



October • November • December **2021**

# AMERICAL JOURNAL

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



UNDER THE SOUTHERN CROSS



**Looking for:** Roger Applewhite, Karl Harris, White, and Breckinridge. We served in 3/18 Artillery, 1969-1970. Contact: Richard Thompson; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Emergency room nurse assigned to 91st Evac Hospital, Chu Lai, Feb20-April 1971. She was from Ohio, a captain with short stature and black hair in a tight bun. The surgeon who operated on me was a Dr. Rinehart. When I left ER the first time she stopped to visit. When I started to hemorrhage she shouted to the night nurse. Then I blacked out a second time and went back to ER. Had this nurse not stopped when she did I'm positive I would have died right there. We corresponded by letters but they were lost due to time. Contact: Joe Kudary; [REDACTED]



**Looking for:** Veterans of A/4/31 Infantry in 69-71 who served with Robert Ison. He served with LT Jerome Frazelle (KIA). Also with Stan Rickerson, Chuck Schafer, Jake Boyle and Brian Tucker. We plan to attend the 196 LIB 2022 reunion in Gettysburg. Contact: Tammy Sherman; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who served with my father, Glenn Edward Nicholson, E Co., 26th Engineering Battalion (Combat), at Hill 35 in Chu Lai, October 1967 to October 1968. Contact: Shelia Benson; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Former members of the mortar squad of the 3rd platoon, C Troop, 1/1 Cav., who served at Hawk Hill between August 1967 and August 1968. We toured the countryside in track C-38. I was the driver, Heinz Hamelberg was our squad leader. Heinz has passed away and I dearly wish to organize a Squad Reunion for old times sake. Contact: Albinas (Al) Gaidys at [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Contact information or just a roster of guys who served in Co. D, 2/1 Inf., 196th LIB, 1969-71. Contact: Oscar Truitt; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who served with PFC Donald E. Biesecker, 11th LIB, 1969. He was wounded in late 1969 and lost half of his right hand. I found 1/9/70 issue of Southern Cross - Americal Division Newsletter that had section of "Awards & Decorations". Don was listed for Soldier's Medal and have recently learned he earned the Bronze Star too. It was never discussed in my family. I could never bring myself to ask him and may have to wait until we meet again on the other side. Don passed away a few weeks ago of bone cancer. Contact: Kyle Sturz; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information on my grandfather who served in Americal Division in WWII. I know he received a Bronze Star and a Purple Heart. He was 1st Lt William T. Plummer Sr., Anti Tank Commander 1524, 221st Field Artillery Battalion. Contact: Jonathan Plummer; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information about my father, Ronald Sandvik, 182nd Infantry, Co. G, Americal Div. I am certain he was stationed in Yokohama with US occupation forces at the end of the war. Contact: Ron Sandvik; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Information about my father, Anthony "Hap" Hagopian. He was a Staff Sergeant out of the Nation Guard in Boston in WWII. Contact: John Hagopian; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** My fathers military records with the Americal Division in the South Pacific in WW2. He was awarded the Bronze Star with a V and an Oakleaf. I am looking for the official citations involved. He was 1LT Thomas J Burbine D.O.B July 3, 1918. Contact: Mark S Burbine; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Jimmy Wilson, Charlie Co., 5th/46th. He was a E-5 and was in country during March 1968 and at least thru September 1968. He was originally from Houston, TX area. Contact: Dale Melton; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** A veteran I believed named James Barrigar, who served with the Division in VN around 1968. I'm researching an article on his father MSGT Francis B. Barrigar USMC, Navy Cross recipient in WWII. They served together in Vietnam (have PR photos). Contact: Charles G. Ikins; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who was in the mortar company of the 196th infantry in viet nam maybe 30 miles west of chu lai from June 1968 to June 1969. Contact: Charles Rawls; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Macintosh. My father is retired army. He is looking for a friend named Macintosh who served in Vietnam '70-71. He served with 1/20th Inf. My dad does not remember his first name. Contact: Rob Cheadle; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who served with my dad, Jerry Austin Hayes. He was Americal Division, infantry, sharpshooter and combat medic. He was in Vietnam when I was born January 23, 1971. Contact: Ray Gande; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Anyone who was with AVEL in Chu Lai, 1968-1969. Contact: Curt Pocklington; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Any vet who was on Hill 76. I was with 3/18th Arty and operated the flash OP. The 196th or 198th LIB also had a mortar platoon on the hill. Contact: John Cass; johnecass@gmail.com.

