



July • August • September **2020**

AMERICAL

JOURNAL

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



UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS

Americal Division Veterans Association Nationally Elected and Appointed Officers 2020 — 2022 Term

Executive Council National Election

Cary B. Bacall
Long Lake, MN

Cameron F. Baird
Stonewall, TX

PNC Robert F. Cudworth
Moosic, PA

PNC John (Dutch) DeGroot
Mt. Prospect, IL

PNC John (Jay) Flanagan
Cranford, NJ

Claude W. Frazier
McKinney, TX

Charles (Chuck) Holdaway
Fountaintown, IN

PNC J. Reginald Horton
Roxboro, NC

Joe Kotarba
Woodstock, IL

Lawrence J. Lennon
Bridgeville, PA

PNC Larry Watson
Wooster, OH

National Commander
Dave Eichhorn
Fleming, OH

Senior Vice-Commander
Robert (Bob) Cowles
New Berlin, IL

Junior Vice-Commander

Wayne Bryant
Greensboro, NC

National Adjutant *

Roger Gilmore
Rowlett, TX

Assistant National Adjutant *

Richard Heroux
Franklin, NC

National Finance Officer *

Spencer M. Baba
St. Augustine, FL

Asst. National Finance Officer *

PNC Ronald R. Ellis
Henderson, TX

World War II Historian *

PNC David W. Taylor
Medina, OH

Vietnam Historian *

Leslie Hines
Des Moines, IA

Editor In Chief *

PNC Gary L. Noller
Kerrville, TX

Contributing Editor *

PNC David W. Taylor
Medina, OH

Judge Advocate *

Mike Twomey
Crawfordville, FL

Product Sales Manager *

Dave Eichhorn
Fleming OH

Reunion Oversight Chairman *

PNC Ron Ward
Lake Bull Shoals, AR

2021 Reunion Chairman *

Charles (Chuck) Holdaway
Fountaintown, IN

2022 Reunion Chairman *

PNC Larry Swank
Laurel, MD

(*) denotes officer appointed by
National Commander.

Executive Council Chapter Representatives

East Region

Thomas Canaap

Southeast Region

Lee Kaywork

Great Midwest Region

David Williams

South Midwest Region

Jimmy Turner

Far West Region

Gerald Thacker

23rd Military Police

Bill Sargent

2/1st Infantry

Carl Fryman

Please send updates and corrections
to the directory to Roger Gilmore,
[REDACTED] and Gary Noller,
[REDACTED]

Friendly New Guy

By Gary L. Noller

Fifty years ago I arrived at the company supply room of my new unit. The Army assigned me to Company B, 1st Battalion, 46th Infantry Regiment, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, United States Army-Vietnam, APO 96374.

I was a funny new guy, and I am sure I looked like one. I had been in Vietnam only ten days and felt overwhelmed by my future. I had just completed in-processing and a week of jungle training at the Combat Center. I thought to myself, "I am not going to be able to do this."

I stood on one side of the supply room counter and the supply sergeant stood on the other side. Another soldier entered and dropped his rucksack on the counter. He had just completed his tour in the bush in Vietnam and would be home in a few days. I thought to myself how much that I wished that I could be him- going, not coming.

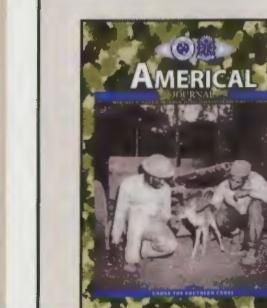
The supply sergeant began issuing my gear and at the same time he took back the gear of the soldier just in from the bush. Rucksack, check; pistol belt, check; poncho, check; poncho liner, check; steel pot, check; entrenching tool, check; canteens, check; ammo magazines, check; M-16 rifle, check; hand grenades, check; first aid pouch, check; bug juice, check. This continued until all



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

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Cover: L to R Pvt. Louis M. Jackson and Pvt. Harold Pruitt pose with a small deer pet. These soldiers are of Company C, 810th Engineers, Nepoui Peninsula, New Caledonia, 8 April 1942. Signal Corps Photo; 162nd Signal Photo Detachment.

was carefully counted and checked in and out. In some instances the supply sergeant simply slid the gear across the counter from the departing soldier to me. Quite efficient, I thought. No need to put it back on the shelf.

The other soldier and I did not carry on much of any conversation. My clean, shiny, olive drab uniform and new black and green un-scuffed boots told him that I was a new guy just as his dirty, smelly, tattered uniform and muddy boots told me that he was an old guy.

But at some point he broke the silence. He simply said, "I made it through a year. You can too." Somehow he knew exactly how I felt. Perhaps he had felt the same way a year before. He then handed me a non-issue U.S. Army hammock. "You may find this useful," he said.

I do not suppose that the brief conversation had much significance to either of us at the time. But as the days in Vietnam and the nights in Vietnam slowly clicked by I continually reminded myself of what the old soldier said. "I made it through a year. You can too."

The soldier was not my parent, a sibling, a teacher, a priest, an uncle, or a good friend. He was not my drill sergeant, company commander, or platoon leader. But he was someone who had been there----- and made it out. His words became like gold to me. I can make it out.

I only served 330 days in Vietnam before catching my flight on the Freedom Bird back to The World. I brought the hammock home to Dodge City with me. I also brought many memories. This is one of them. I wonder how he is-- 50 years later. I hope he is well. Too.

From the National Adjutant

By Roger Gilmore

Midst all the hardship and difficulty brought on by the recent COVID19 pandemic and ensuing throughout this nation, we continue to see hardship and disruption of normal daily activities due to the ongoing wave of COVID19 cases. In my opinion, the personal safeguards we take to ensure minimal exposure to the virus are crucial to staying healthy during the crisis.

I had a recent appointment for a wellness checkup at my local VA clinic. All the COVID19 safety protocols were in place at the facility. The lab work was done on site, but the doctor appointment was a telephone discussion. The VA continues to stay on top of this pandemic and ensures protective measures are in place for all of us veterans needing VA care.

We continue to see low counts in terms of new member additions to the ADVA roster. Protective measures such as social distancing in place in most all areas of the country. We are not able to mingle on a regular basis with other military veterans and meet Americal Division veterans. This certainly impacts new member recruiting for the Association. Social media seems to have taken hold as a way to stay in touch with Americal Vets we served with and could be a way to recruit new members. I encourage you to reach out to an Americal Vet you served with and encourage him to join the association if he is not yet a member.

For this reporting period we added thirteen new members. This number is on par with last reporting period. Of this count, five joined as life members. Annual pay members upgrading to life membership is down for this period. We had six members pay the required life member dues to upgrade their membership. Three former members reinstated their ADVA membership; this count is significantly down from previous reporting periods. Hats off to ADVA members Jessie O. Gause, Hobert Salisbury, Jack Head, Jesse Mendoza, Les Hines and PNC Dutch DeGroot for their recruiting efforts this quarter.

Some all-veterans reunions may happen later this year as events and activities begin to re-open. The website for the annual Kokomo, Indiana Vietnam Vets event states they are planning a September 2020 event. Some of our ADVA members attended the 2019 event and recruited fourteen new and reinstated members. Some from the same ADVA member group that attended last year may attend the 2020 event (if not canceled) and recruit new members in the campground area.

I want to use a few sentences in this article to stress the importance for paying annual dues. The Association relies for the most part on dues income to fund this publication. When you, an annual pay member, receives a dues renewal notice, a pre-addressed envelope is included in the mailing. The envelope, with your personal check or money order (no cash please), goes to ADVA Assistant Finance Officer Ronald Ellis. If you mail your dues renewal in a hand addressed envelope there is a possibility it will not be delivered to Ron's address in Henderson, Texas. Please use the pre-addressed envelope for mailing your annual dues payment.

Your dues renewal status is listed in the address box on the back cover of this issue. If your annual pay renewal date is listed as JAN20, May20 or SEP20, please mail your dues renewal check ASAP. September 2020 renewal notices were mailed the last week of August. **If your renewal date is September 2020 and you did not receive your notice and new annual pay membership card, contact me and I will mail you another.** If at any time you wish to know your membership status or dues renewal date please contact me. You may send me an email at [REDACTED].

The Taps section of this report lists our ADVA members and Americal Division veterans who died recently. This issue lists a very notable name from the roster. General Frederick Kroesen was a distinguished Army veteran with 40 years of service. His combat experience spanned three conflicts – WWII, Korea and Vietnam. His Vietnam service includes brigade commander of the 196th LIB (1968-69) and Americal Division Commander in 1971. General Kroesen held many high-ranking posts in Europe during the post-Vietnam era. Please inform me when you know of the passing of an ADVA member or Americal Division veteran so his name, hometown and unit information can be listed in the Taps section.

When you make an address change, whether permanent or seasonal, please inform me as soon as possible so I can update the ADVA roster. Email is the best way to notify me when you move, and you incur no costs. My email address is gilmoraces@aol.com. If you prefer to call, my cell phone number is [REDACTED]. The membership application form on the back cover of any Americal Journal can be used to send written notification for address change to this address: [REDACTED], Richardson, Texas 75080.

Thank you for your continued membership and interest in the Americal Division Veterans Association. Please stay safe and healthy.

New Members

Jeffrey D. Butler
4/3rd Inf
Bennington, NE
★ Self

Manuel Cotton
A/5/46th Inf
Rocky Comfort, MO
★ Jessie O. Gause

Pierre Gagnon
C/1/6th Inf
Branford, CT
★ Hobert Salisbury

Robert Holzinger
1st/1st Armd Cav A Trp
Huntington, IN
★ Jack Head

Danny Moss
32th RR Co
Battle Creek, MI
★ Self

Ralph Puralewski
5/46th Inf
Mt. Prospect, IL
★ PNC Dutch DeGroot

Calvin L. West
196th LIB
Corona, NM
★ Jesse Mendoza

Bobby Williams
C/5/46th Inf
Smith's Grove, KY
★ Self

New Paid Life Members

Stephen R. Chastain
A/4/3rd Inf
Celestine, IN
★ Roger Gilmore

Robert J. Farrell
HHC/3/1st Inf
Minneola, FL
★ Self

Douglas A. Hayka
D/4/31st Inf
Alpena, MI
★ Self

Ronnie J. Hoggard
132nd ASHC
Olney, MD
★ Les Hines

Bernard J. McKigney
C/3/1st Inf
Moorhead, MN
★ Self

John Armel
196th LIB
Reedsburg, OH
★ PNC David Eichhorn

Lee Grannis
1/6th Inf
Bethany, CT
★ PNC Larry Swank

Dan Gross
B/1/6th Inf
Scherville, IN
★ Chris Collins

Michael Hertz
A/1/52nd Inf
Madeira Beach, FL
★ Self

Bradley C. Jackson
HHC/5/46th Inf
Canby, OR
★ Don Ballou

Thomas L. Mayer
A/1/52nd Inf
Cumming, GA
★ Dan Young

Reinstated Members

Edward J. Palfreyman, Jr.
E/1/52nd Inf
Washington, PA
★ PNC Larry Swank

Thomas P. Russell
17th Cav H Trp
Dardenne Prairie, MO
★ Bernie Chase

Robert C. Van Delinder
723rd Maint Bn B Co
Branchport, NY
★ Self

TAPS LISTING; MAY THEY REST IN PEACE

World War II Veterans
Otto F. Boehmig *
721st Ord Det
Pittsburg, PA
November 2012

Donald Eichelberger *
196th LIB
Westlake Village, CA
Date Unknown

Wayne Moore *
196th LIB
Westlake Village, CA
Date Unknown

Edward Query *
523rd Sig Bn
Martinsville, IN
December 19, 2019

Arthur A. Reese *
123rd Avn Bn Aero Sct
Ramsey, MN
July 2, 2020

James T. Richmond *
1/46th Inf
Blacklick, OH
April 2018

Kenneth Vander Molen *
182nd Inf Rgmt Co G
Grand Rapids, MI
June 26, 2020

Vietnam Veterans

Frank Q. Cook, Jr.
11th LIB
Anacoco, LA
2019

David E. Swallow
E/5/46th Inf
La Pine, OR
October 11, 2019

Stephen D. Frausto, Sr. *
D/5/46th Inf
Orange, CA
Date Unknown

Jerome R. Wiese
C/4/21st Inf
Rantoul, IL
April 22, 2020

*** ADVA Member**

Former Division Commander Remembered

General Frederick (Fritz) Kroesen (USA, Retired) passed away on April 30, 2020. He was 97 years old.

During the Vietnam War he commanded the 196th Lt. Inf. Bde. on two different occasions. He then commanded the Americal Division from July 1971 until the division was deactivated in November 1971.

Kroesen began his military career in World War II. He completed Officer Candidate School (OCS) at Ft. Benning in 1944. He then received an assignment as an infantry commander with the 63rd Infantry Division. He saw action in France and Germany where he received the first of three Combat Infantryman Badge (CIB) awards. The other two came from combat infantry action in the Korean War and the Vietnam War.

