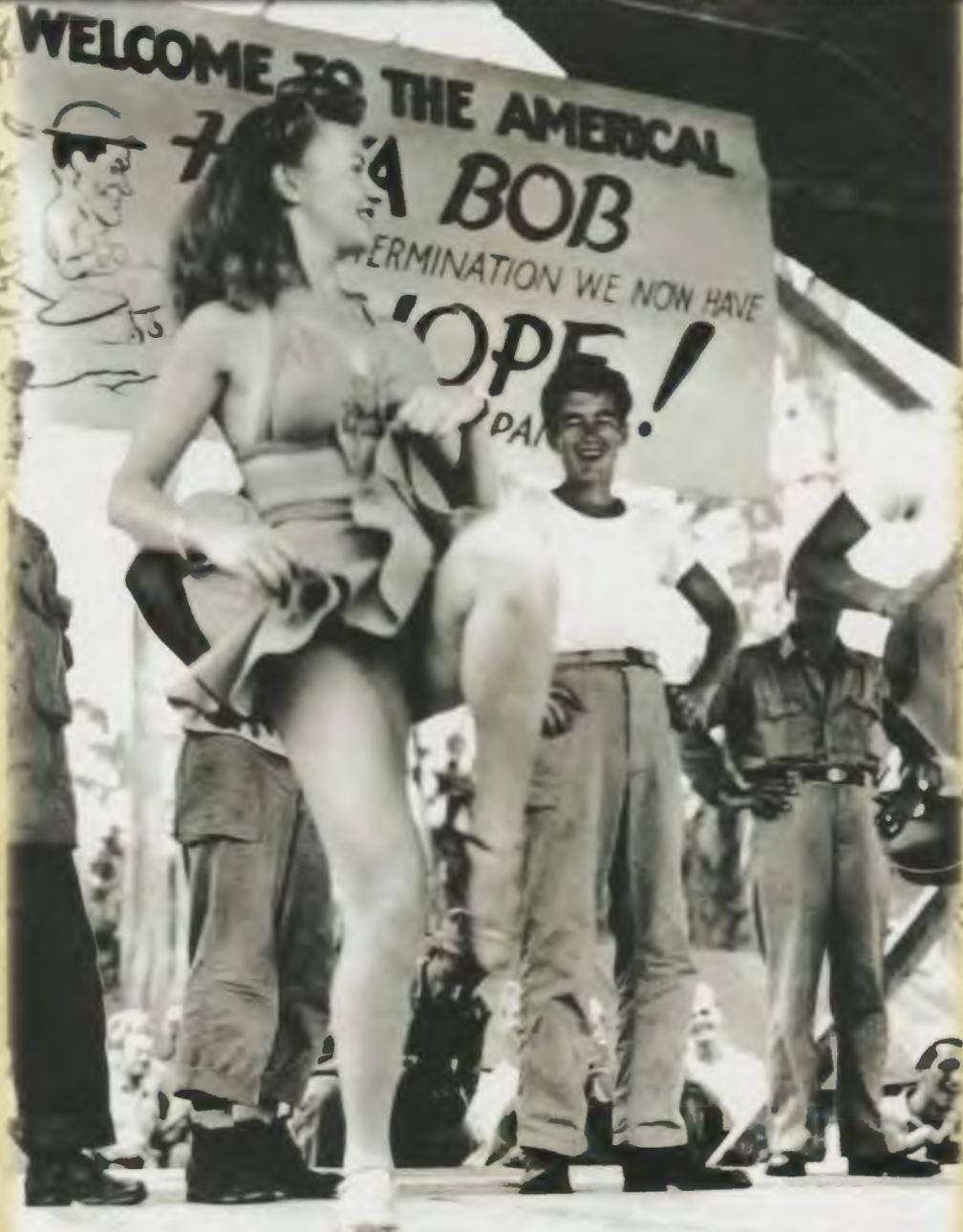


January • February • March **2021**

# AMERICAL

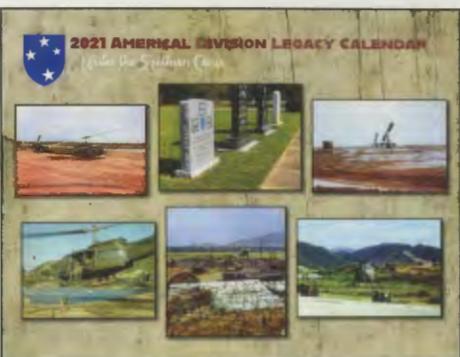
## JOURNAL

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



UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

## New Lower Prices at the Legacy Store



*Under The Southern Cross* by Francis D. Kronin is the complete history of the Americal Division in World War II. It was edited by the division's historian during the war and originally published in 1951. This rare 432-page book includes 16 pages of photographs. Its appendix also details the Honor Roll of all Americal Division soldiers who gave their lives in the war. It also shows Order of Battle, Troop Lists, and Awards and Decorations earned by the division. The book is in soft cover and is only \$17.50 each, \$15 each for three or more copies purchased at the same time. Shipping is free.

### ORDERING INSTRUCTIONS

This is a limited inventory reduction offer and is limited to stock in hand as of January 1, 2021. This offer may expire as stocks deplete and may not be offered again. Place your order now if you want to be sure to get in on these lower prices.

Send your order and payment to PNC Gary L. Noller, P.O. Box 1268, Center Point, TX 78010. Payment may be made by check or money order. Credit cards are not accepted. Please do not send cash. Allow three weeks for delivery. Include your mailing address, phone number, and email address with your order in case there is need for a follow-up call to you. You may request additional information by sending an email to [REDACTED] or by calling [REDACTED] (CTZ).

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### National Commander's Report

By David Eichhorn



I am honored and humbled to serve as 2020-2022 commander of the Americal Division Veterans Association.

What a year it's been. I hope you enjoyed the 2020 holiday season and are staying healthy. After the year we've had we sure need some time to spend with loved ones.

First off, I greatly missed attending all of the 2020 reunions. They were canceled due to COVID-19. We will surely make up for time lost when we can all attend the reunions.

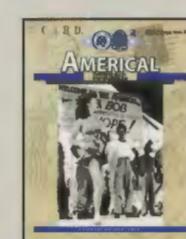
For years now, I've had hiking the Appalachian Trail (AT) at the top of my bucket list. For those of you who don't know, the AT crosses 14 states and is 2,200-miles long. I began the trail on 29 February 2020. I started in Georgia and headed north along the trail. The trail ends in Maine.

I had a great month hiking, making new friends, sleeping on the ground, just like fifty years ago in Vietnam. There are some major differences though. I wondered where the bears were instead of where the enemy was.

I enjoyed the chance to create once in a lifetime memories along the trail. However, I was interrupted the end of March, in Hot Springs, NC, when they announced that they were closing the trail due to global pandemic. Although I was sad that I would have to head back home, I knew that I would be back when our country was in a better place.

I returned to the AT later and had another great couple of months hiking. I finished this hike in Shenandoah National Park, having completed 875 miles. I also spent some time backpacking in the Monongahela National Forest in West Virginia. It's peaceful and simple in the woods- sleep, eat, and walk. I plan to return to the trail in March 2021 and I hope to complete my journey before the reunion in Indy.

I hope you are all doing well surviving the pandemic, staying safe, and are healthy. These times have been unpredictable but we will persevere and get through it, stronger than we were before. I'm looking forward to seeing those of you that attend the annual reunion!



**Cover:** Patricia Thomas, tap dancer, with WWII Americal GIs at Bob Hope USO show.

### FSB Mary Ann Anniversary

By Gary L. Noller

I wish to take a moment to recognize the 50th anniversary of the enemy attack on Fire Support Base Mary Ann. The attack began at approximately 2:00 AM on March 28, 1971.

Mary Ann was the forward operating base for the 1/46th Infantry, 196th Lt. Inf. Bde. It was located approximately due west of Chu Lai and due south of Da Nang, half way between the ocean and the Laotian border.

The surprise sapper attack claimed the lives of 30 Americans and wounded almost 90 more. The brunt of the attack was suffered by Co. C, 1/46th Infantry. They were on the bunker line and exposed to an intense barrage from mortars, small arms, machine guns, rocket propelled grenades, and satchel charges.

It is ironic that the attack occurred when it did. American military leaders had already made the decision to close Mary Ann and move the 1/46th to Da Nang. The 1st Marine Division was going on and were to be replaced by soldiers of the 1/46th. Co. C had spent the day of March 27 beginning the process of decommissioning the firebase. Most likely, the enemy did not know that.

The Americans also had no warning of the enemy attack. Mary Ann was opened in June 1970 and had not sustained an attack in almost 10 months. The enemy took advantage of a moonless night and attacked under a barrage of their own mortar fire to include the use of tear gas.

I have heard many stories over the years about Mary Ann. Some are true. Some are myth. And some are false. I was not at Mary Ann when it was attacked. Just ten hours before the attack I moved from Mary Ann to LZ Mildred located five kilometers to the southeast. On April 1 I returned to Mary Ann to finish my last month in Vietnam. Returning to Mary Ann was very eerie and sorrowful.

A good account of the attack and its prelude and aftermath may be found in the book *Sappers In The Wire* by Keith Nolan. Please remember the sacrifices of those that were killed and wounded. We will never forget them.



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
- Contributing Author: Roger Gilmore

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## From the National Adjutant

By Roger Gilmore

As we move into 2021, the COVID issue continues to pervade our nation. Fortunately, the long-awaited vaccine is becoming more readily available. Some members I stay in contact with have had the injections with no significant side effects. Hopefully, those of you that are in the VA Health Care system can have the vaccine available through one of the VA facilities. In late January, I registered with my local VA clinic for the COVID19 vaccine injections.

Delivery of the 4th Quarter 2020 Americal Journal was significantly delayed for some of our members. The publication was mailed with the Americal Legacy Foundation 2021 calendar the first of December. We received inquiries via the Americal Facebook page, email, and telephone. We monitored each inquiry to be sure the delivery did make it to members. Some were delivered as late as mid-January. Editor-in-Chief Gary Noller and I worked the list of those identified as not receiving the publications. We mailed replacements to those confirming non-receipt. Hopefully, by the time this issue reaches you, the 4th Quarter 2020 publication and calendar has reached you. If not, let us know.

The Association's membership rolls increased significantly over the previous reporting period. The past lull could be due in part to the pandemic curtailing many veteran activities, including membership sign-ups in organizations like ADVA. We added fifteen new members. Of those fifteen, four joined as life members. Twelve annual pay members upgraded their ADVA membership to Paid Life. Eleven former members reinstated their annual membership for this period. This surge in reinstatements is due in part to our planned approach for reminding annual pay members when we have no record of dues payment for their renewal date. Assistant Adjutant Rich Heroux is responsible for this membership task. Thanks to Rich for his work on this and other related membership duties he performs. Hats off to members PNC David Taylor, Bill Stoneman, Lyle Peterson, Greg Malicki and Les Hines for sponsoring new members during this reporting period.

The Americal Division, Family, and Supporters Facebook page is a way for Americal Division vets to connect with buddies and chat about their Vietnam experiences. PNC Jay Flanagan, one of the Americal Division, Family, and Supporters Facebook page administrators, is working with our membership rolls to identify Americal Veterans who request admission to the FB page but are not ADVA members. He then encourages them to join the Association. Expectations are that this process will help us pick up members via that social media platform. Benefits of ADVA membership are this high-quality publication and Americal Legacy Foundation Scholarship grant sponsorship for any ADVA member's children or grandchildren attending college or vocational school.

We have an extensive Taps listing in this issue of the Americal Journal. I started listing ADVA members and Americal Division veterans whose death is posted on the Americal Division, Family, and Supporters Facebook page. However, I am an infrequent user of Facebook, so I will not get all names posted there for a particular reporting period. The best way to inform me when you know of the death of an ADVA member or Americal Division veteran is email or telephone call. My email is gilmoraces@aol.com. Please be sure to include the member or veteran's full name, date of death, Americal unit (if known) and hometown.

January 2021 annual pay renewals went to the USPS a little later than normal. The business mail unit at my post office was closed until January 4. These did not get out until mid-week first week of January. Please note your annual pay due date on the back cover (beside your name) and mail your payment if not current. Please notify me when you have a change of address so the ADVA roster can be updated ASAP.

### New Annual Pay Members

**John Abrams**  
1/52nd Inf  
Spencerport, NY  
★ Self

**Danny W. Davison**  
196th LIB  
Jacksonville, IL  
★ Self

**Lee Douglas**  
11th LIB  
Marysville, WA  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Joseph J. Emma**  
1/82nd Arty Btry B  
Somerdale, NJ  
★ Bill Stoneman

**Steven Josefsberg**  
4/31st Inf Co B  
Oceanside, NY  
★ Self

**John P. Lavelle**  
523rd Sig Bn Co A  
Bettendorf, IA  
★ Lyle Peterson

**Michael Mason**  
328th RR Co  
Jacksonville, FL  
★ Self

**Robert C. Morgan, Jr.**  
1/82nd Arty  
Long Beach, CA  
★ Self

**John Slagboom**  
2nd Armd Div, Ft Hood  
Grand Haven, MI  
★ Self

**John Wright**  
Div Arty Air  
Palmdale, CA  
★ Roger Gilmore

### New Paid Life Members

**James L. Cunningham**  
1/52nd Inf  
Punta Gorda, FL  
★ Gregg Malicki

**William Duprey**  
116th AHC  
Ellington, CT  
★ Self

**Daniel J. Guida**  
1/1st Cav HHC  
Wading River, NJ  
★ Self

**Preston S. Rogers**  
123rd Avn Bn Co B  
Austin, TX  
★ Les Hines

**Frederick A. Camacho**  
3/16th Arty A Btry  
Wisconsin Rapids, WI  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**James P. Collins**  
26th Engineer Bn  
Los Osos, CA  
★ Lawrence O'Boyle

**Jeff Crocker**  
4/21st Inf Co C  
Passadumkeag, ME  
★ Self

**Tom Ellis**  
2/1st Inf Co B  
Columbus, OH  
★ PNC Rollie Castranova

**Daniel F. Flynn**  
198th LIB  
Naples, FL  
★ Bernie Chase

**John W. Glover**  
23rd S&T Bn Co B  
Tallahassee, FL  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Peter R. Moore**  
3/21st Inf Co E  
Hamden, CT  
★ PNC Rollie Castranova

**Bruce Mulraney**  
4/21st Inf Co E  
Marina Del Rey, CA  
★ Don Ballou

**Ernst Olsen**  
198th LIB  
Milford, PA  
★ Self

**Francis Vincent**  
3/21st Inf Co A  
Fenton, MI  
★ Rich Heroux

**Franklin Wootan**  
1/20th Inf Co A  
Fairfax, OK  
★ PNC Ronald R. Ellis

**Robert W. Zimmerman**  
1/6th Inf Co C  
Columbus, OH  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

### Reinstated Members

**James M. Dehlin**  
1/1st Cav  
Roscommon, MI  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Donna W. Hammond**  
Associate  
Oklahoma City, OK  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Nolan Hargrave**  
3/16th Arty Btry A  
Centennial, CO  
★ Don Ballou

**John J. Licata**  
3/82nd Arty Btry A  
Santa Monica, CA  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Richard J. Linehan**  
3/1st Inf Co B  
Toledo, OH  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Tom Lowman**  
3/16th Arty  
Oak Harbor, WA  
★ PNC Larry Swank

**Martin H. Moore**  
2/11th Arty – TFO  
Amherst, OH  
★ Roger Gilmore

**Roy A. Abbott**  
HHC/1/46th Inf  
Chino Valley, AZ  
★ November 9, 2020

**Ron Nereson**  
1/46th Inf Co C  
Hayden, CO  
★ PNC Larry Swank

**Pedro Perez**  
11th LIB  
Lajas, PR  
★ Self

**Clarence Phinisee**  
196th LIB  
Dallas, TX  
★ Self

**Theodore Rahl**  
1/46th Inf Co A  
Lansing, MI  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

### New Associate Members

**Irma Wethington**  
Tucson, AZ  
★ Self

### TAPS LISTING; MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

### World War II Veterans

**Patrick F. Cavanaugh**  
Unit Unknown  
Yonkers, NY  
January 7, 2021

**Floyd Petty**  
★  
132nd Inf Rgmt  
Bakersfield, CA  
November 3, 2020

**Richard Drapczuk**  
★  
1/46th Inf  
Cherry Hill, NJ  
December 9, 2020

**Joaquin Garcia**  
★  
B/1/20th Inf  
Brownsville, TX  
August 6, 2020

**Roger J. Grazioplene**  
★  
B/2/1st Inf  
Batavia, NY  
November 6, 2020

**Herman J. Amann**  
★  
5/46th Inf  
Redding, CA  
Date Unknown

**Joseph L. Bagwell**  
★  
B/D/4/31st Inf  
Jack, AL  
Date Unknown

**Charles Boyd**  
C/4/3rd Inf  
Julian, NC  
December 15, 2020

**Larry Cheek**  
D/1/6th Inf  
Hometown Unknown  
January 28, 2020

**David G. Clark**  
★  
23rd Admin Co  
Rochester, IN  
Date Unknown

**Michael Colby**  
2/1st Inf  
Rosedale, MD  
February 11, 2020

**William Connell**  
2/1st Inf  
Albany, NY  
July 17, 2020

**Russell W. Davis**  
B/3/21st Inf  
Zanesville, OH  
October 27, 2020

**Jerry D. Smith**  
★  
E/1/52nd Inf  
Trimble, MO  
May 23, 2020

**Charles Surface**  
C/2/1st Inf  
Houston, TX  
December 13, 2020

**Roger Wampler**  
★  
26th Cmbt Engrs Co B  
St. Louis, MO  
January 6, 2021

**\* ADVA Member**

### ADVA MEMBERSHIP 31 January 2021

|                      |              |
|----------------------|--------------|
| World War II         | 249          |
| Vietnam              | 2,430        |
| Cold War             | 4            |
| Associate Members    | 179          |
| <b>Total Members</b> | <b>2,862</b> |

## Americal Legacy Foundation Report

By Roger Gilmore, Chairman, Board of Directors  
**Foundation Web Site**

The Americal Legacy Foundation website store recently underwent a redesign. The primary change was the pricing on the items we offer for sale. Additionally, the Americal Legacy Foundation 2021 calendar is now offered for purchase in the store. The legacy store link also offers information on how to donate to the foundation.