**Looking for:** Anyone who knew my uncle, Sterling Price Kersh, in Vietnam, 1/20th Infantry, possibly Co. C. Contact: Bradley Reeves; [REDACTED]

**Looking for:** Sgt Jimmy Wilson, served with Charlie Co., 5/46th Infantry, during the summer of 1969. He was originally from the Houston, Texas area. We are still looking for others from the same company as we have a reunion every year. Contact: Dale Melton; [REDACTED]

2022 Bi-annual ADVA Elections

The Americal Division Veterans Association will hold its bi-annual election in 2022. The bylaws define certain activities related to the election and voting. See the text below for selected details from the ADVA Constitution and Bylaws.

Bylaws  
Article IV


Nominations and Elections

Section 1. Nominating Committee:

- A. A Nominating Committee comprised of not less than five (5) members appointed by the National Commander and approved by the National Executive Council.
- B. The Nominating Committee shall present a slate of elective officers to the National Adjutant by February 1 in the year of the election. The elective officers are (1) National Commander, (2) Senior Vice-Commander, (3) Junior Vice-Commander, (4) Executive Council Members. The National Adjutant shall verify the eligibility of the Nominated members.
- C. Further nominations for elective officers shall be submitted to the National Adjutant no later than February 1 in the year of the election. Nominations of candidates for elective officers made in this manner must be endorsed by fifteen (15) members in good standing. The National Adjutant shall determine the good standing of the candidates and endorsing members and forward these results to the Nominating Committee..
- D. The balloting for the election of officers shall be held every two years in even numbered years and shall be at the direction of the Nominating Committee. The election ballot may also contain any questions to be decided by a vote of the membership. The balloting and tabulation of ballots shall be held between March 1 and May 31 of the election year. The results of the ballot count and all returned ballots shall be provided to the National Adjutant within seven (7) days of the tabulation.
- E. Members nominated for elective officers shall have their names drawn for position on the ballot.
- F. The plurality of votes cast by members voting the election shall decide the election.
- G. The term of office for elective officers shall begin on July 1 following the election. The term of office for appointed officers shall begin immediately upon appointment by the National Commander.

Section 1. Notifications:

- A. The Nominating Committee shall notify each nominee of the intention of placing the nominee, including those made from the field, on the ballot. The Nominating Committee shall ascertain that the nominee agrees to be on the ballot and will serve the post before placing the nominee on the ballot.
- B. The Nominating Committee shall notify each nominee,



**Cover:** Left to right: "Ace" (Asao) Kusuda, Shigeru Yamashita, and "Mac" (Nobuo) Nagata. New Caledonia, 30 August 1942. Story on page 14.

the National Commander, and the Chairman of the Executive Council of the results of the ballot count within fifteen (15) days of the tabulation of the ballots.

Bylaws  
Article II  
National Officers

Section 1. National Executive Council:


D. The term of office for each member elected to the Executive Council shall be for two (2) years. A member shall be eligible for re-election not to exceed four (4) consecutive years in office. After four consecutive years in office followed by a break of two years, a member shall be eligible for re-election. These term limits shall include chapter representatives serving on the Executive Council.

Section 3: National Officers (Elective):

- A. The elective officers of the Association shall consist of the following: 1. Commander, 2. Senior Vice-Commander, 3. Junior Vice-Commander.
- B. The term of office for each elective officer shall be for two (2) years. After a break of two years, an elective officer shall be eligible for re-election.

Constitution  
Article III  
Amendments

Section 1: This Constitution and Bylaws may be amended through the use of the official ballot at the bi-annual election, by a majority vote of the individual active members in good standing.  
Section 2: Amendments shall be made in writing and submitted to the National Adjutant who shall forward the proposals to the Executive Council. The Executive Council shall study the proposed amendments and may make recommendations to the membership as to whether the amendments should be approved or rejected.  
Section 3: Amendments to these Bylaws must be submitted not later than November 15th of the year preceding the bi-annual election.



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

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

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From the National Adjutant

By Roger Gilmore

Our deadlines for submitting Americal Journal articles are falling a little earlier than in the past, so membership statistics listed in this article are gathered through the end of August.

A very low number of Americal Division veterans joined the Association over the past three months as annual pays – only two. The positive news is we did have quite a few new Life members added to the roster. A total of forty-three new Life members are on the roster as of August 31, 2021. Nine are first time members who joined with a Life membership payment. The remainder are annual pay members who upgraded to Life.