Kroesen earned his fourth star in 1976 becoming the first OCS graduate to achieve that rank. He retired from the Army in 1983 after achieving a near 40 year career.

In September 1981 Kroesen was injured in an attack while serving as a U.S. Army commander in Germany. His automobile was hit by a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) fired by members of the West German terrorist organization known as the Red Army Faction. Kroesen and his wife were both injured in the attack.

Among his many awards are two Silver Stars, three Bronze Stars for Valor, and two purple hearts. His final assignments beginning in 1978 were as Vice Chief of Staff of the U.S. Army, Commander of the Seventh U.S. Army, Commander of U.S. Army Europe, and Commander of NATO Central Army Group.

Kroesen was an Honorary Member of the Americal Division Veterans Association. He resided in Alexandria, Virginia.

May he rest in Peace.

ADVA MEMBERSHIP 31 July 2020

| | |
|----------------------|--------------|
| World War II | 251 |
| Vietnam | 2,504 |
| Cold War | 5 |
| Associate Members | 178 |
| Total Members | 2,938 |

Americal Legacy Foundation Report

By Roger Gilmore, Chairman, Board of Directors

Americal Legacy Foundation Board of Directors Meeting

Our annual meeting of the board of directors was held on June 24, 2020. The meeting was conducted virtually using Zoom software. The meeting proceeded successfully and covered the agenda topics prepared in advance. Directors in attendance approved the 2020-2021 budget. The budget includes expenditures for remaining monuments for placement at VA cemeteries, as well as a budget line for concrete base work for placing the monuments. Other budget items approved are expenditures for the Foundation Scholarship program and funding for the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archive project. Other agenda topics included future fund-raising initiatives, the Foundation's scholarship grants for the coming academic year and possible Americal legacy monument and grant projects.

Foundation Web Site

Briefly, a reminder that, effective September 1, 2020, we will no longer have the PayPal link on the web site available for donations. We understand this may be an inconvenience to those of you who prefer this method of payment for donations or items from the Legacy Store, but feel it is necessary to lessen our workloads. PayPal will not be available for ordering books or calendars. The website (Legacy Store and donations link) are re-designed to provide ordering, remittance, and mailing information for store orders. The ordering process is essentially unchanged. Once an order has been placed in the Legacy Store and confirmed, you will receive an email with instructions for payment. You may also request a purchase using the Contact Us link. We will be offering an Americal Legacy Foundation challenge coin for sale in the Legacy Store. Coin details are listed in the store link.

Americal Legacy Calendar – 2020 Edition and Future

ADVA member and friends continue to support for the Foundation through calendar donations. Director Gary Noller deposited \$226.00 in early July from the 2020 calendar donations. We sincerely appreciate the generosity of all who steadfastly support the Foundation's various monument and grant programs through your donations.

We have plenty of 2020 calendars that are available for order. Contact us via the Foundation website (outlined above) or call me to order more.

Future editions of the Americal Legacy Calendar will be under the preparation and direction of Gary Noller, Foundation First Vice President, and director. Gary takes over this process from David Taylor, former Foundation director and calendar coordinator since its inception. We

will continue to use the fine design services of Lisa Anderson who has prepared the art and layout work for many calendar issues under the direction of David. If you have pictures from your Americal Division service days that you would like to have considered for use in the 2021 calendar, please submit them to Gary. The photo files (.jpg) must be of high resolution (600 dpi or higher) to be considered for use in the calendar. The higher resolution is necessary because the photograph will be covering an entire page, not just a page

segment as in some of the Journal articles. Contact Gary Noller by email to [REDACTED]

Americal Monument Programs – National VA Cemeteries

As the nation continues to work its way out of the COVID19 pandemic, we see different sectors of businesses and activities slowly opening. Relaxing restrictions seems to vary quite a bit by state. Varying reports advise that infections are on the rise, yet many folks are out and about conducting activities as usual. The VA cemeteries resumed committal services in early June with limits to be in compliance with state, local and federal guidelines, and orders. This ongoing effort to work through the pandemic restrictions impacts our legacy monument projects. We continue to work with our POCs at these locations to be kept abreast of the situations to determine what projects can be moved forward based on timing for easing pandemic restrictions.

Below is a recap of VA cemetery sites selected and where we stand with our placement proposals.

Long Island National Cemetery - (Farmingdale, NY)

This VA cemetery is in the middle of one of the hardest hit areas of pandemic infections, so the cemetery is slowly working back into normal operating mode. At the time this article was written, the state of New York had moved into Phase IV of restrictions being lifted. This allows non-essential personnel on site to perform work and will permit delivery of the monument once the concrete base is poured and cured. We do have a work agreement in place with a local masonry contractor to pour the base and place the monument. The contractor planned to do the concrete pour the end of July. With the COVID19 restriction situation being very fluid and ever changing, the state of New York had (at the time of this article) a travel ban on persons entering the state from many other states. The monument will be delivered from a quarry in Vermont, a state that is not on New York's travel ban list. We assume at this point the delivery can be made to the Long Island National Cemetery for placement. More on the progress here in the next issue of the Americal Journal.

Camp Butler National Cemetery - (Springfield, IL)

Last word we got on this monument placement proposal was no action taken since the COVID19 restrictions were put in place. Our POC at the cemetery was reviewing our package when the pandemic basically shut down cemetery operations of this nature. He plans to look through the proposal package to confirm all documentation is submitted, then forward the package up to the district office for review and decision. More on this location project in future issues.

Rock Island Arsenal National Cemetery (Rock Island, IL)

ADVA member Lyle Peterson is continuing to follow up on progress here for the proposal package. The proposal package documentation is complete (to our knowledge). Lyle contacted a member of the NCA/VA cemetery staff in mid-June asking about the status of the proposal which is supposed to be in the DC office for review and a decision. Lyle's follow-up request in late July for an update on the package submission to the district has gone unanswered. Lyle has been very diligent in keeping tabs on this monument project and we certainly appreciate his efforts.

Washington Crossing National Cemetery (Newtown, PA)

We received a follow up communication from the on-site POC in late June asking where we stand on this proposal. This project is on hold now, due to the extremely high estimate for the concrete base construction. The concrete work cost estimate must accompany the proposal documents being submitted for district approval. Later this year, when we hope to be in a more normal business mode, we plan to research other local concrete contractors for a lower priced bid on the work.

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

Follow up with the on-site POC in mid-July indicates the cemetery is still working on the major renovation project started in early 2019. Delays caused by weather and the pandemic restrictions have slowed work considerably. The staff hopes the construction will be complete by mid October 2020. We will follow up then to determine if delivery and placement of the Americal Monument can be scheduled soon.

Americal Monument/Memorial Programs Other Locations

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

Our Americal Division unit tribute plaque to honor the division's service in its three eras of activation is paid for and ready for installation. These plaques will line the Path of Remembrance leading up to the museum.

With the continuing shutdowns and postponements due to the pandemic, an opening date for the new museum has not been set. The Museum was scheduled to open in June 2020. According to the museum web site's latest information The museum will open when the conditions can ensure the health and safety of museum visitors and staff, and the museum is ready to begin daily operations.

Fort Polk, LA

We are making good progress at this site. The post senior commander approved the placement proposal in mid-March. Since then we have learned additional approval is required. Also, some additional documentation is required – a proffer letter and the concrete pad construction estimate. The proffer letter was submitted for inclusion in the gift packet in mid-July. I made a trip to Fort Polk at the end of June to view the monument placement site and met with the Fort Polk POC to discuss logistics for the placement. ADVA member James Tarver, who resides in nearby Leesville, joined me for the meeting and site viewing. The monument site is at the Fort Polk Historical Holding Facility (formerly known as the Fort Polk Museum) and is appropriately next to the Tiger Land monument. Since that visit, the POC advises the gifting packet will have to get local approval from the post DPW for construction of the concrete base and placement site. Following that review and approval process, the gifting packet goes to IMCOM (Installation and Management Command) for final approval. Mr. Tarver is working to secure a local concrete contractor for a bid to do the concrete pour.

Above is a picture of the Fort Polk Historical Holding Facility where the Americal Monument will be placed.



Fort Rucker, AL

Good news on this Americal Legacy monument project. After restricted post access for the past two months, Fort Rucker has opened up to permit non-essential personnel on post. I received word on this in mid-July. Columbus Monument is prepared to travel to the post and place the concrete base and monument once the dig permit is complete. Columbus Monument will coordinate with the POC at Fort Rucker for actual work dates. We expect the placement will be completed by mid-August.

Should travel and group activities get back to some degree of normalcy in early 2021, we plan to have a monument dedication ceremony at Fort Rucker. We hope to set a date that will coincide with other Americal Division remembrance activities scheduled nearby.

Camp Edwards, MA

From email discussions with BG Len Kondratiuk of the Massachusetts National Guard since the last Americal Journal issue, I've learned the Americal Monument located at Joint Base Cape Cod is in a serious state of deterioration. The brass plaque commemorating the Americal Division service is badly oxidized and needs to be replaced. In June, Len contacted a local brass company who can manufacture a replacement brass plaque (hopefully of better quality). The price for a replacement plaque of the same size and essentially same design is fairly expensive.

The Board of Directors approved the line item in this coming year's budget to cover the cost quote from the plaque company referred by Len. The high price of the quote we currently have may lead us to research other vendors in the Boston area for a lower price quote. More on this project in future issues of this publication.

Other Foundation Projects

The Vietnam Center and Archive

Emails going to the Texas Tech Vietnam Center and Archive the past few months are unanswered. Likely our inquiries are low priority as the Center deals with the COVID19 pandemic and school shut down. We will continue to reach out to Dr. Maxner and his staff to determine what their plan is for working on the new materials ADVA Vietnam Historian Les Hines sent in early January. More on this project as details become available.

2020 Scholarship Awards

By William Bruinsma, Scholarship Chairman

This year has been interesting for the scholarship program. Because of the COVID19 virus some things were more interesting than usual. Usually applications start arriving in March and there is a small rush near the deadline of the May 1 postmark requirement. This year the rush resulted in receiving the majority of the fifty-seven applications during the last half of April.

This year an attempt was made to make sure that funds were sent when needed by the applicants. An email was sent informing the applicants that it would be their responsibility to let know if they wanted the funds awarded to them. Did they want the funds for the fall term or sent for a later term.

Of the fifty-seven emails sent there were six replies, eleven were returned as undelivered, and there was no response from the rest. Because there was such a low rate of replies each applicant was called. As of early July there were five that had not been contacted. As of the middle of July, after many more calls and emails to each applicant's phone numbers and emails to parents, there were still three applicants that had not replied.

Communicating with applicants this year has been difficult but is not a unique problem. Reaching applicants, while a larger problem this year, has been a problem in the past as well. For the first time this year voice mails and email messages were left for all applicants. Usually if there is no reply to an email to an applicant one is sent to a parent. But that did not always work this year.

After the amount awarded to the applicants is determined an email is sent to the applicant to let them know of the award. Most of these messages are not acknowledged. This has been normal as long as I have been chairman of the scholarship program. Being able to contact an applicant is important if there is a question about the address of the school and to inform them of the amount awarded. It is the applicant's responsibility to make decisions about other financial aid or coordinate the different aid they may receive. Communications with the applicant's parents via email has also be a problem.

Part of the problem with contacting applicants is the quality of the application or some parts of the application that are difficult or impossible to read. This means it takes some time to decipher the information. This also may result in going to the extent of contacting the sponsor for information.

Some schools require a form for outside scholarships. This must be submitted with any funds sent to the school. If this form is not included it may delay scholarship program funds being available to the student. It is the applicant's responsibility to either include the form with the application or send it at a later date.

When an applicant changes schools it is not a problem if notification is sent before the checks for the awards are sent. After the checks are sent it is necessary to receive a refund from the first school before a check can be sent to the second school. In the past this has presented a problem for some.

Awards are based of several things: The application states it must be legible. Less than thirty percent are in this category. If it is necessary to study an application or use other ways to get required information it counts against the applicant. As mentioned above, communications are also considered in the judging. If it is necessary to try several times and different ways to contact the applicant it counts against the applicant.

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 this year. 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 were considered to be written in haste and of poor quality. This continues to be a problem.

While it appears I am complaining, which maybe I am, I do enjoy the interaction with the applicants once contact is made. Talking with sponsors and parents throughout the year is also something that is interesting, informative and again enjoyable.

Because of the problems with deciphering applications, poor communications and poor quality essays it has been decided that beginning next year the lowest ten percent of applicants will not receive an award. It is hoped this change will encourage applicants to take this opportunity in a serious manner. It is hoped this will get the attention of applicants who will then take this opportunity more seriously. Please make anyone you sponsor aware of this change.