In December we received many inquiries about the delivery of the 2021 calendar. A few ADVA members did not receive the calendar due to the slowdown in mail delivery during December. We hope that all have received a calendar. We had to do some catch up with a repeat mailing in January for those who did not receive the calendar in December. Our mailing list for non-recipients was cut considerably as deliveries of the two publications began to trickle to members in mid-January.

We have some calendars remaining. If you did not receive one, please contact us and we will get one in the mail to you. If you want extras for fellow Americal Division veterans or other ADVA members these can be ordered from the website. More information can be found on Legacy store merchandise inside the front cover of this publication.

A few inquiries continue to come through the Contact Us link asking for specific unit information or details on Americal soldiers individual service in Vietnam or World War II. The only information we may have on soldier service in Vietnam will be the DTOC logs that are compiled in the History link on the website. Other information on the history link is the Vietnam War Operational Reports Lessons Learned logs. They are compilations of division personnel and tactical and field operations and major enemy engagements and operations. These can be useful in helping individuals identify action dates for connecting with fellow Americal Division veterans. In addition, twelve issues of the semiannual publication of the Americal magazine in Vietnam are available on the history link of the website. Our website is [americalfoundation.org](http://americalfoundation.org).

## Americal Legacy Calendar – 2021 Edition

I think most of us can agree that the year 2020 was a year like no other we have experienced. I have even heard the term "a lost year". Our normal routines were disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic. I hope your Americal Legacy Foundation 2021 calendar will be a bright spot to begin the new year. The calendar is very well done, and we hope that based on your prior years' donations and incredible generosity that this one will be as well received, and you will continue to support the programs with a donation.

The 2021 calendar appeal is the same as in the past – continue to provide funding for projects through our "unrestricted" allocations. The unrestricted funds go toward monument projects and grants for others that honor and commemorate the Americal Division's great history of service to this country.

On February 1, ALF director Gary Noller reported donation receipts of approximately \$12,000 from about 350 donors. We sincerely appreciate this support and encourage all who received the calendar to support the programs with your tax-deductible donation.

## Americal Monument Programs – National VA Cemeteries and Other Locations

I previously reported that the nation seemed to be coming back slowly to normal activity in the wake of COVID-19 infections in a slight decline. However, the last couple of months the number of COVID-19 infections seemed to be on the rise and some areas of the country are once again imposing more restrictions to slow the spread of the pandemic. We are fortunate to have had some success in monument placements at VA cemeteries before things took a turn for the worse. The NCA has implemented firm measures that allow families to conduct committal and burial services in the face of ongoing cases. If this continues, we do not foresee any type of monument dedication ceremonies at locations where the Americal Division monument is in place. With placement approval from the NCA at future sites, we do expect some placements in 2021. We continue to monitor the situation and stay in contact with our POCs at selected sites.

In 2020, the Foundation had expenditures listed below for monuments placement at these sites around the nation. The National Cemetery costs include concrete base construction (Long Island) and freight charges from quarry to destination. They are: Long Island National Cemetery: \$2,771.00; Rock Island Arsenal National Cemetery: \$3,406.00; Fort Rucker, Alabama, Aviation Monument: \$5,573.00. Below is a recap of VA cemetery sites selected and where we stand with our placement proposals.

### Rock Island Arsenal National Cemetery (Rock Island, IL)

The Americal Division monument delivered to the cemetery in early November 2020. Installation was complete just before Veteran's Day. Our sincere thanks go to ADVA member Lyle Peterson for his help and persistence getting this project approved and completed. Lyle continued to monitor the placement proposal document approval process up the line until all was complete at the highest level. We plan to have a dedication ceremony in 2021 if COVID19 restrictions are eased and conditions for group gatherings are deemed safe. Pictured left to right is ADVA members John Lavelle and Lyle Peterson.



Rock Island National Cemetery with ADVA members  
John Lavelle and Lyle Peterson.

## Long Island National Cemetery - (Farmingdale, NY)

This long-awaited monument placement project was finally completed the first week of October 2020. We had hoped to have it in place before the publication of the last American Journal, however the contractor had other high priority jobs to get completed before he proceeded with ours. Bottom line it is in place along the cemetery round about. See the picture below of the monument site.

### Washington Crossing National Cemetery (Newtown, PA)

In January, I resubmitted the necessary paperwork to a concrete contractor in Morton, PA, for a bid to pour the concrete base that will support the monument. The contractor requested additional details for the project to prepare the bid. Some information requested had to come from the cemetery maintenance supervisor. This information was provided and submitted to the contractor as supplements to the original paperwork.

### Arkansas State Veterans Cemetery (N. Little Rock, AR)

Follow-up with the cemetery POC indicates the major renovation work is complete. Additionally, the standard COVID19 protocols are in place at the cemetery and we will be able to enter the facility to select a placement site for the Americal Division monument. Plans are to visit the cemetery this spring for site selection.

### Ft. Snelling National Cemetery (Minneapolis-St. Paul, MN)

Initial contact has been made with Ft. Snelling National Cemetery to begin the process of placing a monument at this location. ADVA members visited the cemetery while attending the national reunion a few years ago. The cemetery presently has 70 similar monuments to include the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Ft. Snelling is the interment location of Medal of Honor recipient Robert J. Pruden. Pruden was killed in action on November 29, 1969 while serving with Company G, 75th Rangers, near Quang Ngai.

## Museum of the U.S. Army – Unit Tribute Plaque

The Museum of the U.S. Army near Ft. Belvoir is closed indefinitely. This is a precautionary measure due to the increased incidences of COVID-19 cases. There is no indication on the website as to when the facility may open. We know that the Path of Remembrance with unit tribute plaques is complete. The latest Museum newsletter (Call To Duty) has a picture showing the several Army unit plaques in place on the wall. The Americal Division plaque is placed between the 3rd Armored Division plaque and the 299th Combat Engineer Battalion plaque. I know we all share the pride in the Americal's place on the Path of Remembrance and look forward to visiting the museum in 2022 as part of the ADVA reunion.

### Fort Polk, LA

Not much in the way of new information on this monument project. Word from the on post POC in mid-September is no new information yet on the additional document requirements to complete the gifting package. This area of Louisiana was hit hard by recent hurricanes and many of those folks involved with the project



Museum of the U.S. Army wall of plaques.

proposal are directing their efforts to putting their lives and property back in order. We do have a local contractor (via verbal commitment with a cost estimate) to do the concrete base work. More on this project in future issue of this publication.

### Fort Rucker, AL

On October 15 construction crews from Columbus Monument Company went to Fort Rucker, Alabama for the Americal Aviation monument installation. The Americal Legacy Foundation 2021 calendar features pictures of the newly installed monument. We considered a monument dedication ceremony in March to coincide with other Americal Division remembrance activities scheduled nearby. That has been put on hold. Other Americal Division ceremonies may happen later in 2021 or 2022; we will look at those events to possibly tie into a dedication ceremony at Fort Rucker.

### JRB Cape Cod (formerly Camp Edwards), MA

In early January, I contacted our POC on this project, Len Kondratuk, because I had not received any response from the JRB Cape Cod commander about getting on base with the contractor for the old plaque removal and replacement of the new one. Len advises he will be able to secure access for the contractor, Colonial Brass. Based on Len's assurance for contractor access, I contacted Colonial Brass to begin construction of the replacement plaque. The 20" by 24" plaque will feature the same design and wording as the original put in place in 1978.

### The Vietnam Center and Archive

ADVA Vietnam Historian Les Hines and I had a teleconference with the Archive's Director Dr. Steve Maxner in mid-January. Our purpose was to discuss progress updates on the Americal portal materials digitizing program on materials Les previously furnished and funding for future work on the Americal collections. Les presented some proposals for tracking progress and providing a more user-friendly index for locating materials in the Americal portal. Les has some remaining materials to furnish Texas Tech, and will do so after he receives data from the VN Archive Center identifying completed work.

Dr. Maxner agreed to provide the progress updates Les requested. He also advised the Center has indexed over 12,000 Americal items on their site to date. The Foundation's 2020-2021 budget includes \$9,000.00 for another year's work on Americal records by a school intern on collection materials that can be processed, digitized, and added to the ADVA online collections.

## Americal Scholarship Update

By Bill Bruinsma, Scholarship Chairman

Applications for the Americal Legacy Foundation Scholarship Program for 2021 are due on May 1. The annual essay topic has been chosen. It is: Should The Electoral College Be Changed Or Eliminated?

There are three changes that are being made for the 2021 awards.

First: Scholarship funds may also be used for on campus housing. Many schools require first and second year students to live on campus. From past experience and recent comments it is more expensive on campus than living and eating off campus. No funds will be awarded for off campus costs.

Second: Because the 2020-2021 school year has been such a disaster, we will use the Grade Point Average (GPA) from the 2019-2020 school year. This should provide a more consistent grade evaluation basis.

Third: We will also accept applications that are submitted without letters of recommendation. I have talked to some teachers and was told it may be difficult to get letters to students to forward with their scholarship applications. Teachers are feeling the strain of video teaching. Some teachers have switched from video to in-person then back to video.

Application form and eligibility rules are located on the Americal Legacy Foundation website at [americalfoundation.org](http://americalfoundation.org). Children and grandchildren of current ADVA members may be sponsored for a scholarship. The same is true for applicants whose sponsor was an ADVA member at the time of death.

Applicants must plan to begin or continue their educations at a degree granting educational institution in the 2021-2022 school year. The scholarship awards will be made to the school in the name of the school and the name of the scholar. Awards are scheduled to be made in the month of July.

It is extremely important that all applicant information is correct, complete, and legible. In the past there has been considerable problems with contacting applicants. This is due to the fact that parts of the application are difficult to impossible to read. This means additional time and effort is required to decipher the information. In some cases it means going to the extent of contacting the sponsor for needed information about the applicant.

Applications must be legible. Less than thirty percent are in this category. If it is necessary to study an application or use other means to get required information it will count against applicant. As mentioned above communication contacts are also considered in judging. If it necessary to try several times and different ways to contact the applicant it counts against them.

The largest and most important part of the application is the essay. Essays are judged by three current high school English teachers. I usually do not read essays. There were fifty-seven essays in 2020. Six were considered to be in the correct form of an essay. Fifteen had no name, seven were in a letter form, and six had no title. Many of the essays that had a name and title appeared to be written in haste and were of poor quality. This continues to be a problem. Please recognize the importance of submitting a high quality scholarship word packet.

## Americal Wreath At Vietnam Memorial

By Earle Gleason

This year we are on top of things for a Veterans Day wreath presentation in Washington, D.C. The Americal Division Veterans association sponsored a floral arrangement at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. We were in touch with Spencer Baba, National Finance Officer, and he gathered support from the Executive Committee. We took it from there.

The Americal Division arrangement was one of a very few at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on Veterans Day 2020. While the weather through Tuesday was beautiful, Wednesday began wet and only got wetter. It rained all day Veterans Day. Terrie Sautter and I were happy to be there and make the presentation on behalf of the ADVA.

[Earle Gleason served with D Co., 5/46th Infantry, 198th LIB, Sept 1968 - Sept 1969.]



## Vietnam Historian Report

By Les Hines

I have a spreadsheet with Distinguished Service Cross (DSC) recipients that might be related to Task Force Oregon, Americal Division, or units that were part of these two units at one time. I did not realize I had a list of DSC recipients for Vietnam that was mostly complete. I found the list that had come from Bruce Swander who had been researching 6/31st Inf. Bn. awards. Some of the entries may not be for Americal actions, but were listed because I could not determine that the action was not part of TFO or the Americal Division related unit actions.



## VA Health Care As An Option

By Gary L. Noller

The Department of Veterans Affairs (DVA) reports that as of September 30, 2019 there were 19 million living American veterans. Of this number, approximately 9 million veterans were enrolled in VA health care. This represents 47% of the veteran population.

Not all veterans are eligible for VA health care. Eligibility depends on several factors that include length of service, nature of discharge, and financial status. A veteran may apply for enrollment in VA health care by completing and submitting VA Form 10-10EZ. The VA will notify the veteran of acceptance or provide reasons for non-acceptance.

There are many eligible veterans within the 53% of veterans who do not receive VA health care. There are also many reasons why eligible veterans are not in the VA system. Some simply do not know that they are eligible. Veterans do not need to have a service connected disability to receive VA health care.

There is a belief by some veterans that private care is of higher quality than VA health care. But customer surveys and independent evaluations show that VA health care is equal to or sometimes better than private community care.

So why should a veteran eligible for VA health care enroll in the system? One of the most important reasons is that enrollment in VA health care gives the veteran an additional option in choosing health care providers. One never knows when or where health care will be required. An additional option may prove to be the best source for much needed care.

A veteran in the VA health care system can obtain services from any VA medical facility. This may be valuable if a veteran becomes ill while away from home. The VA has 170 medical centers and almost 1,100 community based outpatient clinics.

The Kerrville VA recently announced the availability of the COVID-19 virus vaccine. I immediately phoned the VA and was able to secure an appointment for the immunization. I qualified due to my age and due to the fact that I am enrolled in VA health care. I have a very short wait to receive the vaccine.

If I did not use VA health care I would still be waiting to find out about a vaccine shot. I do not when or where or who it would come from. Perhaps a local hospital or my primary care physician would notify me of availability. Or maybe it would be provided by a local pharmacy or by attending a mass immunization event at a local venue. Since I use VA health care I am already scheduled for the vaccine.

Veterans seeking information about vaccine availability should call their VA medical facility. There may be a wait time to reach an operator. Phone lines open up later in the day and later in the week. Patience will be needed and is appreciated.

## Donut Hole (2nd Edition)

By R. C. LeBeau

To Americal Division veterans, Mark Twain once said, "God created wars so Marines could learn geography." In June 1950, a bartender told this Twain quote to a Marine in Oceanside, California. The Marine had just asked, "Where is Korea?"

That quote could have been used for both Army and Marines when it came to the question, "Where is Vietnam?"

I am RC LeBeau, author of the book *Donut Hole*. My intent for writing the book was not only to provide a biography of my life and my Marine Corps experiences in Vietnam. I also wish to honor the Army's Americal Division, Task Force Miracle, and the infantry companies involved in the battle of Lo Giang.

Lo Giang is south of the Da Nang airbase. Our small Marine compound, Echo 4, was surrounded by an unknown size of enemy forces tasked to take down the Da Nang airbase. My task in writing the book is to bring to light to readers, not to be grandiose, but in the form of recognition and historical documentation for the combat actions on the days of February 7-9, 1968.

