



173d Airborne Brigade
Memorial Dedication





THE BATTLE ON THE 8TH OF NOVEMBER

The 1st Battalion, 503d Infantry Regiment, assigned to the 173d Airborne Brigade (Separate), fought a battle on the 8th of November, 1965, during "Operation Hump" in War Zone D, Republic of South Vietnam. The fighting took place on a nondescript hill known as Hill 65 under a jungle canopy that in places was 250 feet tall. The 1-503rd fought a

Main Force Viet Cong Regiment of more than 1200 men and was outnumbered by nearly a 3 to 1 margin.

The song, "The 8th of November" was written and sung by Big Kenny Alphin and John Rich, better known as "Big & Rich" in Country Music circles. It is the story of Master Sergeant (R) Niles Harris and those that fought along side him on Hill 65, and those who gave their lives that day for their fellow Sky Soldiers.

Niles Harris met Big & Rich in 2002 while working as a bar tender in the Buffalo Saloon in Deadwood, South Dakota. During this time, Big & Rich were playing the Saloon and had not yet achieved notoriety in the Country Music industry.

One night, between playing sets, Big Kenny noticed the top hat that Niles was wearing and asked if he could wear it while playing the rest of the night. Niles told him he could have it. At the end of the night Big Kenny came back to Niles to give his top hat back. Niles told him to keep it. A friendship started. Over a beer Niles asked Big & Rich if they had ever toured around the Deadwood area to see the old gold mines. Both said no so Niles said he would pick them up the next morning for a tour.

The next morning Niles picked Big Kenny and John Rich up in his 1973 Ford Bronco. Upon entering his Bronco, they noticed all the 173d memorabilia that Niles had affixed to the inside. Over the course of that day and many others, Niles told them about his time

in the service, about the 173d, and the 8th of November Battle during which Niles was badly wounded.

Over the next two years, Big Kenny and John Rich discussed writing a song about Niles and the 8th of November Battle. In 2004 they started writing. As the songs they had written before were about their own experiences, this was uncharted territory for them.

In September of 2005, Big & Rich took Niles back to Vietnam and visited Hill 65, the site of the 8th of November Battle. Niles buried the jungle boots he had worn that fateful day 40 years before on the battle site.

By 2006, Big & Rich had become an extremely well known Country Music Duo. They released their 8th of November song that year. It climbed the country music charts and made the 173d Airborne Brigade a household name.

At the 40th Annual Country Music Awards in 2006, Big & Rich and the 8th of November song were nominated for Vocal Duo of the Year, Song of the Year and Video of the Year. In 2007, the fifty-one minute video that Big & Rich made of Niles and their trip to Vietnam was nominated for a Grammy as Best Short Video of the Year.

The Battle for Hill 65, that took place on the 8th of November 1965, was one of many fiercely contested engagements in which the 173d Airborne Brigade participated during its period of service in the Republic of Vietnam. While the Sky Soldiers who fought on that day were singled out for particular praise by Big Kenny and John Rich, the valor that they displayed was characteristic of the uncommon valor demonstrated by Sky Soldiers who served in the 173d Airborne Brigade throughout its almost seven year deployment in Vietnam.

The 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation is deeply indebted to Big Kenny Alphin and John Rich for honoring the Sky Soldiers who fought on the 8th of November on Hill 65, and for their sustained support for the Memorial Foundation effort.



TURNING GEORGIA CLAY

On July 11th, 2008, at 1000 hours, the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation Board of Directors, Sky Soldier veterans, Gold Star families, and active duty Sky Soldiers sunk entrenching tools into the Georgia clay to begin the process of constructing the long-awaited 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial.



Foundation Vice President Larry Sanchez served as master of ceremonies for the short but symbolic program. In addition to the Foundation Board of Directors, turning ground were, among others, Association President Eric Hitchcock, Columbus/Fort Benning Chapter President Walt Rosso, and newly minted Infantry Second Lieutenants Peralla and Daly, who joined the active duty brigade in Vicenza that fall.

Foundation President Ken Smith noted that memorial construction was one of the most important events in Sky Soldier history. It fulfills a promise made to fallen Sky Soldiers of all generations that they would never be forgotten and to each other that we would remain a band of brothers. Retired MG Jerry White, President of the National Infantry Foundation, talked about the significance of the Memorial and the role of the 173d Airborne Brigade in our nation's history.

Country Music artists Big & Rich, strong supporters of the Foundation, closed the program with their signature "8th of November" ballad. More than 200 Sky Soldiers and supporters attended the ceremony.



THE FALLEN



ON IRAQI FREE

THE 173D AIRBORNE MEMORIAL FOUNDATION HERALDRY PROJECT

The soul of the 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial is the data contained therein. Most revered are the names of the fallen warriors from all generations of Sky Soldiers, whom we have pledged never to forget. The Memorial serves as a lasting tribute to the bravery, service and sacrifice of Sky Soldiers and their allies who served in Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan. Countless hours of research went into the production of the Heraldry information displayed on the granite panels.