This year as usual there was an extremely good rate of donations for the scholarship program mailing. Approximately twenty-seven percent of members responded by making a donation. Together with other funds the program was able to award \$47,500. This is a great help to the students many of which will begin their college life as well as those continuing their education. Please remind anyone you sponsor that while it is possible to receive a scholarship more than once they are for undergraduate studies only.

Bryonna Allen - \$750

Manhattan Christian Col
Edward Allen
D 1/46th 198th LIB

Caleb M. Allen - \$500

Univ. of Mo. – Kans City
Robert Saisbury
C 1/6th 198th LIB

Kelan Amme - \$500

Messiah College
Carl Trpisovsky
3/21st 196th LIB

Claire Anderson - \$1,000

University of Kansas
Melvin Carney
B 1/6th 198th LIB

Liliana Astino - \$1,000

Clemson University
Joseph Astino
198th LIB

Caroline Bowers- \$1,000

Mercer University
Alton Coleman
2/1st 196th LIB

Thaddeus M. Branum - \$750

Ohio University
William Bevins
A 1/52nd 198th LIB

Ashlyn Brown - \$750

Boise State University
Richard Hildreth
3/16th Artillery

Jared Buchholz - \$750

Heidelberg University
Darrell Ordway
C 1/52nd 198th LIB

Mark Costanza - \$500

Texas Lutheran College
Charles Corstanza
A 4/21st 11th LIB

Allyson Cowen - \$750

North Carolina St U
John T. Young
23rd Admin

Grace M. Dawson - \$750

Dixie State University
William Dawson
HHC 1/14th Artillery

Jacob Dawson - \$500

University of Wyoming
William Dawson
HHC 1/14th Artillery

Audriauna DeLong - \$500

Iowa Western Com Col
John S. DeLong
C 3/1st 11th LIB

Lauren Flanagan - \$2,000

Worchester Polytec Inst.
John C. Keefe
3/16th Artillery

Molly Forshag - \$750

Univ. of West Georgia
John H. Forshag
5/46th 198th LIB

Caleb D. Gray - \$750

Univ. of Tenn – Knoxville
Leroy H. Davis
C 5/46th 198th LIB

Madison Houser - \$1,000

Union College
Elliot Houser
C 1/82nd Artillery

Paige Howe- \$500

Western Kentucky Univ.
Kenneth A. Howe Jr.
23rd Admin

Jarod Johnson - \$1,000

Rochester Inst. of Tech.
James J. Treacy
198th LIB

Brenna Keaty - \$500

Saint Louis Univ.
John Sears
D 4/3rd 11th LIB

Emma Keaty - \$500

University of Iowa
John Sears
D 4/3rd 11th LIB

Tristen Kloppe - \$4,000

Western Michigan Univ.
Ronald Hadley
D 1/6th 198th LIB

Hope Koppeis - \$500

Louisiana State Univ.
Carl J. Koppeis
HHC 5/46th 198th

Abigail Laine - \$750

Merrimack College
John Laurie
198th LIB

Della Langdon - \$500

Portland State Univ.
Jack F. Godfrey
B 1/52nd 198th

Ashton Lay - \$500

Cent Lakes Col- Staples
Jack Hvezda
D 5/46th 198th LIB

Megan E. Macakanja - \$750

Univ. of Minn- Twin Cities
Michael Smith
D 5/46th 198th LIB

Olivia McKinney - \$500

Temple University
George H. Eckhardt
B 5/46th 198th LIB

Casey Merriam - \$500

Univ. of Central Florida
Darryl Merriam
HHC 14th Cbt Avn Bn

Grace Metko - \$500

Univ. of Wisc- Eau Claire
Philip Krause
1/52nd 198th LIB

Colton S. Miles - \$750

Univ. of CA – Davis
William Miles
C 3/26th 196th LIB

Ashlyne Olson - \$1,000

Washington State Univ.
Arthur Olson
HHC 4/3rd 11th LIB

Leah Smith- \$2,000

Kent State University
Larry Andrzejewski
1/52nd 198th LIB

Natalie Smith - \$1,000

Temple University
David Allis
E 3/1st 11th LIB

Isabella F. Rinehart - \$500

Appalachian State Univ.
John Fredrick
C 1/46th 196th LIB

Jeffrey Rollins - \$500

Univ. of N. Carolina- Charlotte
Arthur Rollins
B 1/6th 198th LIB

Ryley Schaub - \$500

Saint Louis Univ.
Walter Schaub
C 5/46th 198th LIB

Alex Schiefer - \$500

Rankin Tech. College
James B. Lampe
D 1/6th 198th LIB

Aanan Schlieff - \$500

Univ. of North Dakota
Dale Stivland
A 3/21st 196th LIB

Gabriella Varral - \$500

Pennsylvania State Univ.
James H. Tessitore
B 1/52nd 198th LIB

Morgan Waggoner - \$500

Central College
Richard G. Waggoner
1/52nd 198th LIB

Carly Walker - \$750

Stevens Inst. of Tech.
William A. Walker
23rd Admin

Emily Walker- \$500

Stevens Inst. of Tech.
William A Walker
23rd Admin

Mary Washam - \$500

Southern University
Terry Washam
196th LIB

Harrison Wilkes - \$2,000

Boston College
William Sargent
23rd MP



Dear editor,

I am enclosing a photograph I had a Japanese take on my first day in Japan. I'm going to be 97 years of age on June 23rd. I hardly ever write any more but I thought you should have this picture.

When our ship pulled into Japan I was the first to find a photography dark room. But the door was locked. When I tried to open the door a Japanese got very unhappy. One of the fellows who could speak both languages told me the other guy said that's a dark room. Then I told him I wanted a picture made or I would break the door down.

I am sitting in the left front. Sam Pear is standing second to the right. A couple years ago Sam's attorney called me to tell me that Sam had passed away.

I was in Company B, 164th Infantry Regiment.

Wayne McDowell



Dear editor,

Seems like I always learn something new about the Americal Division, when I receive my copy of the Americal Journal. In the April-May-June 2020 issue, I read the article, "Before The Americal:" and saw the mention of the name, General Patch, which, for some reason, struck a chord in my mind.

I am currently working on a round-table presentation as a guest speaker at our local Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) in Harrisburg, PA. It recounts my time in Vietnam; part of which includes my assignments with the 48th, 57th, and 59th Infantry Platoons (Scout Dogs), as well as the 63rd Infantry Platoon (Combat Trackers) in the 23rd Infantry Division. In the initial few minutes of my presentation, I talk about my

military roots. It includes my paternal grandfather being wounded in France during WWII, and my father's 20 year career in the army. This led to me being born at the 97th General Hospital in 1951 while my father was stationed in Frankfurt, Germany.

In 1953, my father was transferred stateside. In those days dependent travel was done by boat. As a result, my first of three trans-Atlantic voyages, was from the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), port of Bremerhaven, to the port of New York City in the States. During my research for my upcoming VVA speech, I found a picture of the USNS Alexander M. Patch, along with a picture of me getting ready for a mandatory lifeboat drill aboard the Patch in 1953. The photo is in one of our old family albums.

I set my mind to wondering if the man, General Patch, mentioned in the 2020 Americal article, and the ship, USNS Patch, that I made a voyage on in 1953, might be related. And sure enough, the USNS Alexander S. Patch was named after the man that would become the first commander of the Americal Division! I can also tell you, the USNS Alexander S. Patch went on to make runs in the Pacific transporting men, and supplies to Vietnam in the mid-sixties before it was removed from service in 1967. As a matter of fact, the Patch transported the 196th Light Infantry Brigade from Boston, MA, to Vung Tau, RVN, via the Panama Canal, in July-August, 1966, completing the longest nautical voyage in the Military Sea Transport Service's (MSTS) history.

Thank you for a great magazine, and for the stories that lead to more stories!

Russell Walters MAJ/RET/USA
(a.k.a. SGT "Doc" Walters, during my enlisted time in Vietnam)



Dear editor,

I fell off the rails and did not get photos of the Americal Division wreath that was presented at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C. on Veterans Day 2019. With the social distancing restrictions on activities for Memorial Day 2020 this photo is even more appropriate.

Earle Gleason,



Dear editor,

Received my copy of the latest Americal Journal today. Locator Requests on p.2, has someone looking for the commander of A, 1/46 in June 1970. I wasn't in the battalion then, but would that be Paul Spilberg? If so, you may want to reach out to Mr. Flores and inform him of Paul's location in Arlington.

The other thing is the photo of a "special rifle" on p.26. I believe, according to official records, that item does not exist. Except for the fact I saw one with my own eyes, that is. MAJ Potter brought one up to Mary Ann while B Co. was providing security. It was a "black" item designed by the CIA or SOG (maybe both) as a short range assassination weapon. It began as a Winchester Model 70, chambered in .458 Winchester Magnum. Later, it was re-barreled to chamber a short, sub-sonic version of the big game cartridge. Then the barrel was drilled and surrounded by the massive suppressor you see in the photo.

That was the only time I ever saw one. It impressed me as being one of the most impractical things I had ever seen. But I never forgot it. Years later, I have read many articles about "forgotten weapons of the Vietnam war." But that rifle was never included. Finally, after searching the 'net diligently, I found some reference to it. But Jim Dowling's picture is the clearest one I have ever seen.

Pete Gallagher

Dear editor,

I recently received and read the April/May/June 2020 issue of the AMERICAL Journal. Your article "Pardon The Error" was good and revealing how simple things can be taken for granted, whether in haste or familiarity in the review process. I would like to offer my time and services as "another set of eyes" in assisting in the area of proof reading for you and the Journal.

I have attached a picture of me on my last overseas mission, this time to Afghanistan in 2006, a year before mandatory retirement from the Army. You can clearly see the AMERICAL patch on my sleeve as I head to an evaluation of an NCO school in Kabul, it was amazing how many soldiers recognized the patch and knew something of the unit's history.

Ron Brown, CSM (Ret)
D Co., 1/52 INF, 198 LIB, 1969-70



Dear editor,

I want to offer my comments on your page three commentary in the 2Q2020 edition of the Americal Journal. The paragraphs addressing the text error for the Army Museum tribute plaque are well done. I was contacted by an ADVA member after the issue came with the picture of the plaque out about the error so I figure many more folks spotted the error and did not say anything. Thanks for letting our readers and loyal donors know it is rectified.

Your paragraph near the end of the article speaking of the Americal Journal quality and the veterans stories is spot on. I know the publication gets great reviews from those outside the organization.

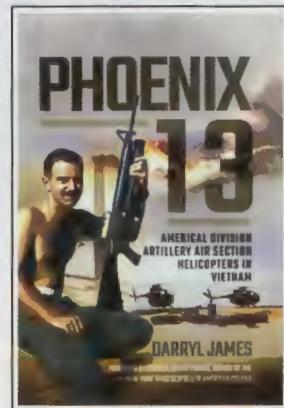
Roger Gilmore,
National Adjutant, ADVA
President, Americal Legacy Foundation

[Editor's note: Roger does a great job in writing content for pages of the magazine. I can always count on him to be on time with his quarterly submissions for Adjutant Notes and Americal Legacy Foundation updates. My apologies to Roger for not including proper recognition of his efforts in my commentary. GLN]

Dear editor,

I have written a book titled Phoenix 13. It is a chronological collection of stories from my year-long tour with Americal Division artillery Air Section. I flew a scout helicopter in Vietnam in 1968 and 1969. A few of the stories in the book have been published in past issues of the Americal Journal. The book has an introduction by General Tommy Franks, author of the New York Times Best seller, American Soldier. Franks served in Americal Division Artillery in 1967. Phoenix 13 will be released by Pen and Sword, Ltd. in the Fall in hard back and digitally. It can be pre-ordered now. You can preorder from this link: <https://www.casematepublishers.com/phoenix-13-elite-helicopter-units-in-vietnam.html#.XpV0Eo6YWM8>.

Darryl James; adjames6@att.net



Playing Baseball in the Devils Garden

Raymond Aguirre

It's been told that the early campaigns in the South Pacific resulted in some of the most violent clashes ever fought during WWII. After Pearl Harbor the following year of 1942 saw many setbacks for the U.S. and her allies; the momentum of the Axis powers seemed unstoppable. The American task force that was sent to Guadalcanal became the became the vanguard and spear tip of an offensive that proved to our enemies that the United States could not and would not accept defeat.