The Army's companies A, B, C, 1/6th Infantry 198th Light Infantry Brigade, along with the Marines who fought and died or survived that day, should be recognized for their bravery in battle. For historical purposes, their actions and accounts of the struggle are expressed with details from both the Army and Marine Corps after action reports (AARs).

As a survivor of this battle, I extend my heartfelt thanks to all who fought there. This includes those who survived as well as those who did not. As a Marine, it will always be one team, one fight. If it weren't for Americal soldiers, Echo 4 would not have survived.

I also wish to thank a courageous helicopter pilot from the Da Nang airbase. All Marines at Echo 4 are forever grateful for the distraction you provided, intentional or not.

With this book, *Donut Hole*, the memory of the battle will live on forever, it will never be forgotten. It was really a "Task Force Miracle."

May God bless you. I thank you.



[Hardcover and paperback, 421 pages. Information on how to order from the author by email message to [boblebeau@att.net](mailto:boblebeau@att.net).]

[Editor's note: We recently received several requests for book reviews to be published in the Americal Journal. We intend to have one or two reviews in future magazines to honor these requests. Gratitude is extended to authors and publishers for providing complimentary books for this purpose.]

**Dear editor,**

My father, Floyd A. Petty, served in the 132nd regiment of the Americal division during WWII. He passed away on December 18, 2020 at the age of 96. My dad remained proud of the Americal division throughout his life. He also hated Army chow (and had no respect for Army cooks). We never had a can of Spam in our home growing up. He was a good man and will be missed.

**Nathan Petty:** [REDACTED]

**Dear editor,**

My father, Herbert J Langlois, Jr., of Boston, MA, passed away on January 14, 2021. I am trying to get the word out to his fellow brothers. He was good friends with David Orndorff of Wilmington, MA who too has recently passed away. He never talked about his service and was a Purple Heart recipient who sustained bad injuries in Vietnam. I would love to find out anything about my father's service or pictures that someone may have of him. He served in 11th Light Infantry Brigade, 3rd Battalion, 1st Infantry.

**Herbert J. Langlois III:** [REDACTED]

**Dear editor,**

My grandfather served in the Americal Division on New Caledonia in 1942-43. His name was Captain Lawrence Fuller Scofield. He used to receive the journal and my grandmother had kept old issues but they were lost when she moved to assisted living. She wanted to share them with her great grandson, named after his great grandfather, who is now an ROTC cadet in Massachusetts.

**Stephanie Scofield Psenicka**

**Dear editor,**

I am an avid WWII collector. I acquired an Americal Division uniform that I am keeping in my collection. It was made in Australia in 1942. A tag on the uniform has veterans name of CARLSON. He is a corporal. I am keeping my fingers crossed that you might have a complete roster to cross check the last name. Then I might be able to truly identify this veteran and discover his history.

**Michael Sweeney:** [REDACTED]

[After additional research it is concluded that the uniform belonged to Ernest (Ernie) Carlson of Fredericksburg, Texas. Ernie was the chapter commander of the South Midwest Chapter. He passed away in April 2000.]

**Looking for:** Someone who may have served with my dad, James Byrnes, aka Jimmy, in Vietnam. He served with Alpha, 4/3, in December 1970 and Alpha, 4/21, from January to April 1971. He died almost 8 years ago now. I am learning a lot about his service and I am so grateful for any help I can get. Contact: Vanessa Byrnes: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information about Msgt Thomas R. Kisner and Pfc Eugene Manigo. They died on December 21, 1967 near Tam Ky when a bridge collapsed under their armored vehicle. Contact: Charles Kisner: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who served with Co. B, 523rd Signal Bn, 1967-68. Contact: Collins Foster: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information on my great-uncle, Sgt. George K Galloway Jr. He would've been in the HQ Battery, 247th Field Artillery, from Guadalcanal through the Philippines. He received the Bronze Star for his actions on Bougainville around the time of the battle for Hill 260. Contact: Will Galloway: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Help in finding soldiers I served with from 198th Light Infantry Brigade out of Fort Hood 1966-1968 who went to Vietnam. Sgt Kuncel, Sgt Holloway, and Cpl Isom. Contact: Don John Johnson: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Guys in Echo Co., 4/31, 4.2 in . Mortar platoon, LZ West, 1970. Contact: Robert Stirneman: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who remembers a friendly fire accident on 1 Aug 1969, Chu Lai, 196th LIB, Americal Division with a mortar round fired short striking three soldiers on perimeter guard. PFC Frederick Fritz Scardina was injured. Trying to locate the other two men injured. I am his brother. Contact: Paul M. Scardina: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who served with my uncle, John Young, 1969, 64A10, B Company, 23rd Supply & Transport Battalion. Contact: Kevin Young: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information. My father was in the Americal Division, WW2, 182nd Infantry Regiment. I am curious about Lieutenant Colonel Everett Mersereau from the 182nd. The American Battle Monuments Commission says he died and is listed missing in action unrecoverable. I would like additional information on this officer. Contact: John Souza: [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information for my friend who fought in Nam from 1/1/68-12/22/68 in Co B - 1/6th Inf - 198th LIB - Americal Division. He is looking for David Peter Lang who served in 67-68. Contact: Mike Schreiber: [REDACTED]

**Message To Our Readers****From the editors**

Your submissions are always welcome and appreciated. Please contact Gary L. Noller, Editor-in-Chief, with any questions you may have. Email to [REDACTED] is the best method of contact. Phone calls may be made to [REDACTED]. It is helpful if text is sent by email attachment as a .doc, .docx, or .txt file and that photos are sent as .jpg or .pdf file. Arrangements can be made for use of text and photos on printed paper. Scanned photos should be done at 300 dots per inch or better.

Selected pages of this magazine were proof read by Ron Brown. He provides a valuable service for quality improvement and his efforts are greatly appreciated.

Dave Taylor will continue to work on World War II stories as they become available. At the current time the Journal has several Vietnam War related stories in line for future publication. Thank you for your documentation of the history of the Americal Division.

**2021 Reunion News**

By Chuck Holdaway, 2021 Reunion Chairman

**LOCATION:** Wyndham Indianapolis West, [REDACTED], Indianapolis, IN 46241.

**HOTEL RESERVATION PROCEDURE:** The reunion room rate is \$115, plus tax, per night, with free daily breakfast. The group rate is offered three days before and three days after reunion dates, based on hotel's availability. Rates cannot be adjusted at check-in or check-out for guests who fail to identify their affiliation with the Americal Division Veterans Association when making reservations. Note: In accordance with proposed hotel reservation changes for 2021, all reservations will be charged a non-refundable deposit of one night's room rate and tax when the reservation is made. Reservation Phone Numbers: When calling in room reservations, ALWAYS indicate you are with the Americal Division Veterans Association and use the code 90621ADVA to avoid any possible complications. Wyndham West Direct: [REDACTED] or by email to [REDACTED].

The following are updates of importance to 2021 ADVA reunion attendees.

**NOTICE:** The original phone number we used for hotel reservations for 2020 has been changed for 2021. I wasn't aware of it until I was contacted by a member that said it didn't work. The new phone number for hotel reservations 317-381-6168.

The 2021 ADVA Reunion in Indianapolis will be the first time in almost two years that we will all be able to get together to see our friends we served with and the acquaintances we have made over the years through the ADVA organization. I expect (and hope) we will have a great turnout.

I realize the battle with the COVID-19 pandemic has placed a burden on all of us, our families, and our plans. I feel it will be pretty much in check by the time we get together in September 2021.

This year we are planning on something different in the form of RV camping. This is at a separate location not too far from the reunion hotel. RV parking (without hook-ups) will be available at the hotel at normal room rates. We also have an agreement with American Legion Post 500 to provide RV spaces for us with hook-ups at a nominal cost. American Legion Post 500 is located at 1925 Georgetown Rd., Speedway, Indiana. The post is approximately 15 minutes from the host hotel and across the street from the Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum. RV camping reservations may be made immediately by accessing the post's web site which at <http://www.speedwaylegionpost500.com>. Contact American Legion Post 500 by email at [REDACTED].

Our tours this year will include the Indianapolis Motor Speedway and Museum (IMS), The Dallara Indycar Factory

and interactive facility, and the numerous war memorials and museums located in downtown Indianapolis. We will also have discounts for any of you daring and spry enough to go some go-cart racing near IMS.

We are planning to raffle off some type of weapon, free accommodations for a lucky member, and some Army poncho liners which are hard to get. We will also have a PX, maps and historical information made available by Les Hines (our Vietnam Historian), a general hospitality room, and some unit/group hospitality suites available.

Our ADVA hospitality room and suite will be located on the 1st floor, the 2/1st Infantry Chapter on the 2nd floor, the 23rd MPs on the 3rd floor and the 11th Infantry on the 4th floor. Members of these groups may request rooms on these floors which will be honored as long as they are available.

**Tentative Tours and Amenities:**

- Indianapolis 500 Race Track and Museum Tour (Thursday morning Sept. 9th)
- Indianapolis War Memorials and Museum Tour (Friday morning Sept. 10th) Indianapolis is second only to Washington, DC in the number of monuments and museums.
- Dallara Indycar Factory and interactive facility (Saturday afternoon Sept. 11th)
- RV parking with hook-ups will be available at American Legion Post 500. RV parking without hook ups will be available at the Wyndham Hotel at reunion room rate.
- Free airport shuttle to and from the Wyndham Indianapolis West Hotel.
- Free breakfast, Wi-Fi and parking are available at the Wyndham Indianapolis West Hotel.
- The headquarters hotel is located very close to the Indianapolis International Airport and adjacent to I-465 interstate highway. It is approximately eight miles from downtown Indianapolis.

Any questions may be directed to me at [REDACTED]

FYI, Allegiant Airlines offers a little known benefit for any veteran by waiving luggage fees. All you have to do is make your reservation online and do not show any checked or carry-on luggage. When you get to the airport, take your luggage to the check-in counter and show them your veteran ID and your checked and carry-on luggage will be free of charge.

Registrations for the 2021 reunion will be handled through Armed Forces Reunions, Inc. Additional program information and a registration form are on the following pages.

See you in Indy!!

## AMERICAL DIVISION VETERANS ASSOCIATION REUNION – SEPTEMBER 8-12, 2021

WYNDHAM INDIANAPOLIS WEST – INDIANAPOLIS, IN

HOTEL RESERVATIONS [REDACTED] (DIRECT) OR ONLINE AT [HTTPS://AMERICAL.ORG/CMSAML/INDEX.PHP/REUNIONS.HTML](https://AMERICAL.ORG/CMSAML/INDEX.PHP/REUNIONS.HTML)

## SCHEDULE OF EVENTS

## WEDNESDAY, SEPTEMBER 8

1:00pm – 7:00pm Reunion Registration Open  
 Hospitality Room – Hours to be posted throughout the reunion.  
 Unit Hospitality Rooms open at discretion of coordinators

## THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

8:00am – 11:00am Reunion Registration Open  
 9:00am – 2:00pm INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY TOUR  
 2:00pm – 6:00pm Reunion Registration Open

## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

8:00am – 11:00am Reunion Registration Open  
 9:00am – 3:00pm INDIANAPOLIS CITY/MONUMENT TOUR  
 3:00pm – 6:00pm Reunion Registration Open

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

8:00am – 9:45am Executive Council Meeting  
 8:00am – 10:00am Reunion Registration Open  
 10:00am – 11:30pm Association Business Meeting  
 12:00pm – 3:30pm DALLARA INDYCAR FACTORY (description follows)  
 5:00pm – 5:45pm First Time Attendee Reception  
 6:00pm – 7:00pm Reception and Seating  
 7:00pm Banquet Dinner

## SUNDAY, SEPTEMBER 12

Farewells and Departures

## TOUR DESCRIPTIONS

## INDIANAPOLIS MOTOR SPEEDWAY TOUR

## THURSDAY, SEPTEMBER 9

The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Museum's mission is to preserve and share one of the world's premier collections of automotive and motor racing vehicles and artifacts, with one of the world's largest and most varied collections of racing, classic, and antique passenger cars. Take a self-guided tour of the Museum. Its collection encompasses automobiles and artifacts representing more than a century of Indianapolis 500 culture, drama and competition, plus vehicles representing NASCAR, Formula One, American short-track racing, drag racing and motorcycles. See thirty-two Indy "500" winning cars on display and view the half-hour film depicting the history of the track. Board the Speedway buses for a special "Kiss the Bricks" tour – take one lap around the oval with recorded audio commentary by an Indianapolis Motor Speedway personality, with the option of exiting the bus at the world-famous Yard of Bricks. The Indianapolis Motor Speedway Hall of Fame – comprised of drivers, team owners and personalities who have had a significant impact on IMS – is also housed at the

Museum. Proceed to Main Street Speedway for lunch on your own at one of many local restaurants.

\$65/person includes bus, escorts, and admission.  
 9:00am board bus, 2:00pm back at hotel. Lunch on own.

## INDIANAPOLIS MONUMENTS &amp; MEMORIALS CITY TOUR

## FRIDAY, SEPTEMBER 10

Indianapolis, home to the American Legion since 1919, devotes more acreage than any other U.S. city to honoring our nation's fallen, and is second only to Washington, DC in the number of war memorials. The Soldiers and Sailors Monument in Monument Circle is the physical and spiritual heart of Indianapolis. The basement contains a Civil War Museum and the top is crowned with a statue of Victory. Nearby is Veteran's Memorial Plaza, the centerpiece of which is an Obelisk that reaches 100 feet. We'll stop and spend some time at the Indiana World War Memorial & Museum that pays homage to the Indiana men killed in World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. At University Park you'll see Depew Fountain, a five-level fountain built in 1919. There are sculptures of President Benjamin Harrison, Abraham Lincoln, Schuyler Colfax, and Ulysses S. Grant. Adjacent is the American Legion Mall, flanked by the American Legion National headquarters and the Scottish Rite Cathedral, judged in its early days by the International Association of Architects to be one of the most beautiful buildings in the world. Also drive by the Medal of Honor Memorial, the USS Indianapolis CA-35 Memorial, and the Indiana 9/11 Memorial. Enjoy lunch on your own at Circle Center Mall or City Market

\$55/person includes bus, guides, and admission.  
 9:00am board bus, 3:00pm back at hotel. Lunch on own.

## DALLARA INDYCAR FACTORY

## SATURDAY, SEPTEMBER 11

The Dallara IndyCar Factory offers visitors the chance to explore 23,000 square feet of interactive and hands-on exhibits centered around the engineering and technology of the world's fastest sport! The tour begins in the Dallara Theater, complete with real racing seats, where you'll see a 9 minute film on Gian Paolo Dallara, the founder of Dallara Automobili. Don't forget to check out the specs of, and get your picture taken with, the brand new DW12! Take a garage tour to learn how an IndyCar is made and see where the two-seater IndyCars are built, maintained, and decaled! After learning the elements of building an Indy car test your driving skills in a racing simulator, equipped with iRacing – the software real drivers use at home. For those who want the extra thrill of a real open cockpit (and for those who can squeeze into one and figure out how to get OUT of it), pay an extra \$20 to take a ride around Speedway in a 2-Seater Street-legal IndyCar or NASCAR. The tour departure and return times may vary depending on the number of folks who register.

\$53/Person includes bus, escort, and admission.  
 \$73/Person includes bus, escort, admission and IndyCar or NASCAR ride.  
 12:00pm board bus, 3:30pm back at hotel.

**Hotel Reunion Rate: \$115 + tax**

## AMERICAL DIVISION VETERANS ASSOCIATION ACTIVITY REGISTRATION FORM 2021

Listed below are all registration, tour, and meal costs for the reunion. You may register online and pay by credit card at the reunion web site at [www.afr-reg.com/american2021](http://www.afr-reg.com/american2021) (3.5% will be added to total). You may also register by completing the form below. Please enter how many people will be participating in each event and total the amount. Send that amount payable to ARMED FORCES REUNIONS, INC. in the form of check or money order. Your cancelled check will serve as your confirmation. Returned checks will be charged a \$20 fee. All registration forms and payments must be received by mail on or before August 10, 2021. After that date, reservations will be accepted on a space available basis. We suggest you make a copy of this form before mailing. Please do not staple or tape your payment to this form.