Soon after the Memorial Foundation was formed, Foundation Board member Ray Ramirez began researching the history and lineage of the 173d Airborne Brigade. His research focused on unit awards and honors, the Order of Battle, and the names of fallen warriors. He obtained several lists of the 173d's fallen from Vietnam, which had been developed by various sources over the years, and consolidated them into one master list that became the

Foundation's baseline for this project. Much of Ray's early Heraldry work appears on the finished product.

In June 2007, Bob Wolfgang was appointed Director of Heraldry. His task was to create the layout and compile, refine and edit the data, artwork and pictorials that would appear on the 30 granite panels of the Memorial. Bob enlisted the services of Joe Flesch, Floyd Riester, Diane Wolfgang, and the late Mike Deems to assist him in this important project. Floyd's experience with helping build the Soldiers Field Memorial in Rochester, Minnesota proved invaluable in moving the project forward.

The most important element of the Heraldry data is the roster of the fallen Sky Soldiers from the formation of the Brigade through the 173d Airborne Brigade Combat Team (ABCT) deployment that was underway that spring. The Memorial Foundation

Board of Directors spent many hours discussing how the names of the fallen were going to be displayed.

After considerable deliberation, the Board of Directors adopted the following criteria:

- The names of the fallen would be placed on the inside panels of the Memorial, thus "protected."
- Due to space limitations, only Sky Soldiers serving with organic or assigned units of the Brigade would be listed, with one exception: our fallen brothers from "Down Under" who served with distinction during the Brigade's first year in Vietnam would also be included.
- Names would be engraved alphabetically by last name which would provide user-friendly access for visitors and not require a directory.
- Rank would not be included, as the life of a private and a senior officer are equally precious.
- The names of those who died in

theater of non-combat causes would be listed on the Memorial.

Editing and correcting the list of the Vietnam fallen proved to be the most time consuming entity of the project because the baseline data contained many duplications and misspellings, and included names of soldiers from units that were temporarily attached to the Brigade over the six years and four months Vietnam deployment.

The Heraldry Committee published an appeal to all Sky Soldier veterans in the Sky Soldier magazine and on the 173d Airborne Brigade Memorial Foundation website, asking everyone to review the list online and notify the Foundation of corrections or additions. During the past three years, the Heraldry Committee has been able to add the names of 17 fallen Vietnam era Sky Soldiers to the database who were previously unaccounted for, through family members or comrades coming forward with information. (The Memorial Foundation's research has been provided to the 173d Airborne Brigade Association for its use and preservation.)

Mike Deems and Joe Flesh undertook the job of refining the available Order of Battle information, confirming and expanding it to ensure inclusion of all units assigned to the Brigade between May 1965 and August 1971. They spent many hours at the National

Archives in Washington, D.C., pouring over records and Department of the Army orders. The task was complicated by the fact that the Brigade's Table of Organization and Equipment changed frequently over the course of six plus years. When Mike became ill, Joe marched on, and completed the project in October 2008.

In addition to gathering and verifying information, the Heraldry Committee also had the task of developing the creative layout evident in the Memorial. They determined how many granite panels would be required to list the names of those who died in service in Vietnam, the content of the panels opposite the lists of the fallen, and the Brigade history and other information pertinent to the Vietnam era. A separate panel honoring the 173d Sky Soldier recipients of the Congressional Medal of Honor was developed. The Foundation Board of Directors elected to devote a separate display of six panels to the 173d ABCT. A total of four panels are held "in reserve" for information from future deployments.

In September 2009, the Memorial Foundation Board of Directors awarded Columbus Monument Company (CMC) the contract to furnish the engraved granite panels for the Memorial, using both sandblast and laser etch methods. South African Absolute/Jet Black Granite was selected for the substrate, along with font style and sizes. CMC

prepared Computer Assisted Design (CAD) layouts to scale for each panel. Following revisions, paper proofs were provided to the Foundation Board for final approval prior to proceeding with fabrication. The Memorial Foundation is extremely grateful to Lynn Evans and Lynn Weekley of CMC for their professional expertise and advice in guiding us through this final, most critical phase of the Heraldry effort.

Most Memorials have a "begin date" and "end date" that makes layout planning and physical construction relatively simple. The 173d Airborne Brigade National Memorial will continue to be a work in progress as the Sky Soldiers of today and tomorrow record new achievements to be added to the Brigade's distinguished history. A unique feature of the Memorial is its adaptability and flexibility to accommodate future data inputs for generations to come. Each panel can be removed from its frame, reversed, polished, and engraved with additional data, if required, once the four blank panels are filled. In addition, three blank panels are stored within the memorial in case one of the displayed panels is damaged beyond repair. This unique feature of the Memorial enables the Foundation Board of Directors to reassert with some confidence the pledge that the heritage of our unique Brigade, and the service and sacrifices of all Sky Soldiers, will never be forgotten.