Guadalcanal

As American forces bitterly gained a foothold in the Solomon Islands, more men and material poured onto Guadalcanal from which other campaigns were launched against Japanese strongholds on other islands such as the Russell Islands, New Georgia and Bougainville in the Central and Northern Solomon Islands. The speed of conquest was a critical and tactical strategy for Admiral Halsey's drive to capture the Japanese Naval base at Rabaul. These are names of some of the places that our naval and ground forces would temporarily call home until the next planned operation against the Japanese became a reality. The term "home" seems like a cruel joke considering the depravity of comforts that our servicemen had to accept. "Home" could only be mirrored through one's imagination and innovative American spirit. For the troops in the field, "home" was only accessible in the recesses of their minds. For those working in the rear, like our hospital support personnel, living in a cramped tent with several individuals over long periods of time with too much time on their hands once the fighting began to linger, could expose the pitfalls of organizational life... everyone has their breaking point. These were men who revealed their souls to each other during the crucible of war; they were family, they were brothers, and sometimes they fought like brothers do. I can think of so many things that could disrupt my daily routine and I have a roof over my head, plenty to eat whenever I want it, not to mention having clean dry clothes and decent hygiene with hot running water at my fingertips. I am never bored because I have unlimited entertainment. What more could a guy want? There can be nothing more intimate than a soldier's thoughts of home while serving in the combat zone, devoid of privacy and unpredictability, where anything could get you killed, and that includes nothing.

Bougainville

Just as things were taking shape on Guadalcanal in late '43, the invasion of Bougainville was launched. The initial invasion was carried out by the 3rd Marine Division and the Army's 37th Infantry Division. The lead element for the Americal, the 164th Infantry Regiment, began arriving on Christmas Day in 1943. Although the Army's 37th Division remained, the marines were pulled off the perimeter defense, passing command of the island over to the Army's XIVth Corps.

The military tried its best to accommodate our servicemen by providing as many comforts as possible to those who were exposed to the hypocrisy of the environment they were in, and the stress of the human spirit under challenging conditions. For the troops who found themselves in the forefront of a campaign, these

efforts were Spartan at best, but profoundly appreciated and were a boost to morale.

The American Red Cross was there from the beginning, serving in the combat zone. These field directors lived as the troops did, short of being on the front lines facing the enemy, operating out of a tent that offered a few amenities that would give some familiarity and home comfort such as reading materials, a phonograph, crafts and writing materials to help send letters home while serving coffee and fresh donuts from the camp bakery. The Red Cross director was usually assigned to several units and became a trusted and well known friend among the troops.

Once the hostilities ceased or greatly curtailed, efforts were made to increase recreational activities as much as the tactical situation allowed; work was soon underway to clear the jungle for ball fields. Most of it was done by hand and later with the help of the engineers. It wasn't until late 1943 that sports activities and baseball leagues actually began to compete on Guadalcanal for those still not in direct contact with the Japanese who were still resisting on the island. This was due to the fact the Pacific campaign had largely moved further north up the Solomon's ladder. By 1944 Guadalcanal was then considered a rear base and out of harm's way, becoming a staging area for men and material, including the arrival of larger hospital facilities to treat the sick and wounded from the combat zone. The island would soon boast of one of the best baseball fields in the area; too late for the men who were taking the fight to the Japanese elsewhere.

One of the big problems with recreational sports was the lack of equipment. Any bat, ball or glove became a guarded and prized possession. The bounty was high when bartering for such tokens of the sport. Slowly, as other outfits arrived to the islands, the equipment became less scarce, and organized intra-league play grew among the ranks.

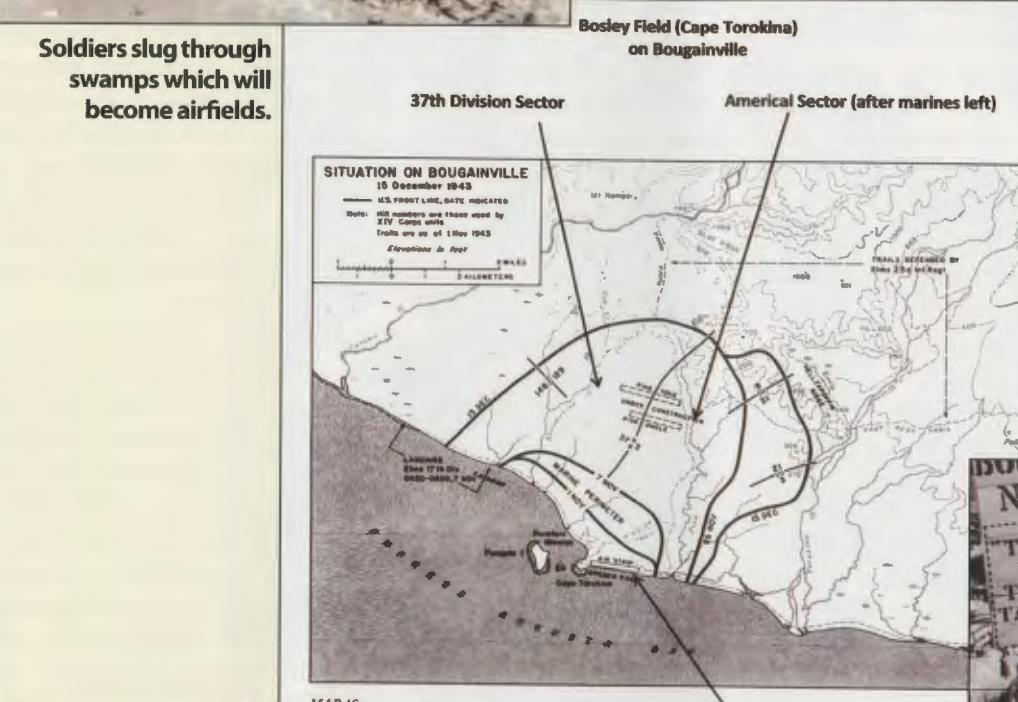
ESTABLISHING THE BOSLEY (CAPE TOROKINA) AIRFIELD



Soldiers slug through swamps which will become airfields.



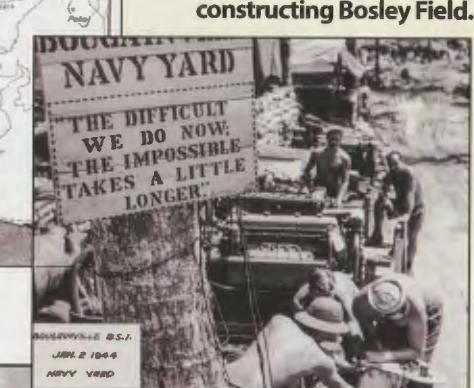
Navy Corsair fighter on Bosley Airfield.



The dense jungle on Bougainville provided hard wood for construction (Mount Bagana Volcano is in background).



Corsair fighters take off on one of three air strips on Bosley Field.



Navy Sea-Bee's played a big role constructing Bosley Field.

Japanese base at Rabaul. This forced the Japanese to fight a fortified position around the airfields rather than U.S. forces defending an entire island.

When the 164th Infantry arrived on Bougainville, they were greeted with the fetid smell of the "Devil's Garden" was surrounded by jungle swamps and massive hardwood forests smothered in jungle vegetation and sweltering heat where it also rained nearly every day like clockwork.

A mountain range stood as a backdrop of the horizon as the volcano, Mount Bagana, lazily puffed ash and smoke, leaving a mixed smell of rotting vegetation, stagnant pools of oozing mud which produced an overwhelming odor of rotting eggs. With less than a month into the campaign, the engineers had started a crude road network inside the perimeter that linked together supply and evacuation lines. The priority was to complete the airstrips for both offensive and defensive purposes. Every outfit on Bougainville was responsible for clearing their own rear bivouac area. This meant hand tools, machetes, axes and shovels, and any heavy equipment that could be commandeered to complete the task. It was back breaking work just to scratch out a little bit of the devil's green acre.

When the 52nd Field Hospital's first echelon arrived at the end of November of 1943, they were directed to a spot near one of the airfields under construction (there would eventually be three air strips). Some trees had to be cleared, but the rest of the growth had to be cleared by hand. For the first two weeks, the best sleeping conditions were wherever the men could string their hammocks. There was no kitchen tent, and meals were cold rations eaten on wooden crates that were scrounged for camp furniture.

The Bougainville base continued to improve as construction engineers and Navy Seabees drained the swamps and made improvements to the living conditions. Throughout the history of conflicts the biggest enemy has been often the problem of sanitation and disease. These were the first problems addressed by the army and enforced by medical and service troops. Great credit should be recognized in the American soldier for his ability to innovate and adapt to such a harsh environment with "good ole Yankee ingenuity" as they made the best out of nothing.

The business of war was still the number one priority on Bougainville. The defenses were fortified and readiness honed to a fine edge waiting for the Japanese to launch a counter offensive to recapture and gain control of the island. That day came on March 7, 1944. After several weeks of intense fighting, the Japanese were defeated in their attempts to break through the perimeter and capture the air fields. After suffering heavy losses, the Japanese melted back into the jungle and were never able again to organize a threat against the American base.

With Bougainville isolated from Rabaul, the remaining Japanese troops on the island were cut off from supplies and lost their capability to make a determined effort to defeat the American forces. Hundreds of Japanese eventually died from starvation and disease, surviving on small gardens hidden deep in the Bougainville jungle.

By July of '44, while skirmishes with the enemy continued, life on Bougainville had become less about fighting the enemy and more about the debilitating ghost of malaise and boredom. The "casual" camps that were available to the infantry units provided temporary relief from combat and were managed by medical personnel to give the soldier some decompression time, allowing the soldier to recover from the rigors of combat. The camps although crude, allowed the soldier to rest, bathe and eat hot meals, which helped restore the effectiveness of the fighting man and kept the ever present condition of combat fatigue and subsequent evacuation to a minimum.

Returning to camp life after combat also meant fighting routine boredom. Staying busy and avoiding the sloth of bunk fatigue became a challenge.

On occasion the sound of guitar playing and singing of country western and southern ballads could turn into a melancholy moment of objection, bellowed out from the cheap seats somewhere within ear shot. Daily rituals consisted of playing endless games of cards or checkers, where on occasion conversations could turn into the same empty subjects and meaningless babel. Living with petty annoyances and excitabilities were an ever present problem when trying to find privacy. These were real issues that were all part of dealing with the struggle to control the absurd circumstance of life after combat. What saved soldiers on Bougainville from falling victim to the surrealism? Perhaps they found the answer in baseball.

The golden age of baseball was at its peak when America entered the war in December of 1941, and the great pastime of America would be forever changed at the war's end. The war would see more than 500 major league players trade a yearly salary for \$21 bucks a month to serve on Uncle Sam's team for the duration. For the G. I. on Bougainville, the common thread of discussion was about baseball and how their favorite team now included multiple ball diamonds around the encampment. The ball fields were given names and dedicated to a special place or person, such as Memorial Field, Halsey Field, Roger Young Park (Medal of Honor), and Billy Smith field.

The biggest complex was Bosely Field with two ball diamonds, basketball and tennis courts and a boxing ring complete with flood lights and a PA system. One of the biggest sporting events that took place happened on October 7, 1944. The event was for the Bougainville Boxing Championship, with the fighters from outfits around the

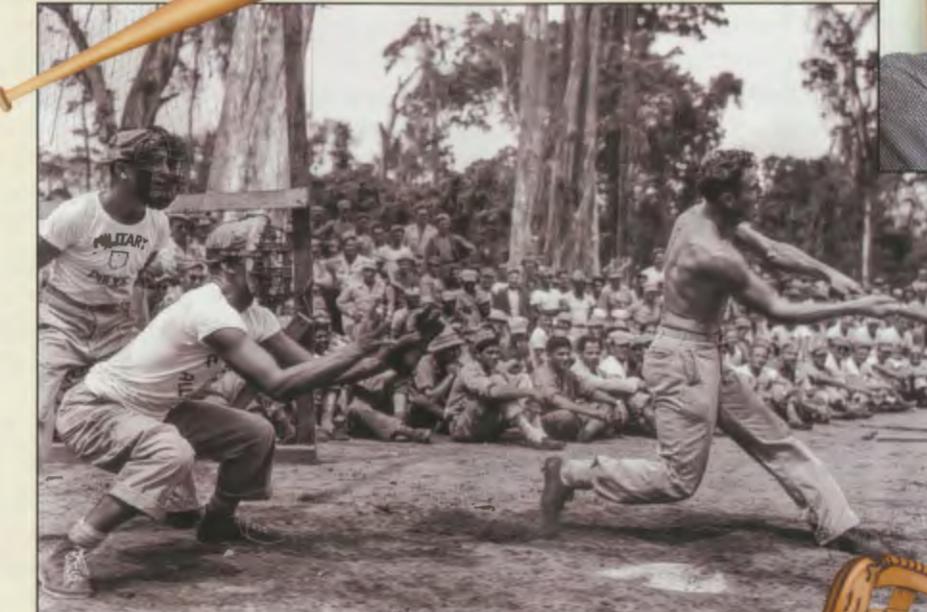
BASEBALL ON BOUGAINVILLE



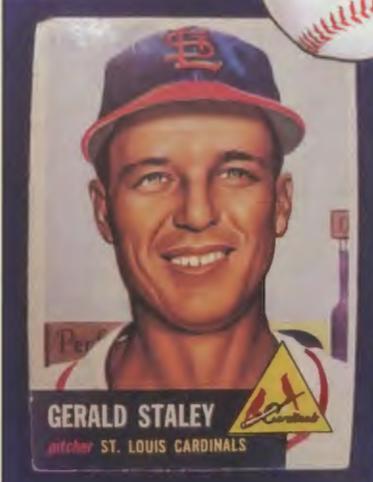
One of many baseball teams assembled on Bougainville. Note bats in front.