## Armed Forces Reunions, Inc.

[REDACTED]  
 Norfolk, VA 23510  
 ATTN: AMERICAL

OFFICE USE ONLY  
 Check # \_\_\_\_\_ Date Received \_\_\_\_\_  
 Inputted \_\_\_\_\_ Nametag Completed \_\_\_\_\_

| CUT-OFF DATE IS 8/10/21 – reservations by space available after that date                                                        |           |             |
|----------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------------|
| TOURS                                                                                                                            | Price Per | # of People |
| THURSDAY 9/9: Indianapolis Motor Speedway Tour Member/Spouse/Guest                                                               | \$65      | \$          |
| THURSDAY 9/9: Indianapolis Motor Speedway Tour WWII Americal Vet/Spouse/Escort                                                   | \$0       | \$0         |
| FRIDAY 9/10: Monuments & Memorials Tour Member/Spouse/Guest                                                                      | \$55      | \$          |
| FRIDAY 9/10: Monuments & Memorials Tour WWII Vet, Spouse, Escort                                                                 | \$0       | \$0         |
| SATURDAY 9/11: Dallara IndyCar Factory Member/Spouse/Guest                                                                       | \$53      | \$          |
| SATURDAY 9/11: Dallara IndyCar Factory WWII Americal Vet, Spouse, Escort                                                         | \$0       | \$0         |
| SATURDAY 9/11: Dallara IndyCar Ride (must purchase tour above, no WWII discount)                                                 | \$20      | \$          |
| MEALS                                                                                                                            |           |             |
| SATURDAY 9/11: BANQUET - Please select your entrée(s)                                                                            |           |             |
| • Chicken Picaata                                                                                                                | \$51      | \$          |
| • Sirloin Steak                                                                                                                  | \$55      | \$          |
| • Parmesan Crusted Snapper                                                                                                       | \$49      | \$          |
| • Pasta Primavera (vegetarian)                                                                                                   | \$41      | \$          |
| WWII Vet, Spouse and/or Escort Banquet Dinner at no charge – Please select an entrée:                                            |           |             |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Beef <input type="checkbox"/> Chicken <input type="checkbox"/> Fish <input type="checkbox"/> Vegetarian | \$0       | \$0         |
| REQUIRED PER PERSON REGISTRATION FEE.                                                                                            |           |             |
| WWII Americal Veteran plus Spouse or escort free                                                                                 | \$0       | \$0         |
| ADVA Member                                                                                                                      | \$25      | \$          |
| Non-member, Fee includes one-year ADVA membership dues & benefits                                                                | \$35      | \$          |
| Spouse and/or Guests (each)                                                                                                      | \$25      | \$          |
| Total Amount Payable to Armed Forces Reunions, Inc.                                                                              |           | \$          |

## PLEASE PRINT NAME AS YOU WANT YOUR NAMETAG TO READ

MAIN ATTENDEE: FIRST \_\_\_\_\_ LAST \_\_\_\_\_

UNIT \_\_\_\_\_ YEARS WITH UNIT (YYYY) \_\_\_\_\_ - \_\_\_\_\_ 1st TIME ATTENDEE? YES  NO Please indicate your era - WWII  Panama  Vietnam 

SPOUSE/ESCORT NAMES (IF ATTENDING) \_\_\_\_\_

GUEST NAMES \_\_\_\_\_

MAIN ATTENDEE STREET ADDRESS \_\_\_\_\_

CITY \_\_\_\_\_ STATE \_\_\_\_\_ ZIP \_\_\_\_\_

PH. NUMBER (\_\_\_\_\_) - \_\_\_\_\_ EMAIL \_\_\_\_\_

DISABILITY/DIETARY RESTRICTIONS \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Sleeping room requirements must be conveyed by attendee directly with hotel)*MUST YOU BE LIFTED HYDRAULICALLY ONTO THE BUS WHILE SEATED IN YOUR WHEELCHAIR IN ORDER TO PARTICIPATE IN BUS TRIPS? (Every effort will be made to provide this service).  YES  NO

ARRIVAL DATE \_\_\_\_\_ DEPARTURE DATE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ARE YOU STAYING AT THE HOTEL? YES  NO  ARE YOU FLYING?  DRIVING?  RV?   
 For refunds and cancellations please refer to our policies outlined at the bottom of the reunion program. CANCELLATIONS WILL ONLY BE TAKEN MONDAY-FRIDAY 9:00am-4:00pm EASTERN TIME (excluding holidays). Call [REDACTED] to cancel reunion activities and obtain a cancellation code. Refunds processed 4-6 weeks after reunion.

## Thanks for the Memories!

Raymond Aguirre

I want to offer some photographs that belonged to my dad and given to me some time ago. I want to share them with the American Division Veterans Association on his behalf. These pictures are truly a treasure. My dad served with the 52nd Field Hospital and these pictures are only a small part of the legacy his outfit shared with other troops during happier times on the islands.

I can't imagine what it must have been like to be overseas on one of these islands with only the company of other troops stationed there along with the remnants of some of the local natives. Of course, there were no cities to be liberated until later in the Philippine Campaigns. "Furloughs" or "rest areas" meant retiring to a recreation area on station or perhaps a recently secured island with no enemy that was used as a staging area. But no matter where it was, there was always one obvious element missing, the essence of feminine pulchritude that became a driving force and constant reminder of what the war was denying these men. Occasionally there might be a hospital in the area that was staffed with a complement of female nurses. But this was very rare in the forward areas and almost non-existent in the early days of the war in the Pacific.

What a glorious welcome it must have been for the "Hope Gypsies" when they stepped upon the stage at



Actress Carole Landis, two weeks later with Jack Benny troupe, seated between two unidentified men at Bosley Field.



Pictured from left to right, Frances Langford, Patti Thomas, Bob Hope and Jerry Colonna, standing in front of what looks to be the side fuselage blister of a PBY on Bosley Field.

Bosely Field (Bougainville) on August 2-3, 1944. The hospitals were always a priority to these entertainment troupes that came to these tiny islands in the Pacific and nobody did it better than Francis Langford ("Mother Langford"), Jerry Colonna, Barney Dean, Patti Thomas, Tony Romano, and the master of ceremonies, Bob Hope. They were followed two weeks later by Carole Landis, Larry Adler, and the one and only Jack Benny.

To understand why these entertainers chose to play the "Pineapple Circuit" in the steaming jungles of Bougainville and other islands all over the South Pacific, can only be appreciated by those who were there. The idea of bringing a reminder of the sights and sounds of the home front to the troops, is the epitome of humanity etched into the hearts of those who can recall the lyrics of a special song, or the shade of someone's shoulder length hair or how it was worn; but most of all the sound of a females' voice that sounded familiar to every man on the island in their own personal way.

Lost to history now are the names of the American men in these photographs, especially the men on stage dancing with Patti Thomas. What was the show like from the veteran's point of view? Any special interest stories connected with any of the entertainment troupes that visited Bougainville, the Bob Hope or Jack Benny groups? Who painted the sign for the stage, "Welcome to the American"?

I read the book, "Don't shoot its only me" which tells about the travels of Bob Hope and the "Hope Gypsies". It's a good book and as I read it I started to admire these entertainers sense of commitment and devotion towards the troops they entertained. They were definitely on a mission. Other books I've read have touched on the shows given by these entertainers such as in the divisional histories for the American, 37th Infantry Division, "Orchids in the Mud", "Torokina", a wartime memoir and the video cassette titled, "Thanks for the Memories"

I hope these photos and small remembrance are enjoyed by the ADVA members, courtesy of my father, Joe J. Aguirre, 52nd Field Hospital on Bougainville.



The birth of the USO tours in WWII, originated in the summer of 1943 as the United Service Organization. These tours were compared to being like vaudeville with foxholes. Bob Hope's collective included the very talented dancer Patti Thomas who displayed all the attributes of every GI's girl back home. It is said when she danced the wolf whistles nearly blew everyone off the stage.

(Contributing Editor's Note: All Photos courtesy of Sergeant Joe J. Aguirre, 101st Medical Regiment (American Division); 52nd Field Hospital, XIV Corps, Bougainville)

Singer Frances Langford, referred to as "Mother Langford" by Bob Hope, makes her way towards the stage from her dressing tent. When Frances Langford replaced Judy Garland as the leading singer for the camp shows in May of 1941, Bob Hope thought of her as being too fragile and vulnerable. Bob soon learned how wrong he was, and evidently, she was quite outspoken and used her leadership qualities to nurture the "gypsies" and therefore earned the nick name "Mother".

But that was the least of her qualities; not only was she beautiful she could sing like an angel. And when she arrived to the jungle islands there wasn't a beast that couldn't be tamed by the sound of her voice including all the wolves in khaki clothing! She truly was courageous. How difficult it must have been for her and the others, to know deep in their hearts that they represented so much to the men; they symbolized home and they gave the full measure for every GI.



Dancer Patti Thomas gives some personal dance lessons to an unidentified GI on stage while in the background on the microphone Bob Hope gives the troops a play-by-play.



## Before The Americal (Part Two): Task Force 6814 and Saving the British and French Empires in the Asia-Pacific, 1940-1942

Roger R. Thompson

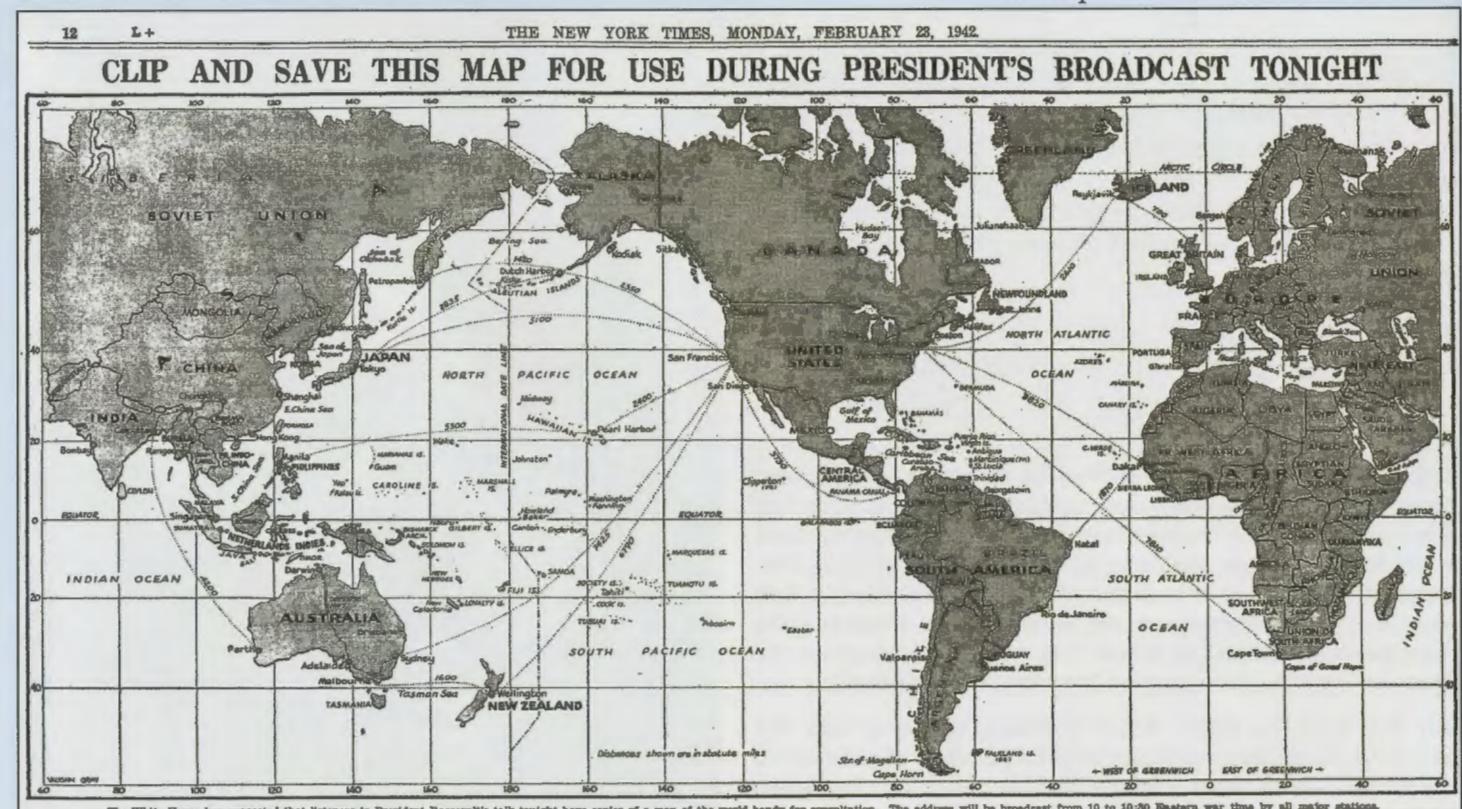
### Introducing Walter Walt

Walter W. Walt, Jr. (1916-2006) served in the Americal Division from the moment it was created in New Caledonia in May 1942. Drafted in October 1941, and inducted into active service on 17 November, Walt was in training in Virginia as Task Force 6814 was forming in mid-January 1942. A Californian, he was assigned to the Massachusetts National Guard's 101st Medical Regiment, Company I. Task Force 6814 embarked from New York, with Walt on the *Santa Elena*, in late January 1942, reached Australia in late February, and landed at New Caledonia on 12 March 1942. The 182nd Infantry Regiment (Massachusetts) and the 132nd Infantry Regiment (Illinois) were joined in April by the 164th Infantry Regiment (North Dakota).

### Disaster in the Asia-Pacific

The American public knew very little about the dramatic story of Task Force 6814. The task force mission, code-named POPPY, was classified "Secret" for military and diplomatic reasons. On their way across the Pacific, the men were told about life in Australia (on the *Santa Elena* troops read *Private Pillsbury Goes to Australia*); they did not know their true mission: to occupy and defend the French colony of New Caledonia from a Japanese invasion.

In early January 1942, the War Plans Division in the United States War Department had "decided to occupy New Caledonia [with]... one triangular division, heavily reinforced with artillery, and one pursuit squadron" and to defend the island and the "natural resources [nickel and chrome] valuable to Japan." New Caledonia was also the last stop on the southern B-17 air ferry route between California and Australia.



PRESIDENT WORKS | How Members From This Area  
ON TONIGHT'S TALK | Voted in Congress Last Week | SENATE BILL PLANS | FOR VICTORY | The world map published in the New York Times on 23 February 1942 to be used that evening during President Roosevelt's radio address to the nation on the progress of the war (The New York Times Company - Used under License).

At both Pearl Harbor and the Philippine Islands, Japan had demonstrated the lethal and destructive power of its carrier-based and ground-based planes. The B-17s, the new long-range heavy bombers the Japanese had destroyed on the ground at Clark Field in the Philippines shortly after the Pearl Harbor attack, had reached Manila via the northern air ferry route from Hawaii, with stops at America's Midway, Wake, and Guam islands. With the Japanese now controlling Wake and Guam, the southern route pioneered by the Pan American Airways Clipper Service in 1940 was the only way to ferry B-17s across the Pacific.

The third reason for New Caledonia's importance: any attempt to defeat Japan in southeast Asia would require an advanced base in Australia, the endpoint in a very long line of communication from Hawaii to South Pacific islands like New Caledonia, lying about 1,000 miles east of Australia. If the Japanese occupied New Caledonia first, the consequences would be disastrous

in the global war being waged against Germany, Italy, and Japan by the new "United Nations" led by America, Britain, the Soviet Union, and China and twenty-two other countries that had signed a Joint Declaration at the White House on New Year's Day, 1942.

And so, on 12 January President Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill met in the White House for the last decision-making meeting of the secret Washington Conference, code-named ARCADIA. Some of the discussion revolved around the critical shipping trade-off for the moment: Russia or New Caledonia. Roosevelt and Prime Minister Churchill approved the Army's plan to send a division to New Caledonia, even though both leaders wanted to focus on Europe and Hitler first.

These were momentous decisions made after much preparatory discussion by the military staffs of the United States and Britain. The United States Army's Chief of Staff General George Marshall, when the White House discussion moved specifically to New Caledonia, informed President Roosevelt, with support from Admiral King, the Chief of Naval Operations, that the occupation of New Caledonia was very important. Marshall underscored the urgency of moving troops from New York to New Caledonia: "to delay added to dangers of the voyage."

After extensive discussion about global shipping to both the Western and Eastern hemispheres, President Roosevelt, in the closing minutes of the White House meeting, said simply: "We approve General Marshall's plan."

Task Force 6814 must get whatever shipping was available, now, and leave for the South Pacific, immediately. General Eisenhower, whom Marshall had called to Washington in mid-December to head the Pacific Section of the War Plans Division, knew the situation was so urgent that the ships could not be "combat-loaded" before sailing--that would have to wait until Task Force 6814 arrived in Australia in mid-February.