The new Life membership rate structure based on age was published in the last issue of the Journal and is appealing to many annual pay members who are upgrading. If you are an annual pay member now, you can upgrade to Life at any time. No need to wait until your annual pay date is up for renewal. Editor-In-Chief Gary Noller's recruiting initiative is still reaping rewards as over half those joining the Association for the first time are sponsored by Gary. A tip of the hat to members Zeddie Bell, Robert Barth and PNC David W. Taylor for sponsoring new members during this reporting period.

For those annual pay members who want to remain as annual, some information regarding next year's renewal periods. Currently, the annual pay renewal periods are January, May and September as specified in the ADVA by laws. With the number of annual pay members declining in each renewal period – due to non-renewals, deaths, and upgrades to Life – I am considering consolidating the annual pay renewal periods to twice a year. This will better balance the workload – for me and for Assistant Finance Officer Ronald Ellis. If this is done, I will have to shift renewal periods for some members. If your annual dues will be affected by a shift in renewal date, you will receive a post card from me advising your new annual pay renewal date.

The following comments are housekeeping items for adjutant duties. Dues payment information from member checks Ron Ellis receives come to me so I can update the roster for your dues payment status. Occasionally, I receive check information with a name I cannot identify in the ADVA roster or dropped member file. When this happens, I assume the individual mailed a check for new membership but did not send a new member application form. I send the individual a new member application with instructions for filling out the form. Sometimes the check is written by a friend or other family member of the ADVA member, and I cannot match a member name to the check. If someone other than yourself is paying your dues, please have them write your name in the memo line of the check.

The second item pertains to adjutant correspondence. Annual dues renewal notices and annual dues reminder post cards are mailed out of the Richardson, Texas post office. We get a few members claiming to have paid up on national dues but are looking at regional chapter dues when stating they are current. I know the Eastern Regional Chapter and Far West Chapter are active in their programs and continue to collect annual or life dues. Please be sure to check your records carefully when receiving dues notices from the national adjutant office.

Annual pay renewals for September 2021 were mailed the last week of August 2021. If your renewal date is September 2021 and you have not received a dues renewal notice, contact me and I will mail another. Your annual pay due date is on the back cover (beside your name). Some annual pay members with renewal dates in year 2020 have yet to mail in dues payments. Please do so asap. If you did pay and think we have not updated the roster for a recent dues payment, contact me and I will research it.

I'm still receiving a lot of address changes. I do appreciate everyone's timely notice of move when relocating. Down the line it saves a lot of work for PNC David Taylor and me. If your move is seasonal (i.e., Snowbirds) please confirm you are changing address temporarily. It's that time of year when some members up north move south.

New Annual Pay Members

**Curt Pocklington**  
Avn – Chu Lai  
San Tan Valley, AZ  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Richard J. Thompson**  
3/18th Arty  
Columbus, OH  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

New Paid Life Members

**Charles Adkins**  
523rd Sig Bn Co A  
Abita Springs, LA  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**William E. Broderick**  
1/82nd Arty HHB  
Loami, IL  
★ Zeddie Bell

**William F. Gordon**  
D/4/3rd Inf  
Coto De Caza, CA  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Douglas J. Greenlaw**  
3/21st Inf  
Greenville, SC  
★ Self

**Donald J. O'Rourke**  
Americal Combat Ctr  
Marshall, IL  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Alfred Ryder**  
6/11th Arty  
Riverview, FL  
★ Self

**Stephen Shanholtzer**  
Americal Combat Ctr  
Springfield, MO  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Gary D. Smith**  
E/4/21st Inf  
Richland, MO  
★ Robert W. Barth

**Hugh E. Washer**  
4/21st Inf  
Coventry Twnshp, OH  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Raymond A. Biathrow**  
1/6th Inf  
Nashua, NH  
★ Mark Deam

**Douglas G. Black**  
A/1/46th Inf  
Albuquerque, NM  
★ Fred Cowburn

**James C. Boetel**  
D/5/46th Inf  
Orange, CA  
★ PNC Larry Swank

**Eugene Bouley, Jr.**  
23rd MP Co  
Milledgeville, GA  
★ Rich Merlin

**Frank Brennan**  
B/1/20th Inf  
Southington, CT  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Theodore R. Bull**  
F Trp 8th Cav (57th TC)  
San Luis Obispo, CA  
★ PNC Rollie Castronova