Lester Rodney in 1944 and later as sports writer. Rodney championed the desegregation of Major League baseball, clearing the way for Jackie Robinson to be signed. Rodney died December 20, 2009.



Gerry Staley
baseball card.
St. Louis Cardinals.



July 4, 1944 championship softball game, 37th Division batter takes a swing. The American won, 3 to nothing.



Baseball team called "The Continentals". Each player was from a different state which was written on their t-shirt "uniform."

Baseball Milwaukee Brewers owner & baseball legend Bill Veeck.



base competing for titles in every weight class. The 164th Regiment walked away with two wins, one in the Bantamweight by Private M. Davis and the other in the lightweight division by Pvt. M. Carrillo, scoring by a knock-out.

The 317th Engineers were one of the outfits that were responsible for clearing the jungle and building those facilities. Through their determined efforts and hard work, they completed construction that covered 37.5 acres, this included entertainment stages and a movie pavilion. Movies were part of the regular nightly entertainment within the camps around the base.

Teams began popping up all over the island as league play became a huge draw for player and spectators alike including an occasional Japanese prisoner who bravely watched games from afar. Competition was tough, and the rosters were flexible, due to the fact that some players could not escape the duty roster. Finding substitutes was never a problem with plenty of men eager to play.

The 52nd Field Hospital fielded several teams from the ranks and put together a pretty good "A-Team". A member of the hospital, an enlisted man by the name of Lester Rodney from Brooklyn, NY played a big part in organizing not just the hospital team but he also managed the scheduling of team play around the island by talking to other outfits and scheduling the games against the hospital teams. Sergeant Rodney had a background in sports and was a sports writer back home. His passion was baseball and he was a die-hard Dodgers fan.

Before the war, his credentials put him in the sporting arena to witness some of the greatest sporting events of the era, interviewing many of the sporting legends of the time. Sgt. Rodney was at ringside when Joe Lewis handed Germany's champion, Max Schmeling, his jock strap at New York's Yankee Stadium on June 22, 1938. Sgt. Rodney was also the editor and sports writer for the 52nd Field Hospital's newsletter, "The Saint". His sports write-ups were popular around the island. The highlights and team results were nearly as good as those published about the pros in the "sporting news" back home. His write-ups were colorful and professional, giving these "island athletes" a taste of big time exposure.

While on Bougainville, Sgt. Rodney crossed paths with Bill Veeck, a promoter and progressive advocate of the game. Veeck also happened to be the owner of the Milwaukee Brewers. Bill Veeck had a reputation around baseball as a maverick and was referred to as the "fans owner" due to the fact that his priorities leaned more towards the fans than they did towards the front office. He was also known as "The P.T. Barnum of Baseball" for his promotional stunts.

Veeck, who on Bougainville was a private with the 3rd Marine Defense Battalion on Cape Torokina when the Americal was on the island and had enlisted at the age of

29; giving up his \$150/week salary and turning down the opportunity to jump rank upon enlistment. How crazy is that?

Private Veeck was born with baseball in his blood. His father had owned the Chicago Cubs and Bill had been raised around major league baseball. Veeck had a vision of what baseball could be, always keeping the fans at the forefront of ideas. Above all, he was recognized as an American original, he was intelligent and possessed a social conscience that changed baseball for the better. One of the first things Pvt. Veeck did after arriving on Bougainville was to get more baseball equipment on the island. Somehow he accomplished this and proved that he was a man of action and passionate about the game.

At one point the hospital newsletter asked for readers to vote on their favorite sport on the island. There was no surprise when baseball was voted tops, then softball with basketball third, then came volleyball, and tennis, with horseshoes rounding out the list.

There were many championship teams and play-offs, as league play circled through the summer. It has been said that "steel sharpens steel" and that was true when it came to playing sports on Bougainville. The competition was tough and every outfit was included, including "Negro units"; a rare gathering for a then-segregated army. The All Stars of the 52nd Field Hospital lost to the 21st Evacuation Hospital All Stars 2-0, behind the pitching arm of Gerry Staley.

Staley would go on to pitch for the St. Louis Cardinals after the war. The biggest game on Bougainville was on July 4, 1944 at Bosely Field as the Americal Infantry Division defeated the 37th Infantry Division 3-zip, winning the island championship and all the bragging rights with it.

No matter how bad things could be on Bougainville, there would always be a way to channel the competitive spirit amongst a band of brothers.

(Contributing Editor's Note: The author is the son of Joe J. Aguirre, who served with the 52nd Field Support Hospital under control of the XIVth Army Corps which controlled the Americal and 37th Division's on Bougainville. Joe Aguirre wrote extensively to his wife during the war about life on Bougainville and this article is part of that story)

Photo Attribution: Photos on Bosley Airfield page were obtained from the worldwide web; map of Bougainville prepared by ADVA WWII Historian; photos on baseball page: Softball game (center page) is U.S. Army photo. WWII photo of Lester Rodney obtained from the Rodney family. All other images obtained from the worldwide web.

This Time I thought For Sure I Was a Goner

Gary Cosby Jr. Decatur Daily.com (August 17, 2015)

"Who says I am not a lucky guy?" recalled Americal PFC Dewell McGriff of Cullman, Alabama, "after some of the closest shaves anyone can have!"

McGriff was an ammunition bearer with Company D (Heavy Weapons Company), 182nd Regiment during the bitter Cebu campaign in the Philippines. The heavy machinegun squad he was assigned to help to cover the flanks of the advancing rifle companies who were inching their way up the fortified hilly terrain called Babag Ridge, overlooking Cebu City.

"Well the first thing that happened to me", said McGriff who had six months overseas with the Americal, "was one artillery shell dropped within a few feet of me. The first thing I knew about that was when I picked myself up off the ground and it felt like every bone in my body was broken. But after a close examination, I found I did not have a scratch on me!"

Things were rather quiet for McGriff for the next few days and he was just getting over the effects of the artillery shelling when things began to happen again.

Tip of the Sword

"Early one morning", continued McGriff "after the Japs nightly Banzai attack, I found that my gun was nearly out of ammunition and another fellow and myself started back for more ammunition. We had just started back when a Jap sniper opened up and the first shot cracked not more than two inches from my ear, and it hit the other ammunition bearer in the shoulder. We both hit the ground and tried to crawl back to our holes. But every time we would move, the sniper would open up again. We finally made it back and I was able to get the wounded man to the aide station – but that day wasn't over yet.

"Nothing more happened until just after dark that night when the Japs started to counter attack. We could hear them coming up the hill and we were lying in our holes waiting for them. I heard one of them hit a grenade on his helmet to prime it and I knew he was pretty close. I didn't realize how close until the grenade hit me on the leg. This time I thought for sure I was a goner, but my luck was still holding out – the grenade was a 'dud'."

The intense fighting continued and McGriff's squad was in close contact with the enemy on Babag Ridge. The trees, shattered by the artillery fire, were scattered across the hillside, providing perfect cover. Japanese soldiers moved through the fallen trees in the dark as they prepared to attack. McGriff was on watch duty and woke up his relief to take over for him.

I heard the (Japanese soldier) come up the hill. I knew he was right in front of us," McGriff said. "I got the guy up and told him, 'don't let him get in the foxhole with me,' because they would try to get in the foxhole with you at night and try to cut or kill you."

Moments later, the grenades began flying. The Japanese soldier had a captured .45-caliber handgun, and McGriff could hear him working the slide to fire it at them. Another soldier shot the Japanese soldier with a rifle, wounding but not killing him.

"I tell you he laid there all night long and moaned. It's sad to hear somebody like that. I wanted to throw a grenade over there to stop his racket you know, but somebody said, 'Let the sucker suffer.' McGriff said, "I tell you, people are cruel in combat. You got to be to survive."

There are many episodes in combat McGriff said he wished to forget but can't. Troops had to use flame throwers on Japanese soldiers who hide in caves and would not come out. The smell of burning flesh is something he cannot forget. Nor can he forget the sight and smell of decomposing corpses of

enemy soldiers that fell along the trails.

"It's hard to get over. It's something you try to get out of your mind." McGriff said. "I think a war changes everybody...a lot of things you just don't forget. I remember a fellow Alabamian came into our unit. I just knew we would be friends. The first thing you did was tell people where you were from. We said we'll get along just fine since we were both from 'Bama. Just then the Japs started throwing mortars and we dove into a foxhole and he was killed."

Americal heavy weapons teams were attached to infantry units and took their orders from those infantry officers. In one particular nasty fight, the infantry officer placed McGriff's gun team on the forward facing slope of a hill, exposing them to concentrated enemy fire. McGriff said the enemy fire was ripping them to pieces and they had to withdraw. The gunner, a man named Luther Bartlett from Black Mountain, North Carolina, grabbed the machinegun and made a run for cover.



Dewell McGriff prior to shipping out to the Americal in the Pacific.

"I will never forget this", McGriff recalled, "Bartlett told the assistant gunner to grab some ammunition, because he was carrying that gun Hollywood style. He grabbed the gun, tripod and all and we got out of there."

Frayed Nerves

McGriff was not physically wounded in battle, but he said his nerves started failing him and he couldn't keep anything in his stomach. He would even throw up after a drink of water. He was pulled off the line and sent for treatment. Medics gave him two pills that knocked him out and he slept for an entire day. Then he was sent back to his unit to pull guard duty.

The Japanese soldiers impressed him with their ferocity and cruelty in battle. They left him dismayed when many of the committed suicide. "Before they would give up, they would commit suicide, a lot of them would." McGriff said. "We had some of them up there in one of them places, they were cornered on a ridge up there and some of them jumped off the mountain. They believed dying for their country was the thing to do."

After three months of fighting the Americal was pulled off the line and began preparing to invade the Japanese home islands. The war ended while the division was still training for the invasion while on Cebu Island. McGriff remembered, "I was lying on an army cot flat on my stomach and a guy from Casanova, Wisconsin, he come running into the tent and jumped right in the middle of my back and said, 'McGriff, the damn war is over!'

The announcement set off a celebration in the camp in which McGriff remembers being nearly as dangerous as the war itself. "I didn't know whether we would survive the celebration or not" McGriff said. "People were out shooting guns and drinking and getting drunk. I tell you it



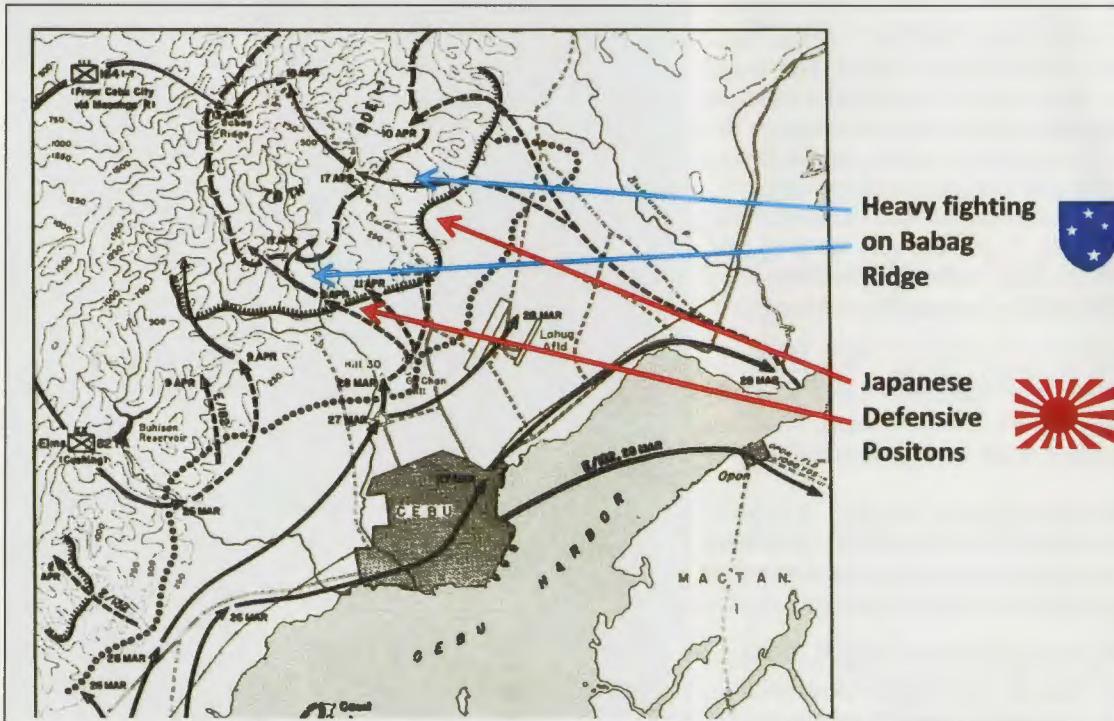
Dewell McGriff being presented his Bronze Star for World War II combat service from Lieutenant General Kevin T. Campbell in Huntsville, Alabama, June 6, 2009.

was dangerous. I threatened to get out of the tent and dig a fox hole."