For the troops leaving New York, there was room and time for personal equipment only; their military equipment and supplies would be shipped from the West Coast and combat-loaded in Australia.

This was the most complicated convoy yet planned by the Army, but it was accomplished with astonishing speed. Two days after the Monday afternoon White House decision, Walter Walt cabled his mother from Virginia (Camp Lee): "Leaving here Friday [16 January] for New York." But first Walt travelled all the way to Camp Edwards on Cape Cod where he joined Company I of the 101st Medical Regiment. These men, and others from Massachusetts National Guard units, left Cape Cod for New York Monday evening (19 January). Shortly before midnight the next day, just after boarding the Grace Lines' *Santa Elena* at the New York Port of Embarkation, Walt wrote the first line of his first trans-Pacific diary-letter: "Dear Mom: Well. Here starts adventure."

General Marshall had told President Roosevelt these troops would arrive in Australia (code-named X) by 14 February. It would take an extra ten days before Walter Walt and his shipmates, five weeks after boarding the *Santa Elena* at the Brooklyn Navy Yard, would finally glimpse Melbourne Harbor. By then, as it turned out, the

situation in the Asia-Pacific had grown very, very bleak for the United Nations. Radio Tokyo was terrorizing Australians, Japan's naval air forces had bombed Port Darwin, the last stop on the southern B-17 air ferry route to the Philippines, on Australia's northwestern coast, to devastating effect on 19 February. In Singapore, on 15 February, thousands of Allied troops had surrendered to the Japanese soldiers whose stunning sweep down the Malaya Peninsula had started as Japanese naval pilots launch their surprise attack on Pearl Harbor.

A week after the British had surrendered their naval fortress at Singapore, Roosevelt ordered General Douglas MacArthur to leave the Philippines and the shattered air-arm of American power in the Pacific, for Australia. General Marshall, returning to his office after a Sunday evening meeting with the President at the White House to confirm this decision, made sure the order was sent out immediately. America's fortress in the Philippines, as the *New York Times* had headlined in its 19 November 1941 issue, was vanquished. The Commander in Chief's "Eyes Only" radiogram was delivered in person to MacArthur at 12:30 A.M. (Washington D.C. time) on 23 February 1942. It would be a long, long day for America and the United Nations.

### President Roosevelt Prepares America for War in the Asia-Pacific

For weeks, Roosevelt's press aides had been preparing Americans for the President's first nationwide radio address since the one he delivered shortly after Pearl Harbor. Day-by-day, as the President worked over drafts, the news from the Asia-Pacific became more and more grim.

Most of America tuned in at 10:00 P.M. Eastern War Time on 23 February 1942 as Task Force 6814 was secretly nearing Melbourne. The President's press aides had promised an important address on the progress of the war. At the President's request, millions of Americans had purchased or located world maps (newspapers were encouraged to publish maps in the days leading up to the address) so they could follow on their maps as he explained the geo-political complexities and necessities of this new global war.

He started with China, now almost completely isolated from the United Nations, and by the end of his address he had covered the world. In his concluding words, President Roosevelt assured Americans that their men were already fighting the Japanese in the Pacific. But he did not share what he knew: a few days earlier Task Force 6814's fast-carrier escort *USS Lexington*, while preparing to launch a diversionary raid on Japan's positions at Rabaul in New Britain, was discovered by the Japanese. The *Lexington*'s heroic naval aviators repelled a fierce attack by waves of Japanese bombers. (Two days later, U.S. Army B-17s under naval command, flying out of northeastern Australia, attacked Rabaul.)

The Japanese were well-prepared for both the *Lexington*'s raid and the President's propaganda war. Roosevelt's speech would be broadcast or published around the world in many languages. He probably knew that Radio Tokyo had already been broadcasting counter-

propaganda. But he did not know this: just as he was being introduced to a huge radio audience, a Japanese submarine off the coast of southern California began firing about twenty shells at an oil refinery near Goleta, just west of Santa Barbara. Japan's first attack on the U.S. mainland, not the President's address to the nation and the world, was the top banner headline—"Submarine Shells California Oil Plant"—and the lead story, in Tuesday morning's *New York Times*. The second story, also in the headlines, was the complete transcript of the President's address, with a photo of the President pointing to the middle of the Pacific on his world map. And on a second world map, published on the page with the rest of the address, the place named "New Caledonia" was as wide as the continent of Australia.

### Localizing the Global Conflict: War Comes to New Caledonia

Walter Walt heard the President's broadcast live as the *Santa Elena* neared Melbourne.

He could not quite figure out the implications for him and the men of the 101st Medical Regiment. Walt wrote: "Just finished listening to the President speak. Still am trying to figure out what he said. He's good at speaking and really not giving out a whole lot of information." But for the starving, beleaguered American soldiers listening on the Bataan Peninsula jutting into Manila Bay, the meaning was clear: There would be no reinforcements for the Philippines. Little did these men know that twenty-four hours earlier, President Roosevelt had ordered their commander to leave them to their fate as he journeyed to Australia. At least they were no longer under "No surrender" orders; small solace.

But the Australians who saw Task Force 6814 arriving at Melbourne a few days later might have assumed, given the dark news of recent days that help had finally arrived. Walter Walt's unit was sent to the mining town of Ballarat, where some of them, including Walt and his commanding officer, Dr. Dale Friend, were hosted by two eminent families in their homes on Ballarat's grand Sturt Street. While the visit was short, the connections made could last a lifetime. Walt's host, Charles Gribble, even had had enough time to entertain Walt at the Old Colonists Club and sponsor him for a month's honorary club membership. But Walt, Friend, and the rest of the 101st Medical Regiment were soon back in Melbourne, where Task Force 6814's convoy was now "combat-loaded."

This time the regiment was assigned to the largest of the seven ships in the convoy, the *Ericsson*. Before the war, this was one of the finest ships of the Swedish-American Line, christened the *Kungsholm*. Even as they boarded the *Ericsson* in Melbourne, neither Walt nor his friends were certain where they were going. In his last diary-letter (11 March 1942) Walt wrote: "We're on our way to, where, nobody knows. There are all sorts of rumors as to where we'll land this time; looks very much like we're leaving Australia. Perhaps it will be New Caladonia [sic]. We'll have to learn French, I guess." Dr. Friend, Walt's commanding officer, had written in his journal on 8 March: "I have already



Task Force 6814 convoy arriving in Noumea Harbor, New Caledonia on 12 March 1942 (U.S. Army photo).

considered the fall of New Caledonia (where we are apparently scheduled for (a la the Rumor)." In a train of ominous speculation, he thought New Caledonia could "become hopeless as it was at Singapore."

### Occupying New Caledonia: The French Connection(s)

The *Ericsson*, which Walter Walt, perhaps mindful of the censorship rules, mimeographed on the ship's menu stock, only referred to as once being a "luxurious" Swedish-American Line ship, was "delayed a couple of days" because it "had a little engine trouble" and lagged behind the other six ships carrying Task Force 6814 that would reach Noumea Harbor on 12 March 1942.

A photograph of the formidable task force ships suggests why New Caledonians were astonished at what they saw across the harbor. The commanding U.S. Army general, Alexander Patch, had arrived by seaplane only a week before. He brought the first specific word to General Charles de Gaulle's hand-picked High Commissioner of France in the Pacific, Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu, about the military operation underway. The High Commissioner had been asking for information since January, but the United States so distrusted the ability of de Gaulle and the French National Committee's to keep this secret-secret, that the Free French in London were kept in the dark. Information about General Patch's Task Force 6814 was so protected that the Army refused to inform the High Commissioner by radiogram. D'Argenlieu found out, finally, in his first face-to-face meeting with General Patch on 5 March 1942.

A few days earlier the *New York Times* broke the story, but this was a story with almost no information: "U.S. Aids Defense of New Caledonia." But the United States, still courting Vichy French authorities in France, sought to distance itself from this no-news news story. The source of this story was Admiral d'Argenlieu, who made public from New Caledonia the agreement the State Department had just reached in Washington, D.C., with de Gaulle's

Free French National Committee.

The State Department also kept tight control of military information. De Gaulle and D'Argenlieu were not given any information about Patch and his Task Force 6814, although Patch was allowed, face-to-face, to tell D'Argenlieu about the United States forces that had arrived at the French Tahiti island of Bora Bora two weeks earlier on 18 February to garrison the island and maintain a fuel depot.

The announcement first made in New Caledonia implied, according to the *New York Times* report, that elsewhere in the Pacific America might instead recognize, as it had in Indochina, Vichy French sovereignty. The accompanying map indicated that the *New York Times* was only sure about New Caledonia being under Free French control. The Times presumed, incorrectly, that U.S. troops were already on the island; they were still in Australia. And even that was still classified.

Before boarding their Task Force 6814 ships a second time, some men had just enough time to send one last telegram to loved ones back home. Even these personal communications maintained the veil of secrecy. The telegraph company could not indicate the location of the sending office. Walter Walt's telegram (2 March 1942) to his mother was marked: "Sans origine." He cabled cryptically: "Feeling fine. Everything OK. Don't be anxious." An indication of the degree of War Department concern about the secrecy of the mission, which was rooted in the danger the men faced, was the successful War Department intervention to suppress the publication in a major Chicago newspaper of a telegram from the commanding officer of Illinois National Guard troops reporting that his 2,500 men were in Australia.

Six of the seven-ship convoy left Melbourne on 6 March 1942 and continued on to New Caledonia. Admiral Chester Nimitz, commanding America's Pacific Fleet from his headquarters at Pearl Harbor, ordered the USS *Yorktown*, done escorting the second secret task force to Bora Bora, to join the *Lexington*. Both fast-carrier groups covered Task Force 6814 on its final days at sea. On 12 March 1942, the convoy (less the *Ericsson*, which arrived 14 March) pulled into Noumea Harbor as the carriers remained on station to the north to cover the hectic unloading operation for the next few days.

Finally, on 16 March, the carrier task forces separated and pulled away. Nimitz ordered the *Lexington* back to Pearl Harbor; the *Yorktown* remained on patrol in the South Pacific, operating out of New Caledonia's Noumea Harbor. Thirteen weeks after Pearl Harbor, the United States Army began to establish defensive positions throughout the island, most importantly at the new Australian-built airfield just north of Noumea. The American occupation of New Caledonia, first called for in early January, had begun.

### Occupying New Caledonia: The Japanese Threat

March was also a momentous month in Washington, D.C. In addition to a high-level re-organization of Army administration, the United States and Britain agreed to a

broad division of responsibilities for the global war, with the United States taking the lead in the Pacific. It was in this context, as Admiral King was preparing for staff discussions, that he sent a memo to General Marshall asking for the latest statistics about the Army's presence in the "Pacific Area." General Marshall responded the same day. This quick exchange of memos on 17 March 1942—the hundredth day of the war—took place just after the Army-Navy cooperation that had delivered Task Force 6814 safely to New Caledonia.

Marshall's statistics underscored just how small America's forces were in the face of extensive Japanese troop conquests throughout their "Southern Resource" zone. Marshall told King the following about these main Army deployments (troops/combat planes) in Australia and the South Pacific:

Australia: 31,691/14 heavy bombers operational  
New Caledonia: 17,276/25 pursuit planes  
Efate (New Hebrides): 450/0

With Task Force 6814 now preparing to defend New Caledonia, its capital at Noumea became the nerve center for the shrinking United Nations presence in the South Pacific, now down to New Caledonia, Australia, New Zealand, and a few other Pacific islands. (Even as Task Force 6814 was moving ashore and across New Caledonia, RCA established a direct radio-telegraph circuit between New Caledonia and the United States.)

The Dutch East Indies, British Malaya and Singapore, British Burma and soon its famous Burma Road to China—all of these colonies and their rich natural resources—were now in the hands of the Japanese. China faced a total blockade of its sea and land routes. And New Caledonia, only two-hundred-fifty miles long and thirty miles wide, was at the center of the newly-formed Australia-New Zealand Area Command (ANZAC). The coalition of United Nations military forces in Southeast Asia established on 15 January 1942, the day after the end of the First Washington Conference, had not lasted even two months. Japan appeared invincible.

It would take twenty months for New Caledonia and other advanced bases to be built up enough to launch the American counter-offensive from the South Pacific that started with the November 1943 invasion of the Gilbert Islands, the Central Pacific islands taken from Britain in December 1941, just days after the attacks on Malaya, Hawaii, and the Philippines.

With his Task Force 6814 safely disembarked and setting up positions throughout New Caledonia, General Patch could now step back and look at the strategic and tactical challenges before him. Could his troops on New Caledonia withstand a Japanese attack? Looking at the 1,600 miles between the airfields at his Noumea and Japan's Rabaul in New Britain, General Patch immediately dispatched 450 troops about 300 miles north to defend Efate and start building an airfield in the southern New Hebrides. Five weeks later, on 4 May 1942, the Japanese countered and occupied Tulagi.

This was no surprise. The Japanese had bombed this British administrative center at the southern edge of their Solomon Islands colony in early January 1942.

Of the Westerners, only a few missionaries had refused to evacuate to safer islands in the South Pacific; a small detachment of the Australian military had pulled out on 1 May. As the Americans solidified their positions on Efate, 750 miles to the southeast in the New Hebrides, the Japanese quickly built a seaplane base at Tulagi. America's Efate airfield was scheduled, as General Marshall had told Admiral King in his 17 March memo, for completion by mid-June.

By April, Japan had consolidated its holdings throughout the Asia-Pacific region. Japanese and American forces drew closer to one another—first 1,600 miles (Rabaul-Noumea), then 750 miles (Tulagi-Efate)—on small islands in the South Pacific as their powerful navies continued to parry blows across the vastness of the Pacific. The Tulagi operation was part of a major Japanese offensive ordered on 29 January 1942 to extend Japan's reach from Rabaul—taken on 23 January as Task Force 6814 was leaving New York—to the Australian-held Port Moresby, just southwest of Rabaul.

The May invasion of Port Moresby was blocked by the same two fast-carrier task forces that had protected Task Force 6814 in March. The Lexington, the carrier that had also protected Task Force 6814 in February as it approached Melbourne, was lost in this battle, the Battle of the Coral Sea. The Imperial General Headquarters in Tokyo now ordered its forces to take to Midway Island in the Central Pacific, having already informed its forces in the South Pacific on 28 April to delay until June the second attempt to occupy Port Moresby and that operation's second phase, taking New Caledonia, Fiji, and Samoa. Dr. Friend had worried about the "fall" of New Caledonia in March. Had he enough time to prepare and train his men if the attack finally came in the months to come?

### Occupying New Caledonia: The French Threat

Admiral Nimitz, who ordered the battered *Yorktown* back to Pearl Harbor for repairs, had been convinced that Japan's next strike would be at Midway Island, west of Hawaii, in early June. The second attempt for a Port Moresby invasion had been delayed to June as a consequence of the Doolittle raid, which had struck Tokyo on 18 April with B-25s launched in an audacious one-way raid from the *USS Hornet* in the North Pacific. Should Midway be in Japanese hands, the risk of another Tokyo raid would be much less.

Nimitz was convinced of the Japanese plans, in part because of the trust he put in estimates made by the Navy's communications intelligence operation in Hawaii. But others, including Admiral King in Washington, D.C., and General MacArthur in Australia, interpreted the same evidence to suggest the next strike would come somewhere in the South Pacific, with targets ranging from Port Moresby, to New Caledonia, to Australia. General MacArthur, in particular, had been focused on this scenario since April (MacArthur had arrived in Melbourne, where he established his command headquarters, on 21 March 1942.) He had warned General Patch twice in late April to be prepared for a Japanese invasion.

Patch had just brought his Task Force 6814 to strength



Right to Left: Admiral Robert Ghormley, Commander of South Pacific Force; Major General Alexander Patch Commander of Task Force 6814 and Ghormley's Chief of Staff, Admiral Daniel Callaghan, coming ashore 19 May, 1942 at Noumea, New Caledonia, for inspection and consultation (U.S. Army Photo).

in mid-April with the arrival of the 164th Infantry Regiment, the North Dakota National Guard unit that had sailed on 18 March for Australia from San Francisco on the luxury liner-turned-troopship *President Coolidge*. On 18 April 1942—the day Doolittle and his airmen raided Tokyo—the North Dakotans joined the 132nd Infantry Regiment (Illinois) and the 182nd Infantry Regiment (Massachusetts). Patch, finally, had the "heavily reinforced triangular infantry division" the War Plans Division had specified for New Caledonia in early January during the first Washington Conference.