The Americal Division was shipped to Japan for occupation duty and then disbanded. McGriff summarizes his experience in war, "Anyone who went over there and went through what we went through was fortunate to get out"

(Contributing Editor's Note: In World War II, all soldiers awarded the Combat Infantryman's Badge (CIB) were subsequently awarded a Bronze Star for service. Dewell McGriff never received his Bronze Star until June, 2009 at a ceremony at the U.S. Space and Rocket Center in Huntsville, Alabama on the 65th anniversary of the invasion of Normandy. McGriff was thankful for the honor while surrounded by his wife, family members and friends. He remarked, "Everyone that got a combat infantry badge was to get a Bronze Star and I got mine 64 years late"

Postwar McGriff decided to become a farmer following in the footsteps of his daddy. After a couple of less than successful years of farming he worked for the railroads until he retired 35 five years later. On July 8, 2019, Dewell McGriff, 93, transitioned from this earth to his heavenly home; another of the greatest generation who helped to conquer evil wherever he found it.



Area of heavy fighting in high hills overlooking Cebu City (Babag Ridge).

Letters to Home

By Luther Kurrass

The observations below were taken from letters I wrote home while I was in Vietnam.

1969

December 10th: Arrived at Cam Ranh Bay. Sounds like going to the 4th Division. Working at a warehouse in Cam Ranh Bay. Waiting for orders.

December 15th: Got orders for American Division; going to Chu Lai. December 17th: Raining a lot. Hard to keep up with time. Hear bombs going off in distance. Will be assigned to company soon.

December 22nd: Raining, getting equipment together.

December 24th: In my company now in LZ Gator; Co. B, 5/46, 198th; pulling guard at night, a long night. Some nights set-up in village; the days are sure hot. Getting to know squad and squad leader.

December 30th: Got a CA out on 26th, going through villages, been hot on some V.C.; we didn't stop much. Been walking every day.

1970

January 1st: We are staying in the area, so we are building up our perimeter. Jets are working over an area not far away. Saw enemy troops in the area. We are wondering where we will be for TET.

January 5th: We have been in a few firefights since we got out here the day after Christmas. Also took same prisoners with safe-conduct passes. Some nights I stay up all night if I

find tunnels with equipment in it and papers. I found a paper with how many weapons the company had. Two days ago we hooked up with armor-18 A.PCs and five tanks. Met a man from Babylon, Long Island, N.Y. We stayed with them for a couple of days. Made more sweeps got some more prisoners, small firefights. We went through My Lai. Last night hooked up at 3:00 in the morning to help support some Marines who were getting hit. Right now I am in an underground bunker writing this letter and it is raining hard. Had a probe about 12:45 throwing grenades, but put out a lot of firepower and then

think I should. We have been taking hundreds of people out of villages and then burning the village. Making free fire zones. Other day nearby I saw two companies of N.V.A. and V.C. We teamed up with A.PCs for support and got some. We walked into an ambush the other day had two killed and two wounded.

January 7th: We got C.A. to a new spot. Out platoon (38) men is on a CAP team with a couple of Marines. At least we don't have to walk. Slept to 9:30, got off of guard at 5:30 in the morning. Working on perimeter during the day. So far we filled 350 bags. Not to bad fill some bags, then stand guard. We built a little sand bagged sleeping position 5 X 5 with a canvass top. Hear a mini gun working and some choppers about a mile from here. My feet getting tired.

January 10th: Still on CAP team, been working with dogs. Today on watch with high powered glasses, saw enemy about one mile away, getting ready to call in something. Pouring down rain again. We are operating in same general area about 10-15 miles south of Chu Lai. Other day worked with armor. So far I have seven CAs to my credit. Just heard, tomorrow we hit some more villages with armor. Going to hit the sack, then guard, then tomorrow.

January 17th: This week we ran into some N.V.A. troops. We made a sweep through some hills and found them. They ran instead of fighting. That night they hit us early about 9:30. Our company (90) men and some armor, we hit back real hard. All we found the next day was blood trails. One of them did give up and gave us some good information. Found tunnels with equipment in it and papers. I found a paper with how many weapons the company had.

Two days ago we hooked up with armor-18 A.PCs and five tanks. Met a man from Babylon, Long Island, N.Y. We stayed with them for a couple of days. Made more sweeps got some more prisoners, small firefights. We went through My Lai. Last night hooked up at 3:00 in the morning to help support some Marines who were getting hit. Right now I am in an underground bunker writing this letter and it is raining hard. Had a probe about 12:45 throwing grenades, but put out a lot of firepower and then



M-60 tank in mire

thing got quiet.

January 18th. Raining an awful lot, we are looking for rockets and day and night. Still on CAP team or near by.

January 22nd, 23rd, and 24th: Been real busy lately. On 22nd, gave five minutes to get ready, someone got into trouble. The chopper was there. They were on a patrol into a village. The village ended up being a V.C. stronghold. It took us all day to get through the village. It finally took air strikes to finally clear the villages. It wasn't easy at all. Both sides took a beating.

January 26th: Trying to get ready for TET.

January 27th: Going back to Gator for bunker guard. Should be back for 10 days.

January 30th: Here at Gator. Very windy and rainy today. Yesterday it was well over 100.

February 3rd and 4th: Pulling heavy guard, mostly 100% alert. Today I have guard from 7:30 am to 5:00 tonight. Should have tonight off. I am finishing letter it is one o'clock in afternoon, one eye is out for enemy, I eye is writing better. I am near 105s so gets loud sometimes. Last night gassed the whole area and threw grenades. Forgot to tell you I have 14 C.A.s right now.

February 6th: We are not doing much except guard. We 100% alert until two o'clock then two up, one down. I have guard now until 7:30 in the evening then get a couple hours of sleep. Truce will be over in a couple of hours.

February 9th: The weather here is similar to Florida but more in extreme. We can hardly ever find any kind of fruit. The enemy get it all.

February 13th: We are on the "stand down" now. Eating good and watching outdoor movies. The 15th



Captured RPG rounds



Resupply for M-60 tank

we go out in the field.

February 17th: The weather very hot; after "stand down" they C.A.ed us into a V.C and N.V.A. R and R center. It has been very rough. We are taking casualties all the time. Mostly mines.

February 20th: We still on a hilltop digging in better. Yesterday went on a long patrol about 10 miles. Weather very hot. Word is our company is going on "pacification". Another word making a village, putting up all kinds of wires. Maybe not much walking. Also tear down half of Gator. Leaving the artillery section.

February 22nd: Talk about us going very close to Laos, time will tell, hear chopper coming in will get letter on chopper.

March 3rd: We have been real busy building on the village. Got mortared for three nights straight, seven got hurt, the blast and concussion was very strong. Out on patrol we walked into an ambush, but we did pretty good.

March 4th: Finally got the bulldozer in clearing; is going much better now. A big chopper brought it in. Soon I am going to be put in for SP/4.

March 8th: Been doing a lot of digging on our fighting positions and sleeping positions. They stopped mortaring us. The last night we had APCs and tanks so the enemy got a good blasting.

March 14th: My tonsils have been giving me some trouble. If they don't stop I will do something about it. Right now I hear APCs and tanks coming I hope they stay awhile.

March 16th: Got my tonsils looked at. They send me to the rear to get treatment. Got shot of penicillin and some pills.

March 17th: Lately we haven't

been getting any kind of mail. Every once and awhile we get replacements for the ones killed or wounded. Our shortest fellow has 8 1/2 months in country. Went swimming in a river by us but the water was very dirty.

March 18th: They took us off of the village. We are going to "Rocket Pocket". Right now in Chu Lai with my tonsils for a few more days, should go back to company soon.

March 22nd: Well we are off the village for sure. Our company has new area of operation. It is from Chu Lai westward to Laos. I heard I made SP/4 also \$60.00 a month more.

March 27th: We are back at LZ Gator bunker guard should be here until April 10th.

April 5th: Haven't got a chance to drive yet; some day maybe I will get a rear job to drive, not going to worry about it. Been hit hard in beginning of April. Got some tanks support, we don't have much of a squad left. LZ Gator, the south Vietnamese took over. Our company moved out west in the jungles.

April 16th: Was only in hospital one day; the hospital was full. Our company is deep in the mountains now. The going is hard, but we keep going. Gets dark very quickly, we set up on the hill tops at night.

April 21st: Our company is about 25 miles from Laos in the jungles. We are trying to keep a check on N.V.A. I am fine, dirty and smelling; water is very scarce.

April 27th: We are on stand down now. Swam in the south China sea and taking lots of showers. I am finally getting clean again. Long time since last hot meal.

May 1st: Our company split up after "stand down". We are in platoon size. At night we split up again and go on ambush. So we don't do much during the day. We heard a plane got shot down.

May 5th: Took new job platoon R.T.O.

May 9th: Still working at night. The other day was bad. We had a man step on a mine; one KIA, one very bad, five hurt; but we have 19 in platoon now. we are short on men.

May 14th: Still in jungle on same operation. Almost got six months over here.

May 18th: We are doing O.K.; quite low on food. Still on same operation.

The terrain is real rough. Up and down mountain and same thing again. We are on a high ridge right now. Start walking early in morning and stop about 4:00 in the afternoon.

May 22nd: Can't believe you haven't got any bonds yet. If I ever get in the rear will find out what happened. If you could send me a small pepper container, mustard, and ketchup. I am getting real tired of Cs or LRRPS. We can't get much out here, because of the terrain and big trees. Still in jungle about 2,300 ft over a valley. Sounds like the Cambodian thing sure is a big success. They really hurt them, captured an awful lot of stuff. Things have been quiet here.

May 28th: We finally got two days off. We had to; everyone was getting sick, could not walk much, we had a couple of dust-offs. We walked all the way in from where we were. We walked all the mountains and valleys to Hwy 1. They said we were the only company in three years in this area. In the mountains it rains quite often, valleys are hot. The enemy is hurting just a little more for food and equipment.

June 1st: I am still platoon radio man. I call in supply and positions, etc. Reason I took it so I can get a rear job.

June 14th: Other night a few trip flares went off. We got right on it. We are suppose to have "stand down" June 21st I sure hope so. Be coming home in six months. My squad leader has a 4" bald spot on his head, they say it is nerves.

June 5th: Our company now on bunker line which is good, hot meals twice a day.

June 7th: Last mission didn't take many pictures because of weight. Sending article on our company last mission.

June 9th: Tomorrow we are moving



Bulldozer clearing jungle brush

out, not exactly sure of what kind of a mission, I just got a map of the area of operation.

June 20th: Been busy, in one day we moved from Grid 3310-3914, going in to "stand down". Walked for 12 hours just stopped for water so we could get to "stand down" (no chopper).

June 21st: Stand down is fine. Sleeping about 14 hours a day, eating and swimming, today is our last day, saw some good movies, Jackie Gleason and Paul Newman; sent home a few odd and ends.

June 26th: Staying very busy. Our company is finding more equipment. The other night a couple of the enemy sneaked into our perimeter. It was so dark you couldn't see six inches. We stayed up all night- back to back. Our platoon the other day found 500 lbs of rice, 15 lbs salt, 100lbs of tea and seven R.P.G. rounds and a few other items. We have a real good dog with us.

July 5th: The past week, the enemy has been on us bad. No sleep or time for anything. I haven't taken my shoes off at all. They hit us day and night plus ground attacks. We got four new guys in our platoon. Be glad to smell something sweet again. We are supposed to go to a fire base soon. Our foxhole was put in for a bronze star- all three of us. We had eight men in our platoon, we now have 12. Our company has 55 men in the field.

July 4th: We are on a firebase now.

We all were in bad shape. They said we had "battle fatigue" so we are getting some good rest. We run some patrols at night. Good food; we are at LZ Fat City. I have a friend (Door-gunner) who said they took troops in 40 choppers to watch some of the trails in Laos. They did away with our platoon, just too small. Talk is we are going to try to do something in August. Looking forward to R and R in Australia.

July 17th: I have no RTO job now, our company has two platoons; company strength (55), so I am a M-79 man. Sure hope we get more men fast. Getting wet all the time either by rain or crossing rivers. So nothing is dry and nothing new.

July 20th: Got good news; my orders for R and R came in. I am going to Sidney, Australia. August 25th to September 1st. We are pulling platoon size ambushes at night. The

V.C and N.V.A. bringing rockets through the area. Hot as always, stay up all night.

July 28th: Still pulling ambushes, not too bad. Getting close to R and R. We have a new A.P.O- 96374; don't know why.

July 30th: We are still pulling ambushes at night. Shaving lotion is too heavy to carry and smell to strong. I don't need anything for my birthday. I have no place to keep it. Getting closer to R and R. Getting down hill now too leave. Good to get the magazine. Package food is always welcome.

August 2nd: We are in Chu Lai now on stand down for three days of rest. We have a new mission coming up. It is going to be but we can make it. Yesterday I met one of the fellows I came over with and went through training with. He said the fellow I went to Washington with lost his left leg. I found out Lamb Jr. died about two months ago; all of us went to Maryland for that month. Life goes on one way or another.

August 8th: Been real hot over here. Sorry to hear Bill is coming over here, he will surely be put to the test mind, body, and soul. It will be a test. Suppose to go on "stand down" august 16th or 17th. My BODY is asking when. Going to eat real good on R and R.

August 12th: We should go to "stand down" 16th or 17th. Still is same valley, where we first came here on August 4th. Yesterday we heard the South Vietnamese army is suppose to replace us. It is hard to believe they will. If it happens it will be the first. After they come out we are suppose to catch the enemy in a vise. The other day we came across an old French fort and trenches. Within two months I should have my order for back in the world. Hope to get East coast.

August 16th: Thinking about R and R. Hope to call, evening of the 26th around 6:00; don't know time difference though.



Armored personnel carrier on guard

August 22nd: I can't believe I am getting out of the country for a little while. Temperatures should be nice in Australia.

September 3rd: Well back in Chu Lai. Had a good time. Sent home a big package for everyone. Also film with me dressed up. You rent everything in Australia, shoes, pants.

September 7th: Well here I am out here, things not bad, just wet. Got a few new guys in, still need a lot more, so maybe I can get out early. My hands got soft on R and R so back to digging foxholes. Getting back to the "old grind again". Got to stop thinking about civilized life again. Sure is hard,



Chinook lifts sling load



Dustoff arrives for wounded

but have too.

September 14th: We are in the same spot as before R and R. Not too bad though. The South Vietnamese left yesterday; don't know why. We are still here. Tonight when I have guard I think one less night. We are suppose to get to "stand down" soon. Going to have a whiskey sour when I get home.

September 19th: Right now our company is in Chu Lai on "stand down". One of my friends just came back from Australia so he gave me 40 negatives, next time in Chi Lai I will get them developed and sent home. The weather is either raining like hell or hot as hell. We still manage to laugh every now and then. We all need practice on laughing.

September 28th: Didn't know the baseball season is almost over. I have a seven day in-country R and R in Da Nang. It is the week of October 15th; so a week out of the field. Will not have much time in the field after that. We are off the grid now, in a N.V.A base area. They have food stored here and there. Not much else to talk about same old stuff. I am trying to keep alert at night. Don't want to mess up.

October 6th: Feeling much better, our last day in Chu Lai. Weather is better, getting good rest, have a bad cold though, but glad that's all I have. Last week got 20 new guys in plus new C.O. and 1st Lt; as a company we are real shaky now. Been working with ARVNs and RF and PF.

October 4th: Things are real lousy lately. Been raining day and night. We are in Chu Lai now. We ate nothing for three days; not much food lately. Been going on a strict diet. Had one of my friends drown right behind me, crossing a river. We are very cold and wet for a long time now. We made no contact with the enemy, but the

weather was against us. Lost my whole ruck sack crossing the river. I was able to save myself and that was all.

October 10th. We had to have a quick C.A. out to help out a company in trouble. Today is the first day we are looking for the Russians. I have 34 C.A.s now. Weather is better, right now on a high ridge line. At night it is so pretty. We can see Chu Lai and Fat City with the lights on. It looks like civilization. I feel O.K. kind of dirty and unshaven but fine. Walking a lot looking for Russians, find some stuff and signs. I found a pistol the other day. I want to get out of this place, getting short now. Our mission shouldn't be to bad. Still looking for some Russian advisers, time will tell. The weather for now is better. Suppose to go to a two week school soon. Contains calling in artillery, map reading, ambushes. At least two weeks out of the field. Been doing most of it already that I am going to school for. Getting short after school; asked me if I could "walk point" the rest of my time, with my experience, I told him I was too tired and to short. He said he would make sure I got more rank.

October 15th: Came into Chu Lai for school. Doing good at school. It is really pretty easy. Should get out around October 30th. Trying to get a job at a fire base, somewhere pulling guard. Sure is nice to have good food and rest. Physically and mentally there is a lot less strain. I am the shortest man in the company now. The CO asked again about "walk point", but I said no.

October 17th: Doing good in school, was told today, I didn't get my bunker job. Getting shorter.

October 22nd: Doing good in school. Some marching but not bad. Good food and sleep. Got orders for air medal. Some of my sores are healing up good. Time is moving on.

October 26th: Almost done with school. They are going to hook me up. A month ago I put in for my seven days in-country R and R in Da Nang. So I am going to take it. It starts Nov 1st. I am going to stay with my friend in Chu Lai. He has a rear job at a mess hall in Chu Lai. I am pulling every string possible to keep out of the field.

October 30th: Finished with school. Did good. They want to hook me up

but I am taking my in country R and R. I am going to my friends hooch down the road. Been raining a lot and real windy, but I am just about dry.

November 1st: I got a drop, I am not sure exactly when. I will be leaving Vietnam sometime in November. It seems everyone who is leaving Vietnam in early December got a drop.

November 5th: just about done with my R and R. Eating and sleeping in a dry hooch. First sergeant wants to hook me up to the field. We kind of went around and around talking. Next day my orders came down to leave Vietnam. I went from Chu Lai to Cam Ranh Bay.

P.S. It was an experience I will never forget.

- CA combat assault
- VC Viet Cong
- NVA North Vietnamese Army
- APC armored personnel carrier
- R and R rest and recuperation
- CO commanding officer
- Co company
- CAP civil action program
- 105s 105 mm howitzer
- RTO radio-telephone operator
- Cs C-ration meals
- LRRPS freeze dried meals
- RPG rocket propelled grenade
- LZ landing zone
- M-79 grenade launcher
- ARVN Army of Republic of Vietnamese
- RF regional forces
- PF popular forces



Quad 50 battery on gun truck

Through My Eyes: A Story of Hope

By Bob G. Witworth (c) 2012 – Sixth Of A Series
Continued from Jan-Feb-Mar 2020 Americal Journal

Chapter 11 Death's Sting

We had been in the area for several weeks and had checked out most of the villages, so we received orders to head back to base camp. After arriving at LZ Bronco, we headed for the mountains to the west toward Laos, with fully loaded rucksacks. The mountains went up to an elevation of 5,000 feet and were covered with jungle. At night, with three layers of green canopy over us, I couldn't see my hand when I touched my face. Even in the daytime, the layers of tree branches overhead made it darker than usual. It was so thick that we wouldn't be able to clear a landing area for our supply choppers to get down if we needed them.

We now had been in-country for only a little over a month. It was our first time going to the mountains and we didn't know what to expect, but we knew we were more likely to find the NVA there. We walked most of the day in the heat and set up our perimeter the first night in the foothills.

We learned early on that when we looked for Charlie all day, it was much too tiring to dig a foxhole and pull guard, only to take off early in the morning and do it all over again. We were too beat. However, if we suspected trouble, it would be worth digging in for the night. That night we were unsure of our surroundings, so we all dug foxholes just in case.

Our platoon worked up and down the mountains for several days. Sometimes we found a trail and walked on it for a while. One trail had trees on both sides with the bark rubbed off up to about six or seven feet high. We found large heaps of dung up three feet high next to the trail. Something really big had been here.

Surprisingly, while moving through the jungle one day, we ran into Rusty's platoon. I hadn't seen my California friend much since we'd left Hawaii. It was kind of amazing to come across him way out in the middle of nowhere. We reminisced about our time spent together at Fort Polk and how much we enjoyed the humidity. We talked so long we didn't notice our platoons had moved out without us. I, for one, moved very quickly to catch up. Being lost once was more than enough.

The platoon wasn't very far ahead of me. We made it through the thick jungle and came out into an open brushy area and headed down toward a creek. As we made our way down the hill, we saw a clearing in the brush and a hole in the ground. The hole was about two feet in diameter and appeared to go down about 18 feet before getting a little wider at the bottom. Someone dropped a grenade into it. Lt. John said he wanted the hole checked out after lunch. He sent a squad-sized patrol out along the creek to check for NVA; then we broke for lunch.

While we were still eating, I noticed David, the guy with the starlight scope, heading over to the hole. Since he was one of the soldiers who had recently found the VC in a cave, maybe he wanted to find a cache of weapons and ammo, or perhaps he thought it was a spider hole that was used by VC snipers.

After a few of us finished lunch, we went to see how David was doing. He had lowered himself into the hole with a small cord. We gathered at the opening to wait.

"Hey buddy, are you about done down there?" Someone hollered into the darkness.

"I don't have any strength; I can't pull myself up!" He called out weakly.

He must have passed out then; we couldn't get another response.

We immediately started looking around for rope and realized we didn't have any. We were getting very concerned and grabbed the only thing we had to use, our pistol belts and the slings on our rifles. We rapidly stripped the gear off of the belts and fastened them together the best we could. Don, who was close to David and had been with him at the cave when the VC were discovered, quickly sat down so we could tie one end of the belts around his ankles. He then rolled over headfirst into the dark hole. We held the belts and let him down.

I didn't know Don well, but found out later he grew up in a mining family in Tennessee. At the time I was amazed at his lack of hesitation heading into the inky blackness.

Soon we could hear his muffled voice.

"I have him! get us up!"

Three or four of us began quickly pulling hand over hand. Finally Don's feet appeared at the top of the opening.

We had them!

I was touching Don's boot with my fingertips, but as we grabbed for him, the pistol belts and slings broke apart and both men fell to the bottom of the hole with a thud.

The lieutenant got on the radio and called for a chopper to come out with a long rope. Word came back that it would take two hours before the chopper could arrive, so we set up a perimeter and waited.

The patrol that had been sent out earlier came back in and said they had spotted NVA down along the creek. Things were starting to stack up against us.

As we sat, a loud shrill scream came from the top of the high hill we had come down. It didn't sound human—it sounded weird and unearthly.

Was that what rubbed the bark off those trees and left huge dung piles?

I was already shook-up. This day wasn't going well.

It seemed like forever before the chopper arrived. When it did, it centered over the hole about 25 feet up, dropped down a rope, and hovered there. The rope was quickly tied to another soldier's ankles, and he was lowered into the hole. Dust and debris were blowing all over the place and we feverishly worked to retrieve our guys. As Don as pulled up to he waiting chopper, he slowly rose past us, feet-first.

"Lordy, Lordy, Lordy," the sarge heard him say; but to those of us watching, he looked unconscious.

Next, David, throwing up, was pulled up and out of the hole.

As soon as the men who had been in the hole were on board the chopper, it headed away and quickly disappeared behind a hill.

It was hard to tell exactly what condition David and Don

were in, but we had high hopes for them. This bad situation could get worse. All the noise and commotion from the hovering Huey and our rescue efforts had made us vulnerable. If Charlie was watching, it wouldn't be long before he took advantage of our chaos.

Hours later, word came over the radio and spread through the platoon that both David and Don were dead. The news affected me in ways I would never understand. I felt like someone had reached inside me and ripped my heart out.

Death's sting caught me off guard as the reality of what had happened hit me. We had been so close to saving them—even touching Don—when the belt buckle broke with that terrible snapping sound. The sight of our arms and hands stretching out, frantically grabbing, as we helplessly watched David and Don fall back down that dark hole wouldn't leave me.

I wanted to go away somewhere—to hide from everyone, but that luxury was not to be had because of the danger of being in enemy territory.

I had high respect for the courage those guys showed going down after David. I didn't know how the others felt, and I didn't ask. It was too overwhelming for me to talk about.

In the morning we got word there had been a mistake and Don wasn't dead, but was in bad shape. This news helped me feel a little better, but that inner ache was still there. Soon orders came for us to move out.

It didn't make sense to me. I wondered how anybody could ask me to continue to fight a war when I hurt so badly. I was learning the fact that war had nothing to do with feelings, and that I had better start changing how I dealt with them. That was when I began forcing my feelings as far away as possible. I couldn't make good decisions or function well if my feelings lived too near the surface.

Chapter 12 Ambushed

With heavy hearts, we loaded our rucksacks on our backs and started back up the hill the same way we had come. We eventually learned what had happened with Don. He had been pronounced dead after he was taken off the medevac chopper, toe-tagged, and put in a body bag. While he was being wheeled away to the morgue, for some reason, perhaps to double-check his dog tags, the body bag was reopened. He made some slight movement and was checked again. They discovered he was alive. He was sent to Japan for a while before going back to the states. He had become blind, but thankfully it was only temporary. He never went back to combat duty.