Task Force 6814 reached full strength not a minute too soon. Not only did Patch need troops for defense of the island, he also needed them for maintaining local order. The newly-arrived 164th was assigned to defend the section in and around Noumea. One can only imagine their bewilderment when these men from North Dakota were soon called upon to maintain order in the midst of what can only be called a local insurrection. In the midst of this crisis the War Department, for the first time, announced on 25 April, in a terse forty-six-word communiqué that included these words: "American troops have arrived at the island of New Caledonia." The Free French celebrated; the French government at Vichy issued a communiqué decrying the "French rebels against the fatherland [who] took over New Caledonia in September 1940... [T]his fact does not authorize the Americans to land troops there."

Three days later, in his first national radio address since his 23 February 1942 "Map Chat," President Roosevelt began to signal a policy shift that, eventually, opened doors for de Gaulle and his struggle for Free French sovereignty in New Caledonia and around the world. Responding to a recent tilt toward Germany by the Vichy French, in his radio address Roosevelt suggested that most French men and women supported the cause of the United Nations. These were not, in his mind, "rebels against the fatherland." Back in New Caledonia these "rebels," according to the Vichy French, the mostly rural New Caledonians who had made it possible for de Gaulle

to claim he had "rallied" New Caledonia to his cause in September 1940, now rose up to protest the removal from power of the popular Governor Sautot who had taken up their Free French cause, as he had earlier in the Anglo-French co-dominion New Hebrides, in 1940.

Eighteen months later Sautot's willingness to cooperate with General Patch, as he had cooperated with the Australians in 1940, infuriated de Gaulle's High Commissioner Admiral D'Argenlieu, who had taken up his post in November 1941. D'Argenlieu was unhappy with all aspects of the American occupation that unfolded beginning in March 1942. With de Gaulle's approval, D'Argenlieu kidnapped Sautot, arrested the pro-American local council, and sent them all away from New Caledonia in exile. As civil unrest simmered toward a full boil, Patch wrote four urgent radiograms in three days (6-8 May) about the political situation in New Caledonia.

On 8 May, in one of the most momentous days in the history of Task Force 6814, an extraordinary sequence of communications and decisions connected Noumea with Hawaii, Washington, D.C., Hyde Park, and London. The White House, the War Department, the Navy Department, the State Department, and American military and diplomatic representatives in London collaborated to support General Patch and bring to heel General de Gaulle, the French National Committee, and Admiral d'Argenlieu in New Caledonia. Patch soon had permission from Washington, D.C., to declare martial law, if necessary. De Gaulle and d'Argenlieu backed down, and Patch could return to his preparations for a possible Japanese invasion.

### Tokyo Delays; Noumea Plans: Task Force 6814 Takes Its Place in the Global War

Contrary to MacArthur's April warnings, the Japanese target in early May was not New Caledonia. Instead, as we have seen, it was Port Moresby. Thwarted once, it was likely Japan would try again; But when? The gravity of the situation was underscored by the decision to halt at New Caledonia a squadron of eight B-17s just beginning, in mid-May, its long southern air ferry flight to Australia.

In a secret "Eyes Only" radiogram of 14 May 1942, General Marshall told General MacArthur of the developing Japanese threats in the Pacific. Marshall also knew, as General Eisenhower had told him the day before, that supply chiefs were being told to make sure there were enough bombs and gasoline for New Caledonia and nearby Fiji, which would get its own provisional squadron of B-17s. Should Japan attack Port Moresby again, heavy bombers could counter-attack from Australia, New Caledonia, and Fiji. Moreover, these B-17s in the South Pacific could protect Admiral Halsey's *USS Enterprise* and *USS Hornet* now on patrol east of the New Hebrides. But days later, so sure was Admiral Nimitz that Midway, not Port Moresby, was Japan's next target, that on 16 May 1942 he recalled to Hawaii his last remaining fast-carrier task force in the South Pacific, Admiral Halsey's *Enterprise* and *Hornet*.

Even as it prepared for the Midway operation in the

Central Pacific, Tokyo ordered its South Pacific forces to be prepared to attack New Caledonia in mid-June. And Washington, D.C., too, continued to pay attention to New Caledonia. General Patch had met the twin crises of late April and early May: a threat of a Japanese invasion and Free French factionalism. His hand has been strengthened, and the fact of the American occupation of New Caledonia could now be de-classified.

Patch later had discussions in May with visiting staff officers from the War Department's Operation Plans Division (the just re-named War Plans Division). Patch had much to report and discuss, including ideas for a regular combat infantry division. But much attention, especially in the Navy Department in the first days after the Battle of the Coral Sea, was focused on Hawaii and Midway.

On 8 May, General Marshall sent a secret radiogram to General Patch telling him that he now reported to Admiral Nimitz in Hawaii (on 7 May—the day he lost the *Lexington* in the Battle of the Coral Sea—Nimitz assumed operational command of all Army units in the "Pacific Area"). On the same day Marshall wrote to Patch, he brought Admiral King up-to-speed on recent events in the South Pacific. King had just designated Admiral Robert Ghormley the first Commander of South Pacific Force. After a week of discussions at Pearl Harbor, Ghormley added Rear Admiral John McCain to his team as Commander Aircraft South Pacific Area. (McCain would soon locate his flagship in Noumea Harbor.)

Ghormley then began a tour of inspection and consultation. By 19 May 1942 he had reached New Caledonia. General Patch and his visitors walked away from a Navy launch under gorgeous skies in the South Pacific for a meeting in Noumea in which there was much to discuss. It is probable that General Patch shared with Admiral Ghormley an unprecedented idea: designating Task Force 6814 as a regular "combat infantry division." Never in the history of the United States Army had an infantry division ever been formed and trained on foreign soil, an undertaking that would take a year in the continental United States. But these were extraordinary times.

General Patch would soon bid farewell to his Navy visitors; he would see them again. Now it was time to prepare for Japan's planned June invasion of New Caledonia, which some intelligence analysts thought could come early in the month. With Admiral Halsey's *Enterprise* and *Hornet* steaming toward Pearl Harbor under Admiral Nimitz's 16 May 1942 order, General Patch's Task Force 6814 was now almost all alone in the South Pacific.

The author, Roger Thompson, enlisted in the U.S. Air Force (1970-1974) and served a tour of duty in northern Thailand in 1973. He teaches Chinese history and "WWII: The Pacific War" at Western Washington University. He would like to thank Walter Walt's son Christopher, and his daughter Melissa, for permission to use their father's World War II diary-letters, photos, and ephemera in this project.

## Milton Shedd: The Rest of the Story

David Taylor – Contributing Editor

(This article is edited from an article in the LA Times for Thursday, May 30, 2002 and various WWII letters revealed from Milt Shedd in a series of vignettes published in The 164th Infantry News, Volume 50, No. 3, October, 2009.)

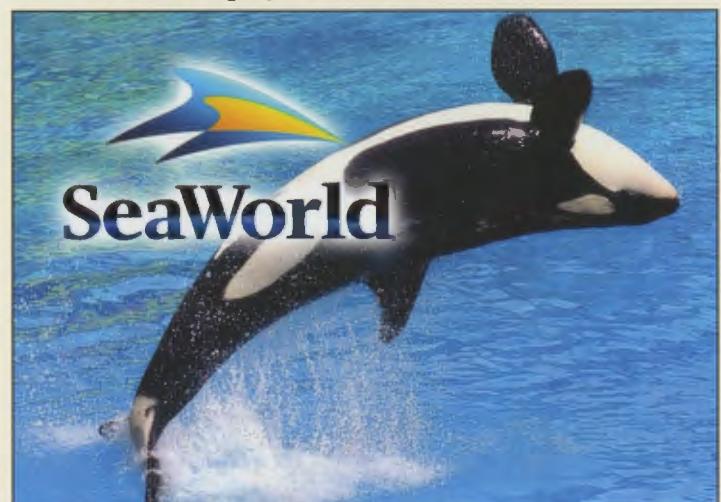
Back when Milton Shedd was only five years old, he stood on the Santa Monica, California pier and fished for smelt, beginning a lifelong love for the sea and all the creatures in it. Before he died on May 24, 2002 in Newport Beach California, he had spent more than 3,500 days on the ocean.

On March 21, 1964 Shedd, with three fraternity brothers opened Sea World in San Diego's Mission Bay. The original 22 acres now covers 190 acres and has welcomed well over 120 million visitors since its opening. In 1965 they acquired Shamu and became the first theme park to exhibit a killer whale, an attraction that assured the parks continuity.

Shedd was president or board chairman of Sea World for nearly 20 years and helped create other Sea Worlds in Florida and Ohio. The parks were sold in 1981. But Shedd's lasting legacy to marine science and education in included a nonprofit research foundation he created 1963.

Some of Shedd's happiest days were collecting live specimens for the theme park aboard his 67-foot boat, dubbed "Sea World" which was built as a marine research and fishery development vessel. He later donated the boat to the University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) Marine Science Center, which he helped establish to prepare grade-school teachers to instruct students about marine life.

Shedd also acquired a fishing tackle manufacturing company and started subsidiaries to sell fishing clothing. By garbing and equipping fishermen Shedd believed he could illustrate the oceans importance to mankind. He was born in El Paso, Texas but reared in Southern California, earning a degree in banking and finance from UCLA, where he played baseball and football.



### Career Interrupted

Milton Shedd's post-college effort to educate people about the sea and all that it holds and represents may have gotten off to an earlier start in his life except that World War II interrupted his college years and he found himself in the Army as a young infantry officer off on another "Adventure of the Sea" on his way to the Southwest Pacific. And that is the rest of his story.

In early April 1944 Shedd was on a troopship bound for New Caledonia. His trip was idyllic as each day he loved to stand by the rail on the ships deck to watch for fish and sea birds. It was on that trip he saw his first flying fish as well as large sharks and giant sting rays, much larger than he was accustomed to seeing in California waters.

Arriving in New Caledonia on April 15, 1944 he enjoyed exploring the large island. He noted in a letter home, "My hunting and fishing trips have been more exploration than anything else. So far, all I've gotten is a 12-inch bass and I shot that with a .45 pistol. Most interesting are the natives. They are from many places and each one has many diseases...nevertheless they are of beautiful physique."

By May 8, 1944 he found himself on Guadalcanal. He wrote, "I say this is dry land versus traveling on the ocean but it could hardly be called that. It's the swaggiest and boggiest place I've ever seen. It rains every night and is quite hot" Shedd also noted in a letter back home that he went on a "hunting trip" in an 8-foot boat to follow an alligator into the ocean breakers. He got a few shots with his M1, but the gator outlasted the boat and they had to retreat for shore before sinking.

By May 14 Shedd reached his destination on Bougainville where he was assigned to the 164th Infantry Regiment, 2nd Battalion, Americal Division as their Anti-Tank Platoon Leader. Shortly after, he was transferred to the battalions Echo Company as an infantry platoon leader. Between numerous patrols his fellow officers planted a vegetable garden and wrote home asking for lots of seeds, writing, "Anything will grow here."

Shedd also wrote, "I'm glad I am doing my fighting in this part of the world. You depend on your own ability

to keep alive. It is as near as anything to Indian fighting such as our ancestors did in the frontier days. Of course, we are waging modern war with modern equipment; but in patrol action it is man against man more than machine against machine." A day later, being reminded of his college baseball days he wrote, "Tell Sturzy that baseball helped me a lot – I threw 4 grenades right in the middle of one group of 6 Japs and another group of 3. When a Jap heavy machinegun opened up on us, I chucked 2 grenades at it and it didn't fire again."

In mid-August 1944 Shedd made 1st Lieutenant and he was assigned to fly in airplanes for observation purposes to call in artillery and mortar fire, what he called "Steel rations for Tojo." A few days later he led a bombing strike from the air to blow-up a bridge. Mission was accomplished. His group's garden however "suffered heavy casualties" as the jungle bugs located it. All they could salvage were some onions.

### Intelligence & Reconnaissance Platoon

On September 5, 1944 1st Lieutenant Milton Shedd was assigned as the 164th Regimental Reconnaissance Officer who was the assistant to the Regimental S-2 (Intelligence), a Major. His platoon's mission was not only to find the enemy, but check out the terrain in certain sectors of the dense Bougainville terrain for upcoming operations.

On October 19 he had just returned from a mission and wrote home, "Just came back from a mission to find a route through a very nasty swamp – 4 days of slopping around in the mud. Our rations consisted of the old standby, K rations. We each carried 2 canteens, a shelter half, one poncho, our arms, etc. At night we built ourselves shacks out of banana leaves, slept on the shelter half as a floor, and used the poncho for a blanket."

### The Silver Star Mission

On November 16, 1944 Milt Shedd was given a few days to accomplish a mission and return. He had to take his platoon on a forced march for 1-1/2 days at a pace that was dangerous because of the possibility of being ambushed. On November 17 one of his men became ill and exhausted one hour from Shedd's patrol destination. Shedd didn't know what he would run into at the destination point so he picked the 5 weakest men for an easily defendable perimeter on a razor back ridge. This was to be his patrols rendezvous point in case of trouble.

Shedd wrote, "Our native guide, without whom we would have accomplished nothing, took the remaining 7 of us to our objective. At this time our weapons consisted of 2 BAR's (Browning Automatic Rifles), 1 Tommy gun, 1 Carbine and three M1's plus 33 grenades. I am glad that I insisted that the men carry grenades, even though there was quite some dissension when each man had to carry three. We had rested at our hidden perimeter point so as to reach the enemy when all would be in from their search for food and might be congregated in preparing for their evening meal. It was close to 1600 when we commenced our stalking of them. They had lived here for months unmolested. They had no security! We could hear them chopping wood & hollering when 200-300 yards away."

"We approached their position on the back side, away from the main trail. I cautioned the men to be extremely quiet. A BAR and M1 covered our crossing the deep gulley only 70 yards from the Nips. After these men were in place, the rest of the men followed into our position. Because of obscuring vegetation, the first line I formed was not adequate. We had to move farther down the forward slope to where the bank dropped away. The men moved forward individually, crawling sometimes in plain view of the enemy. The actions of the men showed the results of good discipline and combat experience. They would do their firing only if positively detected or on my signal which...was the throwing of grenades. I had

collected 8 of them and all during this phase of the operation, held one, pin pulled, in each hand. Our final line was ideal. We looked down onto their position with 100% visibility. It had taken 15 minutes to work up to this point and we were more than ready to start, but we lay in observation for a minute while the men picked their targets.

"The village was situated in a clearing. The Nips were completely in the open and the farthest was only 40 yards. There must have been 25 or the better part of a platoon. I had cautioned the men to lay their magazines in front of them where they could get to them easily. I pointed at 6 Nips eating and then at 3 sleeping. My BAR man nodded. I threw one grenade and then the other, following these with 6 more.

"Everything happened at once. The confusion and noise were terrific; for better than a minute the shooting was done by all of us. There were only 7 of us but the enemy was all bunched up and disorganized. Suddenly a heavy machinegun opened fire on us. I don't know where the first burst hit, but the second burst hit a bank only a few feet below us. The gun was located only 30 yards away and was silenced immediately by grenades, BAR and M1's. At this time one of my men was hit and began sobbing, but stopped as he pulled himself back over the bank. There were a few more scattered 25 caliber shots; then they fired no more.

"I didn't dare enter the village as it would have put us in the open and they were under cover. They still had weapons and I thought that some of them had undoubtedly escaped. When no more enemy movement could be seen, we withdrew leaving a BAR and M1 to cover us as we crossed the gulley. We captured and destroyed machine guns, mortars, automatic rifles, rifles and carbines, pistols, quantities of food, ammunition and clothing. The radios will be their most valuable items, however. It turned out the native guide had been hit, by a fragment from our grenades. It was much easier

going home as the trail was mostly downhill. Local natives helped us evacuate the guide. We estimated having killed or wounded 20.

"In returning to this area leading a larger patrol, I found the place a nasty mess. There were two large graves. We counted 5 bodies in one and did not reach the bottom as the dead had all been buried naked. There were no articles of equipment, etc. buried with them. We did not uncover the other grave. Sections of the shacks had been torn away. Surprise and correct use of our superior weapons had caused these results. The American soldier is tops and knows his stuff."

Shedd wrote home on November 19, "I returned from my patrol a few hours ago. I am as tired as I have ever been in my life. Just an hour ago the General pinned a medal on me – rather rushed affair. I sit here at my typewriter so sleepy I can hardly see what I am doing. We got some sabers and of course, I had to give my best one, which was worth plenty, to the General (politics)."