The jungle was hot and humid, and it was a real workout packing weapons and gear to climb up, up, up a mountain, only to go down, down, down and then back up again. We climbed through the mountains and ended up farther in the jungle, still looking for the North Vietnamese Army.

The NVA wanted to fight only on their terms, when they really believed they could take us. This often meant that we had unknowingly taken on an overwhelming NVA force. This time, however, word was that we were to meet up with the rest of the company and become part of a big blocking force so we could get a large unit of NVA surrounded. Then they

would have to fight us because there would be no other way they could avoid being encircled.

We found our company deep in the jungle-covered mountains back toward Laos. Once there, we settled in for the night by setting up our part of the large perimeter, and started pulling guard. Again, the jungle was so dark I could touch my face without being able to see my fingers. In the morning we saw a squad of guys headed down the mountain to fill canteens with water from a creek far below. Ben, a rifleman from First Platoon, and I were lucky enough to talk one of them into filling our canteens for us while we waited up on the mountain.

I had gotten to know Ben earlier in Hawaii. He was one of those fellas everyone loved. He played football at home and was very strong. Once, after mail call, I saw him with a pile of opened letters from home. Most of them had a picture of a beautiful girl inside.

Wow! How did he pull off getting so much fan mail?

Really, there was no trick to it. Everyone liked him. He had red hair and freckles and loved to have a great time. He also enjoyed winning.

We were both in a good mood that day. After all, we had just finagled a water delivery at a time when water was hard to come by.

While we waited, we talked. One of the things he mentioned surprised me.

"I am really excited about tomorrow," he said.

"What on earth for?" I wanted to know.

"Because I can hardly stand waiting until we catch up with the NVA," he answered. "I want in on the fight! I am ready to take them on!"

He seemed to have no fear. It wasn't like that at all and the possibility of a big gun fight worried me a lot.

It wasn't that I was afraid of guns. As kids, my friends and I had plenty of them. One of the ways we hunted rabbits when we were old enough to drive was by sitting on the front fender of a car. Two of us would be out on the fenders while someone drove along a dirt road in the country. If a rabbit got up, we were ready to start shooting. Sometimes it got a little wild when the rabbit sped up and the driver gassed the old '54 Ford, especially if the fender paint had been waxed recently. Rabbits were good at making sharp, high-speed turns. When that happened, the driver hit the brakes and turned. Often doing 30 to 40 miles an hour, we went flying off the fender, rolling onto the dirt, gun and all. I knew what some people thought, but we'd shot a lot of rabbits that way.

It had been boring in the little podunk town where I grew up, so we stayed busy doing crazy stuff.

Just after I turned 18, one of my buddies and I bought ourselves pistols and drove out to the country to try out our new guns. It only took about a half hour before I'd shot myself in the leg. We hurried back into town to see the doc. He fixed up my leg okay and I went home. My dad had not been happy about what I'd done, but he could see that I had learned a valuable lesson about the business end of a firearm. That lesson, even learned the wrong way, had given me great respect for firearms. In Vietnam, more than anywhere, I needed that respect.

Ben and I talked for hours before the guys came back with our water. When they finally arrived, Ben went to his platoon and I headed back to mine. As it got dark, we heard heavy artillery rounds flying overhead. This continued all night long. Our firebases were shelling where they thought the NVA would be. I was worried about the next day and the possibility of my first meeting with a large enemy force.

My mother had sent me a little Bible with a metal plate inside the cover. I guess she hoped it would help stop a bullet someday. I had been reading the Psalm where King David wrote that a thousand might fall at his side and ten thousand at his right hand, but that no harm would come near him because God would protect him. I read that with contempt and skepticism. To think that God would watch over us, or me, for the next few days, just seemed impossible.

In the morning, Second Platoon was sent out on patrol to see if we could locate or make contact with the NVA. Ben was walking point for First Platoon, and they headed off to an area where the mountains were high and the jungle so thick that you could hardly make your way through it. An ambush could be around any corner or right in front of you and you would never see it until it was too late.

The way we were trained to deal with an ambush was brutal. If you were ambushed and not killed or wounded too badly, you were to turn toward the enemy, fire your weapon, and walk into the oncoming bullets—shooting everyone and everything. But usually we would hit the ground and start shooting from there. If you had any brains and wanted to keep them, you learned to eat dirt fast.

In an ambush, the thing you really want to do is run away, but that's your worst choice because you're a great target to shoot in the back. Although it was horrible, facing the ambush was your best choice and had to be made instantly or you were dead. The problem was, a soldier had to be hardened with experience in order to be able to make that choice. He had to look straight at death and do something about it without hesitation.

When an ambush goes off, it's loud, fast, and confusing. With the firepower that we had, an ambush would last only seconds, with hundreds of bullets being fired. If the point man was caught in an L-shaped ambush where he was being shot at from the front and the side, his chance of getting out alive was slim to none.

Shortly after we started our patrol through the mountainous jungle, we heard the sound of automatic weapons fire from the direction First Platoon had headed. The gunfire didn't last long, but it sure sounded like contact had been made with the enemy. We continued our patrol into the afternoon and made no enemy contact.

When we returned to our company's perimeter later that day, we heard that Ben had walked into an ambush the NVA had set off and was killed instantly. The terrible news shook us all.

If someone as tough as Ben could be gone so quickly, what would the rest of us do to make it through this war?

I found a spot on the side of a small hill to sit and wait until his platoon returned. When I saw one of his buddies come walking in on the trail just below me, I called out to him.

"John, what happened?"

John was a tough guy, but when he looked up at me I saw more pain in his eyes than I had ever seen.

He didn't need to say a word.

We all had suddenly lost a wonderful friend and the meaning of war was digging painfully deeper inside all of us.

The shelling continued that night and I knew that in the morning we would be on the move again. It was very hard to put Ben's death aside and continue on. Self-pity because of what we were facing wasn't going to help. Each man had to find a way to deal with his feelings and move on. For most of us, that meant pushing them way down inside and beginning to build a hard wall of protection around them.

The war continued despite our loss. There was still a large force of enemy soldiers that needed to be dealt with sooner or later.

The next morning, Second Platoon went on patrol deeper into the mountains, headed in the same direction that the artillery had landed the night before. After winding through the jungle and mountains for several hours, we found a large NVA base camp that was well hidden under triple-canopy jungle. The camp was deserted; no one was there and it looked as though they had left only a day or two before. The camp could have housed hundreds or maybe a thousand NVA or more. There were barracks, cafeterias, and other kinds of structures, all made from natural materials found there in the jungle.

In the camp I found a backpack, filled with maps and other information, hidden in a tree. I had no idea why it had been left behind. As we kept searching throughout the camp, I found some simple drawings that had been colored in with crayons. They looked like school children had made them. Along with the drawings was a New York Times newspaper with the front pages showing war protests back home; in essence, supporting the very enemy that was killing us and invading the country we were here to help.

Why have we been sent hereto fight and die in this war if our country back home isn't going to support us?

Regardless of what I thought, this war would continue whether these issues were worked out or not. The Times newspaper article reminded me of the Civil War, when newspaper propaganda was turning the public against the war effort. Union General Ulysses S. Grant knew if he didn't finish the war within a few months, the negative publicity would cause the North to lose. Now, here it was happening right before my eyes.

During our operation the NVA managed to slip away from us without much contact. The nights I had spent worrying about a big fight came to nothing. I was learning that just because I worried about something, didn't make it happen. A few nights earlier I had held God's Word in contempt for no real reason; I still needed to learn more about faith and trust before I judged it helpless in a time of fear.

[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.]

LOCATOR REQUESTS

Locator Requests

Looking for: Information on action involving my father, Thomas A. Savage. He was a 1st Lieutenant when he went to the South Pacific after OCS training. He was a replacement in the Americal Division arriving in the South Pacific sometime between late November 1943 and early January 1944. He was wounded on January 20, 1944. He made it back to the states in April after the amputation of his arm had difficulty healing. I'm trying to learn more about the details on the day he was wounded. I'm specifically trying to determine the company he was in. Based on details in the book "Orchids In The Mud" he was most likely with company B, F, or G but I'm not certain. His Army documentation doesn't state any detail about what part of the Americal Division he was in. I'm hoping you can help. Contact: Dan Savage; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information about Alvin Justice. He was my great grandfather and was in 182nd Inf. Co. C. Contact: Justin Lambert; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information about my father. He was a corporal in Co. D, 132nd Infantry. I wondered where I could find more information regarding his time in the service. Contact: David See; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information on my deceased father, Jose P. Pacheco, who fought at Bougainville, Luzon, Guadalcanal, Leyte Pass, and during the occupation of Japan, etc. He was awarded a Silver Star and Bronze Star and other commendations for his service. He was a first sergeant and Scout. Contact: Mike Pacheco; [REDACTED].



Looking for: Information on my Dad, Arnold Lee Fant, WW2 in the Phillipine Islands. He was first assigned to the 615th Engineer Base Equipment Company and arrived on Leyte, PI on 29 March 1945. He was in country for 8 months and 22 days. Contact: Richard Fant; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information of my father, now deceased, Hubert "Jack" John Griffiths. He was, I believe, a mess Sergeant and very proud of his part. I am now 63 and preparing information for our grandson and family. One action that I remember my mom spoke of was when his company went in to take out the Japanese and only three men from the company were left. From New Caledonia they went to Guadalcanal. This was the

Looking for: Info about my uncle, Salvatore DeMarco, who fought in the Americal Division on Guadalcanal. That's all the info I have. Contact: Sal DeMarco; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Ralph Hernandez, my best friend in Vietnam. We were in C 3/21 196th. We served together until he was wounded and sent home. He was wounded in the Battle at Tam Ky in

first of "three times they went over the beach" (Dad's words). They relieved the 3rd Marine Division on Bougainville. I took this to be the second "wet" beach landing. The final landing was on Leyte/Cebu." I'd like to confirm this and if one of these was where his company was wiped out. Also any awards, campaigns, or qualifications would also be helpful to know. A side note, like many service men during these times, my mom and dad were married on a six day furlough, honeymooned on the train down to California, stepped off the train and didn't see each other for 33 months. Contact: Walt Griffiths; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Bronze Star recipient David J. Berkeley, SSG from Mass served in Guadalcanal in WWII. His daughter has asked me to attempt getting information for her. Contact: Bertrand Chouinard, MSG (USA Ret); [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information about my grandfather's Presidential Unit Citation for service in Guadalcanal. He never spoke of his service, but I would like to get more information related to his time serving. Contact: Phil Taggart; [REDACTED].

Looking for: I found the following photo labeled 2d platoon, C 4/21. It was taken from a Huey landing on San Juan Hill about March 1971. Can anyone identify himself or others in this photo? Contact: Magdaline Volaitis; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information. I was with D, 3/21, 196 from September 1970 to February 1971, and then with E Co from March 1971 to September 1971. I was one of nine soldiers wounded or killed in a night mortar attack on October 26, 1970. I would like to hear from anyone from those units. Contact: Cornelius Osborn; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information about the circumstances surrounding the death of my friend, Pfc. David A. Hill of Leominster, MA; KIA Feb. 13, 1969 near Duc Pho. Assigned to 11th LIB. Killed by small arms fire. Body recovered, buried in Leominster, MA. Contact: Steve White; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Anyone who knew by brother, Sp5 Floyd "Doc" Talley, a medic in D Co 1/46th Inf 196th LIB at LZ Professional from 13 May-6 Dec 1969 when he was wounded trying to save fellow soldiers. Also served at 27th Surgical Hospital in Chu Lai where he died from wounds 8 Dec 1969. Contact: Wade Talley; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Anyone who from third platoon, C Co, 3/21st, 196th. Contact: Steven Nagle; [REDACTED].

May 1969. Contact: Paul Jude Reamer; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Information about two POW letters written from Don Sparks, served with Americal Div. Capt Smith (probable first name Frank) was C O of C Co, 5/46th Inf, approx time frame May 1970 and would have knowledge of the letters. The Lt who actually took them off a NVA courier was killed four days later. Don Sparks is still listed as "Last Known Alive". Contact: Larry McElreavy; [REDACTED].

Looking for: A man in F troop 17th cav with the nickname Westee for my father who was his gunner / TC. 69-70 quang tin province. I think his name was Reggie Westel Hinson. Westee was my father's badly injured tank driver. He barely made it to the bird alive. My father is Galen Fish. He doesn't know I'm doing this. Contact: Kenneth C. Fish III; [REDACTED].

Looking for: Mike Smith of the 23rd Admin Co [AGDR1-2] Americal Division. I know Mike lived in Battle Creek, Michigan. I was his pen pal while he served in Vietnam and I would like news of him. Mike was there in 1970 - was wounded and then became a clerk. Two of his buddies were Michael Leidlen and Dennis Wingfield. Contact: Magdaline Volaitis; [REDACTED].

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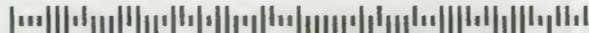
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