### Shedd's View of the Japanese

Milton Shedd wrote home about his opinion of the enemy he faced. He wrote, "The Japanese believe in their religion thoroughly as Christians do in theirs. We abhor death and suffering (but) to suffer and die for their Emperor is the most glorious thing that can happen to Japanese in the eyes of that race."

"They believe in this doctrine just as absolutely as we believe in kindness and goodwill – that is something that we Americans do not believe and cannot understand. It is not religion itself that causes so much trouble- it is that state of mind which refuses to accept cold hard material facts as they exist on this earth. When I came overseas...I could not believe that some Nip soldiers conduct their own public funerals before leaving for the front with, in



Shedd's pitching at UCLA came in handy with throwing grenades on Bougainville. Shown here is Shedd's UCLA pitching photo and, above right, another American baseball-savvy soldier who is "pitching grenades" at the Japanese on Bougainville.



many instances their wives committing Hari-Kari so no lingering reluctance to part with their loved ones could weaken their husbands will to suffer and die for their emperor. We think in terms of experiences we have had; there are just some things we cannot conceive of happening.

"On the last patrol we had, we killed 23 Nips. These soldiers had been packed and ready for a suicide mission. I found their order from their Regimental CO. I saw it translated. It was an order to die. It directed that every man in the entire group must die in order to abolish the disgrace incurred when this group had 14 men killed and then retreated (an unforgivable sin in the Jap Army) when many of the men were too sick to fight. The former Company Commander had written a statement stating that he did not want the men to disgrace themselves further, so he committed suicide in order to bolster their morale (his own words). I held these documents in my hands. I took them from the dead officer's body. I saw one Jap blow his stomach out with a hand grenade only 10 yards from me.

"It was a good thing that we got them before they started on their suicide mission. I read several letters and direct orders concerning the necessity of every single man dying gloriously to wipe out the disgrace of their necessary retreat. I wish some of the "intelligent people" back home could see what we see over here. I'd like very much to see their reactions. I'm speaking of people that theoretically have all the answers – politicians who have the sure fire plans for peace and world understanding in the future."

Milton Shedd...lover of the sea and all it represents for humanity, who did great things to educate children about the sea and the life that resided in it. But Milton Shedd also served his country in combat, earning a Silver Star, Bronze Star and Purple Heart to save the world from oppression so that his dreams could be realized in a world at peace.

[Biographical note: After my experience as a combat infantry draftee serving with Co. A, 1/46th Infantry, 196th LIB, in the tropical forests of Vietnam, I transitioned home to become a police officer in the concrete jungle of Los Angeles. After several years I chose to leave the force and return to college on a full-time basis. Several years and jobs later I traveled about with the military as a reservist and ultimately returned to active-duty. The cities and jungles of Belize, Ecuador, and Panama became familiar in addition to the arid desert of Fort Bliss and Biggs Army Airfield, Texas. I took a circuitous route and a long time to become a career traveler (aka Lifer). From humble beginnings, SGM (Ret) Don Counter.]

### Boots

By Don Counter

In preparation of my first trip to Ecuador, I read reports, surveyed maps, reviewed contingency and evacuation plans, then committed codes, radio frequencies and routes to memory. These detailed measures were force protection requirements for the humanitarian aid mission into remote regions of Ecuador.

We met at night in Quito, the second highest South American capital. Early the following morning more than 50 dental, medical, optical and veterinarian staffers were shuffled into awaiting vehicles and convoyed to a military base camp several hours away.

Through windows, we observed the harsh reality of life in primitive areas. All along steep slopes indigenous residents planted crops and resided in shanty homes that clung precariously to the hillside. Men and women, scarcely five feet in height, were hunched over supporting massive bundles on their backs. Many were barefoot, even in the 56 degree temperature, evidence of a difficult farming existence. Their dwellings were without electricity or plumbing, and the only source of heat was a simple cooking fire.

Our route passed through an active volcanic region referred to as "Little Hell" by the residents living in its shadow. Their plight was even more evident and ground shaking.

Upon arrival at our initial destination, the host nation base camp, I noticed laundry draped over almost every bush and shrub. It became immediately evident that neither washers nor dryers existed in this remote and labor-intensive environment.

Once inside the installation, we were ushered to a meager barracks and began setting up our base camp for the mission.

With full expectation of intensive work days and weeks a laundry contract was set up with a local woman. Within a couple of days we were able to drop our laundry off and in turn pick it up three days later. Having had several days of prior travel my bag was full and consequently I was the first to drop off my laundry and then patiently waited.

We conducted our missions into the countryside with the medical groups. About two thousand adults, children, and animals were diagnosed, treated and issued medication on a daily basis. Many of these indigenous people had never seen a doctor, much less been treated by one. Wide-eyed children were being asked to "open wide" for the first time by our dentists.

Each day was a lesson in gratitude. Many families traveled on foot before daylight in the hope of being seen and provided medical care. They would return to their village well after the sun had set on the rugged countryside. Not only were the people in these outlying areas thankful for our help, I was thankful for American medical care, which was so accessible that I needed



only pick up a phone to schedule an appointment or to cancel one if it seemed "inconvenient." I was thankful for everything that, as an American, I took for granted: the availability of food, health care, potable water and sanitation.

Each evening I checked the laundry box in anticipation of my bundle of clean and dry clothing. Day after day, I replayed this same scenario, until day five when my suspicion was acknowledged... my clothing was actually lost (a polite word for stolen.)

Needless to say, after repeated nights of hand washing and alternating the same clothes, I was irritated beyond explanation. I had been attentive, cautious and watchful regarding mission details, but nothing had really prepared me for the loss of my clothing. I was perplexed; I couldn't imagine anyone in that country tall enough to fit into my six-foot two inch clothing. I was caught off guard, but I realized I had to prioritize and put the situation into perspective.

It was necessary to be more circumspect and important not to divert from the intent of the mission. This intent of this mission was medical/humanitarian aid. Compared to our standards of life, these people weren't just dealing with life, they were enduring it. What had happened to me was inconvenient though not as severe as the daily lives of these people. Each day my thinking evolved and I gained a dramatic change in perspective, and an appreciation for their stamina.

At the completion of the mission, just minutes before our departure, I returned to the very spot where the laundry drop box once sat. Inside my jungle boots I placed a hand written note which read, "Ha sido una estancia muy agradable." "En estos momentos no necesito las botas, van con el uniforme." Translated in English it read, "It has been a very enjoyable stay. I no longer need these; they go with the uniform."



## Through My Eyes: A Story of Hope

By Bob G. Witworth (c) 2012 Seventh Of A Series  
Continued from Jul-Aug-Sep 2020 Americal Journal

### Chapter 13 Booby Trap

First thing one morning we headed out of the LZ, through the rice paddies again, and into the villages. One of our rifle squads made contact with four VC and killed one of them. When the surviving VCs fled, our guys went after them trying to reestablish contact but couldn't.

It was extremely hot that afternoon, and we were taking a break in the shade. A small chopper landed nearby and an officer got out. I watched as he had a conversation with our officers. He threw his helmet on the ground and started yelling and swearing, waving his arms around, wanting to know why we weren't chasing down the remaining VC.

This was the same officer I had fired up in Hawaii, and he hadn't changed a bit. He was a bad piece of work. I had seen him once before in his chopper when we were under fire and a couple of rounds went his way. The next time I saw his chopper circle overhead, it was 5,000 feet higher in the sky. I had no respect for him at all.

It was obvious he couldn't care less about us and would use us in whatever way he wanted if he thought it would help him get ahead. The only thing the guy had on his mind was the enemy body count. That was all that mattered.

He left the area and we moved out to look for the long-gone VC. We searched and patrolled for some time, but didn't find anyone. We were in the enemy's backyard, and it was easy for them to stay ahead of us most of the time.

One day on our usual patrol, we were searching a village and came across two young men that were old enough to be soldiers. We took them with us and began the long walk to our firebase, heading back a different way than we had come so we wouldn't set a pattern that could be noticed and used against us. Rather than walk in the rice paddies, we took a path through small rice fields and brush which made it easier to walk, but more dangerous because of the potential for mines and booby traps.

I was at the rear of the patrol. A woman was following along behind, jabbering at us to let the men go. We hadn't been on the trail very long when I heard a loud explosion from up ahead. When I looked forward, I saw one of the Vietnamese men fly through the air and land on his feet. He tried to run away but was stopped.

As I moved toward the front of the patrol I heard someone say that Lt. John took most of the blast and his CS gas grenade had gone off, making it impossible for anyone to get near him. By the time I reached his location, the gas had dissipated and a couple of guys were there with him. I went over and knelt down next to him. There were holes all over his arms, hands, ears, face, and body. He was in a lot of pain. I tried to help him get into a position that didn't hurt so badly, but nothing worked. He had taken a lot of shrapnel. The medic checked him over, but there was little that could be done.

The point man had tripped a booby trap on the path and kept walking. The lieutenant, close behind him,

unknowingly walked into the delayed blast. The point man took some shrapnel, but not as much as the lieutenant. A medevac chopper flew in, and with some pretty incredible maneuvering, landed right next to us. We quickly loaded the wounded and had them on their way to the hospital. That was the last time we saw Lt. John. We heard he was pretty bad off and was sent out of country.

Each time something like that happened, it drove home just how dangerous it was to take each step. The constant inner nagging that the next step could be your last was always there.

It was weeks before our platoon received a new lieutenant. During that time the platoon sergeant, who we called "Papa," was in charge of our daily operations under the company commander. Papa was a good man who didn't have any grand ideas about our platoon winning the war in short order. He was "regular Army," and followed orders well. Every one of us knew there was the "Right Way," the "Wrong Way," and the "Army Way." Papa was better than most at doing what he was told all the time. He did have moments, however, when he got fed up with the army way.

### Chapter 14 Something Heavy in the Air

*They don't strike you when you're strong.  
They strike you when the day's been long.*

*Now you're tired and feeling weak.  
You only want to get off your feet.*

*Don't put down your guard.*

*You're in their backyard.*

*Yes, you would like a little sleep,  
but they will strike you in your need.*

*They're not here to help ...they would  
like to create hell.*

*Bullets flying everywhere. I can't see  
"Charlie" anywhere.*

*I drop down hard to the dirt.*

*I am now very alert.*

*Look around; is anyone hurt?*

*Now it's quiet, they are gone.*

*Fired all they had; then ran.*

*Hoped their bullets in this short time  
through our flesh their way would find.*

*How this creates fear!*

*Inside of me my beating heart I hear.  
Maybe I can just sleep right down here.*

We were still in the lowlands, working the area and looking for VC on our daily patrols from the firebase. One morning we assembled with First Platoon next to the barbed-wire gate where we would leave the base perimeter. Standing in front of me was a soldier named Niles, who I had visited with a few times but didn't really know. He was carrying an M60 machine gun for First Platoon that day and I could see four hand grenades hanging on him, as well as 200 rounds of .30

caliber ammo draped over his shoulders.

It was one of those rare times when I felt I was supposed to know something, and that feeling wouldn't leave me. When I looked at Niles, I felt like I was supposed to tell him something, but I didn't know what. It was strange, to say the least.

Soon after that we all moved out, First Platoon headed west, and we headed east through rice paddies toward a village. It was really hot that day and we were traveling light—no rucksacks—just guns, rockets, grenades, ammo, and canteens, along with some C-ration cans stuffed in our pockets. By this time the guns and other things were nothing but tools.

Before I was drafted I'd liked guns; they fascinated me. Now we carried them everywhere. They were there when we ate, sat, walked, pooped, and slept. We had to clean them, take care of them, and know where they were at all times. If I didn't have one near me, it felt as though something was missing.

It was difficult walking through the muddy paddies. It seemed like our feet were always wet and it was tough to keep them from rotting. It was hard to come by enough time to remove our boots and let our feet dry out. We worked our way slowly through the water, sometimes walking on the dikes. We were always worried about dikes being booby-trapped, but after you were hot, soaked with sweat, and tired from slogging through the mud, fatigue affected your judgment. When this happened, we might be willing to take a little risk we ordinarily wouldn't, and walk on a dike for a while. When we made it to the village, we began our routine: searching through everything, checking out the people, looking for VC and supplies. Most of the time we couldn't find anything and that day was no different.

As we left, we headed off through one of the small gardens and I noticed some green peppers growing. I thought they might spice up my C-rations, so I picked a couple of them and put them in my shirt pocket for later.

We moved through a sandy area with some trees off to one side. Bullets started cracking past me and I dove to the ground, trying to figure out where they were coming from. The shooting didn't last long; there were maybe 20 rounds from an automatic weapon. We waited a short time and then got back up.

This kind of thing happened every now and then. Most of the time a VC would be hiding in a well-camouflaged spider hole, sometimes a hundred yards away. He would pop out of it and fire off a quick burst of gunfire at us. Then he would drop down the hole, pulling the camouflaged lid over his head, and we would never find him. It was frustrating, but that was all part of our day.

We started off again, trudging through what was becoming sandier terrain as we neared the beach. I felt my chest starting to burn, but didn't think much of it. As time went on, the burning still hadn't gone away; it just kept getting hotter and hotter. Finally, I couldn't take it any longer so I stopped and opened my dirty smelly shirt to take a look. My chest had a huge red welt on it! When I dove for the ground under fire earlier, I had crushed the hell-hot peppers and now it felt like they were eating through my chest. I was on fire!

Not much else happened on the patrol, so we moved on

back to the firebase. When we arrived, we learned that First Platoon had run into bad trouble. Their point man, Chuck, had taken a bullet through his right leg, which permanently paralyzed the lower part of his leg and foot. Niles had stepped on a mine and the explosion set off the grenades he was carrying. He was killed instantly and two other soldiers were wounded. It was a harsh day for First Platoon.

When these things happened there wasn't much said. We just tried to get it together and move on. I never understood why I had those incomplete impressions about Niles that morning. But there definitely had been something heavy in the air.

### Chapter 15 Boys to Men

We moved out early one morning from LZ Bronco and headed south down highway one. After traveling about a mile, we came upon a red and yellow mini-van that had driven over a land mine the VC must have buried in the road the night before. The van had been blown off the road and into a rice field about 30 feet away. All the windows and the undercarriage were blown away and it looked like the shell of some big dead bug lying out there in the field. About a dozen Vietnamese men and women had been killed and someone had laid their bodies along the side of the road before we arrived.

The people killed that day were never removed from the roadside. We passed by them several times that year and their clothed bones were always there.

*Why didn't anyone move or bury them?*

This was so different than what it would be like back home, but we were half a world away from there.

*Wasn't there anybody who cared about those people? Didn't they have families or loved ones who wanted to know where they were?*

We also came across a dead VC soldier lying alongside one of the trails we frequently used, and his decomposing body had remained there the entire time as well.

As we passed by those bodies over that extended period of time, I adjusted to the fact that we were surrounded by death all the time. I was left with the impression that life was cheap and nobody cared about what happened to anyone else. That really affected me and made me guard against having compassionate feelings.

Our platoon kept moving on patrol through rice paddies and villages. We were searching for VC or anything out of the ordinary, but hadn't found a thing. Around noon we took a break for lunch.

The platoon was strung out in a long line sitting on a well-traveled path about five feet wide. There was no one around but us. The weather here was hotter and more humid than in the mountains. The trees behind gave us some shade. out in front the area was more open. There were some large stacks of straw about 75 to 100 yards away, and hedgerows and rice paddies in the distance.

I was sitting on the path near the end of the line and used a P38 can-opener to open my lunch of beans and franks. No juicy hamburger, fries, and ice-cold Coke today. I was drinking warm rice paddy water from my canteen, flavored with an

iodine pill to kill all the little germs—a taste one doesn't forget.

While I was gobbling down my beans, I saw an older man out in front of me, dressed in black pajama-like clothing, and a broad cone-shaped hat. he kept looking at us from behind a pile of straw. He would step out from behind the pile, stare at us, and then step back. He did this about four times over a period of three or four minutes. About the time I wondered what he was up to...

BOOM!

There was a huge explosion.

Dirt fell from the sky, getting all over our lousy food. I thought for sure someone had been killed or badly hurt from the blast. I wasn't sure exactly what had happened, so I got up and headed toward the action about 90 feet away.

When I got close, I could see an enormous hole about seven feet across and six feet deep in the middle of the trail. Ace, a railroad worker from Pennsylvania, was sitting next to the hole on one side with a stunned look on his face, and Fred, a mechanic from Oregon, was on the other side, sitting half-propped on one arm, with his free hand covering one ear. They weren't moving and had hardly come to their senses.

It was shocking. I couldn't believe they were alive. We always did our best not to bunch up next to each other when we were on patrol or taking a break. They had been sitting far enough apart to avoid being blown to pieces. "Whoa, that was a close one," I said.

Ace had a dazed look on his face.

"Yeah!" he mumbled.

I was amazed he could hear anything or answer me.

Fred shook his head slowly.

"I thought that old guy was acting suspicious, so I rolled over to get my rifle," he said.

That action had probably saved him when the blast went off.

I couldn't see the old man anymore, but I was sure he had detonated the booby trap. At the time I saw him repeatedly looking at us, the thought didn't enter my mind that he was trying to see if our guys were close enough to set it off.

When I came to Vietnam I had no opinion of the people who lived here, but that was changing. I was angry and

trying to come to terms with what had just happened. I was getting my fill of things looking different than what they really were. What my eyes saw could be so deceptive.

*How was I going to tell who was who?*

Most everyone I saw looked the same. We were told that we wouldn't be able to tell the VC from the villagers during our training, and here it had almost killed us.

I was learning the hard lesson of not trusting the apparent, but had no idea the price that would be paid later for making a mistake because of a situation like this.

Despite the uncertainty of our surroundings, we got ourselves together and continued searching the area for the rest of the day.

Papa decided we would pull two ambushes that night. At dusk we split into two groups. One group went to set up an ambush near the area where the booby trap had been set off, and the other headed to the beach area where NVA were known to work out of small boats at night. I was with that group, and as soon as it was dark we headed for the beach. We were walking on a wide path in the dark and were making good progress when we heard an explosion far behind us.

Soon word came over the radio that a grenade had been thrown in the middle of the other ambush, wounding several guys, and they needed our help. We started back at a rapid pace, but didn't know where they were located. It was really dark and we couldn't see much. We started moving across a small open area as we got near to what we thought was their location.

Unfortunately, what little communication we had established over the radio failed. I heard a shot; then rifles and a machine gun opened up, sending tracers and bullets right at us. I dove for the ground while tracer rounds snapped between my legs and under me as I hit the dirt. These bullets were way too close and I tried to become one with the earth. In the confusion, one of us got a round off with the M79 grenade launcher.

BOOM!

After it hit we heard shouting in English. We realized the guys we were coming to support had mistaken us for the enemy and opened fire. We started yelling at them and the shooting stopped. The M79 round had landed on them and now more had been wounded. Ace was among the eight injured, but no one critically. We got together and began patching them up. soon we had a Medevac on the way.

While we were waiting for the chopper, one of the wounded was moaning a little too loudly for my comfort level. I moved over to him, bumped him with my boot, and asked if he could hold it down some. he had taken quite a blast from both explosions and had some shrapnel in his arm. I assured him he wasn't hit too badly. This made him feel a little better and he was able to quiet down. This was pretty scary stuff, being 10,000 miles away from home, in the middle of the night, in a country where most people had it in for you. heck, I was scared, and I wasn't wounded or lying on the ground from a concussion.

Once again, it was a real wonder we hadn't killed some of our own guys. Our lack of combat experience was showing. I never thought war would be like this. I hadn't realized that there would be so many costly mistakes and bad surprises.

We knew we were in the enemy's backyard, but never realized how hard it would be to find him. It was nerve-wracking to be constantly looking for Charlie without success. This was his terrain, his familiar territory. he had grown up in these rice paddies, hedgerows, and mountains, and always seemed to know where we were. His booby traps and land mines were deadly, and he had plenty of time to set them up for us and then hide in the shadows while we struggled.

*How could we get a handle on things in such a tough situation and make it through this?*

The constant uncertainty of our surroundings, the death and serious injury of our guys, and the elusiveness of the enemy was taking a toll on all of us. We were making many mistakes that could cost us our lives.

Even though I was very scared most of the time, I thought I was tough enough to handle whatever came my way. I hadn't realized yet that things were always going to go wrong. When they did, we needed to make adjustments to improve the situation and keep moving toward our objective. No touchy-feely stuff, no

matter how bad it got.

I needed to learn how to look at what was happening and make it black or white; to quickly come to the most important decision first, then act, right or wrong. I hated this. I preferred to take time to make decisions. It was maddening to be rushed when some of these choices would have such deadly, life-changing consequences. I could easily do the wrong thing and someone would die, or I would get myself killed in no time. I didn't have enough knowledge yet. I just needed to stay alive long enough to get it.

Growing up had been easy and fun. I'd managed to get through the few minor problems I had, with good advice from those around me when I needed it. In my family, we loved each other, and I had lots of friends. I wasn't a drinker and was able to stay out of most trouble even when we'd done crazy things—like for excitement, my friends and I took turns sitting on the bridge over an irrigation canal, wearing water skis, and holding onto a rope tied to the rear bumper of Davis' 54 Ford. he gave it the gas and jerked us off the bridge onto the water and away we went.

*Wahoo!*

All we had to do was lean away from the speeding car above us on the dirt canal road and hang on. His old green hot-rod had no problem getting up to 70 miles an hour with dust billowing up behind it.

For 16 and 18-year-old boys, it had been wild and only cost us gas money. One of my older friends had warned me we were crazy and could get killed because the water was like concrete at that speed, the canal was narrow, and it would only take one wrong move to hit the water or dirt sidewall. None of us thought we would get hurt or killed, though. Life was simple, easy, and fun.

Now, just a few short years later, and all had changed. Now I was faced with problems that gave older men a struggle, much less 20-year-old boys. What a learning curve! our time in-country had steadily become worse. We were being forced to change and I wasn't sure if it was good or not. We were losing our boyish attitudes. Tenderness was fading away as we came to grips with this deadly job.

The medevac chopper got there sometime later. We put the wounded on it and away it went up into the night. I wished I was going with them, back somewhere safe, maybe to a nice bed where someone else would pull guard while I slept. I was dreaming. Now that we had the wounded on the chopper, the rest of us headed back for the beach.

Everyone seemed to be on edge as we moved along the trail in the dark. We had been going all day and half the night in this mosquito-infested country, and now it was the middle of the night and we were tired. We came to a village and walked through the edge of it. I cared less and less for the people in these villages all the time. right or wrong, I blamed them for the constant danger we were in when working the flatland.

I thought it must have been really easy to recruit new VC. The young boys had to be bored and tired of bending over all day to either plant rice or harvest it in the heat and bugs. There wasn't much to do in the local village: no electricity, no TV, no radio, no sports, no cars, no money.

Then along comes Charlie VC, telling stories about the "Bad Americans" and how to kill them.

"Here, kid, this is a hand grenade. Just pull this and throw it at them; and don't forget to run away really fast."

"Just put these two wires on this old battery when you see an American near that tree. Don't forget to run, they may not be too happy. If you're good, I'll try to get you one of these neat rifles. Wow, won't you be cool?"

I knew that some of the villagers believed the VC's lies and worked with them to kill us. If the village leader didn't buy into his schemes, Charlie gave a demonstration of what would happen if he didn't go along with the plan. he either got with the program or would get beaten or killed. The villagers were always under pressure from someone trying to force them to comply. It was easy to see stress on the older faces, the look of despair. No matter what happened, they would end up the losers. All they could do was wait out this war.

We continued on our way to the beach along the dark path. After moving a half-mile, I saw a frail old man standing outside his hooch. he became frightened when he saw us and started shaking and chattering to himself with his hand over his mouth.

Suddenly the soldier several feet in front of me slammed the butt of his rifle into the old man's head, knocking him back toward the hooch. It shocked me. This was uncalled for and cruel. here we were, armed to the teeth, walking next to the man's village in the dark, and frightening him. Then this big guy busts him hard with the butt of his rifle. I was very unhappy with the villagers, but being mean to a frightened old man wasn't right.

Frank was walking behind me and saw our guy hit the old man too. We never forgot this cruel act and kept a watchful eye on this member of our ranks from then on. he was a bully and a coward when he hit the old man and would show his cowardice again later. He was the only soldier I ever saw turn tail and run when it took everything a man had in order to stand and fight during a real battle.

We kept moving toward the beach. We got there at dawn as three small boats were moving out to sea. That was against a curfew that had been set to keep the NVA soldiers from using boats to move around. We called out for the occupants to stop, but they kept moving farther out. Papa gave us orders to open fire and we did. By then they were about 400 yards away so we put several hundred rounds on them.

Someone in one of the boats called out and headed back toward us, but the other two boats kept moving out to sea and were soon out of our range. The boat that came to shore had a lone man in it. He had been shot under his left arm and the bullet exited under his shoulder blade. He was in surprisingly good shape and hadn't lost much blood. The medic started patching him up as he was being questioned. He gave no answer as to why he didn't return at first or who or what was in the other boats. We called in another medevac chopper and soon he was on his way to a hospital. We headed back to our firebase, hopefully for a little snooze before we would be sent out again.

[Editor's Note: Bob Witworth served as an infantryman in the Duc Pho- LZ Bronco area of operations. To be continued in a future edition of the Americal Journal magazine.]

## A Visit To Angel Fire

By Rick Ropele (2004)

It was an awe inspiring sight to drop down into the valley and come around the bend to see that gleaming white chapel emboldened against the hillside. Ever since I knew that Cathy and I would be on vacation through the northeast area of New Mexico, I knew I had to visit, to experience I knew not what, but I knew there was something there for us.

I haven't had a chance to go to Washington D.C. to visit The Wall, so Angel Fire was my first opportunity to experience a memorial dedicated to the sacrifice of those great men and women we served with in Vietnam. It was an emotional afternoon, but more importantly, it was an eye opening, visionary experience, for Cathy. Let me explain.

Cathy and I have been married for 31 years. I got out of the Army in 1969 and took a job in the aerospace industry in California and pretty much tried to put Vietnam behind me as I got on with my life. Cathy and I married in 1973 and we set about having and raising our family. In those busy years of furthering education, earning a living, attending our church and raising our five children, my memories of Vietnam were never in the forefront of my thoughts, but it never ceased to amaze me just how close to the surface those emotions and experiences always were. It could be something as innocent as an odor (that smell of burning wood that the people used when cooking), or it could be a song on the radio ('The Letter' by the Box Tops, '...lonely days are gone, I'm a going home, my baby wrote me a letter...') that would pop an incident into my conscious mind.

As I grew in maturity and became more and more involved in church activities, I began to appreciate more and more how those experiences had contributed in shaping my character, in providing a value basis for living my life and in shaping my outlook in many associations with my fellow men and women. I began to realize that my Heavenly Father must have had a larger life plan in mind for me as I just as easily could have been KIA instead of



WIA that morning on TET in 1968 at the bridge outside of An Ton.

Cathy knew somewhat of my time in Vietnam. She knew I was only over there a short time before being wounded and medevaced back to the U.S. She knew of retained fragments and some of the discomfort that I occasionally experienced, but the experiences aren't something that you would just bring up in day-to-day conversation. How can someone who hasn't been in those situations relate to what it's like to walk point to a night ambush position, or to pull the trigger when you have another man in your sights?

To her credit, she certainly didn't have perspective to understand the depth in which these experiences changed our lives. She never said it in so many words, but her perception was, 'hey, the past is in the past, don't dwell on it, move on'.

Now, I'm not a PTSD type person, where these processes are cranked up everyday, or where they drive daily thoughts and actions, but the memories are always there and their trigger is something of which I'm not always aware. So, it was with this basic background, we made a visit to Angel Fire part of our vacation.

When we first arrived at Angel Fire, we went into the chapel. Featured across the back wall were ten photographs and biographies of soldiers who had lost their lives in the war. These photos are changed out regularly so that whoever visits in the chapel is reminded of its purpose, its significance, and the people who made the ultimate sacrifice for their fellow man. It was plain in its simplicity, but its poignancy wasn't apparent until after we went through the exhibits in the other structure.

In the main building there were the usual things on display, a diorama of a patrol in the jungle, helmets, web gear, photographs, news reel footage, etc. However, what was most appealing was Dr. Westphall's efforts to personalize the experience.

Do you remember going into the auto parts store several years ago where they had their parts catalogs in these racks spread across the counter and the clerk would move along the rack as he looked through the catalogs for the stocking number of your part? Angel Fire also had this same kind of a display rack, except the rack was filled with picture after picture of the men and women who died in the war. Each one was accompanied by a small biography that Dr. Westphall had prepared. It is here that the experience becomes personal to everyone.

The black and white photo of the person on a page took on the persona of the real individual. You could look into the smiling faces and easily relate to each of them. Most of the pictures were those 8 x 10s they gave us all after graduation from Basic Combat Training (BCT). As you looked into their faces and read their biographies, you knew them. These men and women who answered the call to serve, they were us. They had hopes and dreams of a bright future, they had parents, brothers, sisters, and

friends who can still feel of their loss today, 40 years later.

We looked at faces, read biographies and became acquainted with real people, not just names on a wall or in a book. It was a very personal experience. I didn't realize how deeply Cathy had been affected.

As we walked back through the chapel just before leaving, she went down the steps to the front, knelt and lit a candle in honor of all those men and women who have served and who are serving in the military today. That evening, she composed the following poem:

### ANGEL FIRE

*Today I knelt at Angel Fire  
and in compassion, lit a candle there.  
As I turned and looked up those stairs,  
It was then, with grateful heart, I said a prayer.*

*We walked this memorial for the first time today  
and viewed countless photos of those now gone.  
That era of protest left heroes unspoken, till now...  
those unappreciated warriors of Viet Nam.*

*When I knelt today at Angel Fire,  
and looked up at that top step....  
you were standing by the photos there.  
You...one who lived...a Viet Nam vet.*

*Only those like you can feel so awakened  
when kneeling here, or by The Wall....  
and seeing the names of your comrades who fell...  
those who died to answer that wartime call.*

*Survivor's guilt, somehow it just grows  
out of a sense not well understood.  
It compels its keepers to speak out often  
of those heroes whose intentions were good.*

*When I knelt at Angel Fire today,  
I realized the calling of Viet Nam vets.  
God brought them back to tell of heroes,  
and to ensure this nation never forgets.*

*In the candle's glow at Angel Fire,  
I gave thanks to God in humble prayer  
that you are here with me today,  
and not in one of the photos posted there.*

Dedicated to Rick Ropele by Cathy Ropele

I'm thankful that I am one of the lucky ones who came back from the war unscathed. I'm thankful that I was led to this compassionate and understanding woman with whom I have been able to spend 31 great years. I'm thankful that I got to serve my country and associate with some of

the finest men and women of my generation. There are countless millions of people alive today throughout the world because of the sacrifice and dedication of the men and women of the United States Military. I'm proud to have been a part of that great cause of preservation.

The United States has been preserved as a great country due to the sacrifices and dedication of the great men and women who answer the call to serve - honorable and great are they that wear the colors of the United States of America.

[Richard Ropele served with Co. E, 1/6th Inf., 198th LIB, from November 1967 until February 1968. He may be contacted at [REDACTED]. Dr. Victor Westphall served in the U.S. Navy in the South Pacific during World War II. He and his wife Jeanne had two sons, David and Walter. 1LT David Westphall was killed in action on May 22, 1968 while serving with the U. S. Marines in Vietnam. -Editor]

### About The Memorial

The memorial at Angel Fire, New Mexico was originally known as the Vietnam Veterans Peace and Brotherhood Chapel. It had its origins in a battle near Con Thien, South Vietnam in which 17 Americans lost their lives. David Westphall, son of Angel Fire residents Victor and Jeanne Westphall, was one of those lost that day. Thanks to the vision and determination of Westphall's parents, the memorial exists today to honor not only these 17 Marines but all members of America's armed forces.

First Lieutenant David Westphall was killed in action on May 22, 1968. His parents decided to create the chapel to honor the memory of their son and his comrades. They held a dedication ceremony on May 22, 1971, the third anniversary of their son's death. This is believed to be the first of many memorials in honor of American lost in the Vietnam War. Over the years several additions were made to the original memorial. For a time the memorial was operated by the Disabled American Veterans (DAV).

On Veterans Day 2005 the State of New Mexico founded the Vietnam Veterans Memorial State Park and took over operation of the memorial. The memorial is open 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, and is free to the public. In 2017 the memorial operation was transferred to the New Mexico Department of Veterans Services. About 45,000 people visit the site each year.

The memorial is in the Rocky Mountains of northeast New Mexico. It is a short distance from U.S. Highway 64 and at an elevation of 8,500 feet. It features the chapel, a visitors center, Veterans Memorial Walkway, static display of a Huey helicopter, a sculpture of a soldier in Vietnam, and many acres of open grounds.

-Editor



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