**Bill D. Campbell**  
198th LIB  
Indianola, IA  
★ PNC Larry Swank

**Loyd T. Carr, III**  
N/A  
Tustin, Ca  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Tom Dube**  
3/16th Arty Btry B  
Patten, ME  
★ Roger Gilmore

**John P. Farley**  
17th Cav H Trp  
Warminster, PA  
★ Robert Short

**Robert C. Gast**  
C/5/46th Inf  
Alden, NY  
★ PNC David W. Taylor

**Danny George**  
1/82nd Arty Btry A  
Brownsville, OR  
★ PNC Rollie Castronova

**Kenneth W. Gibson**  
4/31st Inf  
DeRidder, LA  
★ James Tarver

**Cornelius Grace**  
11th LIB  
Charlotte, NC  
★ PNC Ronald R. Ellis

**Sam Hixson**  
C/1/46th Inf  
Spencerville, OH  
★ Ron Shook

**John P. Iappini**  
4/21st Inf  
Boston, MA  
★ John L. Insani

**Gary Johnsen**  
123rd Avn Bn  
Lebanon, PA  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Frederick C. Keihn**  
55th Arty G Btry  
S. Abington Twnshp, PA  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**William H. Leightenheimer**  
635th MI Det  
Tucson, AZ  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Dennis Loop**  
E/1/52nd Inf  
Spring, TX  
★ PNC Jay Flanagan

**James C. Martinson**  
4/21st Inf  
Puyallup, WA  
★ PNC Ronald R. Ellis

**Joseph McCourt**  
A/1/46th Inf  
Scotch Plains, NJ  
★ PNC Rollie Castronova

**John S. McDaniel**  
B/1/46th Inf  
River Ridge, LA  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**John C. Mosely**  
Div HDQ (G-1)  
Brinson, GA  
★ Self

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

**Dennis O'Connor**  
D/1/52nd Inf  
Cincinnati, OH  
★ Bob Urban

**Michael J. O'Connor**  
D/4/3rd Inf  
San Pedro, CA  
★ Les Hines

**Joseph Pascale**  
C/1/6th Inf  
N Massapequa, NY  
★ Mark Deam

**Francis A. Patsy**  
11th LIB 6th Spt Bn  
Sterling, VA  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Richard W. Sauer**  
198th LIB  
Haddonfield, NJ  
★ Self

**Paul R. Smith**  
E/1/6th Inf  
Monticello, AR  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

**Dwight Sypolt**  
B/2/1st Inf  
Nashville, TN  
★ PNC Ronald R. Ellis

**Harold H. Waterman**  
HHC/3/1st Inf  
Dickeyville, WI  
★ Bill McLaughlin

**Robert C. Winstead**  
A/3/1st Inf  
Sandia, TX  
★ PNC Gary L. Noller

TAPS LISTING;  
MAY THEY REST IN  
PEACE

World War II  
Veterans

**Michael Guzzo \***  
132nd Inf Rgmt  
Phoenix, AZ  
Date Unknown

Vietnam  
Veterans

**Jerry Ashcraft**  
A/1/46th Inf  
Columbus, OH  
Date Unknown

**Lee Basnar**  
C/1/52nd Inf  
Sierra Vista, AZ  
August 5, 2021

**Bruce Bevans**  
161st AHC  
Fresno, CA  
April 13, 2021

**Donald Biesecker**  
11th LIB  
Atoona, WI  
May 21, 2021

**Jack Chevalier**  
A/2/1st Inf  
Vashon, VA  
April 1, 2021

**Raymond M. Cusato \***  
123rd Avn Bn  
Shirley LI, NY  
February 13, 2021

**Norman P. Gottlieb \***  
123rd Avn Bn  
Falls Church, VA  
June 9, 2021

**Jerry Gouge \***  
A/2/1st Inf  
Nebo, NC  
July 27, 2021

**John Haithcoat**  
A/3/21st Inf  
Ferndale, MI  
June 18, 2021

**Heinz Hamelberg**  
1st/1st Cav C Trp  
Huntingdon Beach, CA  
June 21, 2021

**Charles Holcomb**  
123rd Avn Bn  
Hometown Unknown  
January 17, 2021

**Jesse Maple**  
D/4/3rd Inf  
W Lafayette, OH  
May 30, 2021

**Richard J. McCoy**  
1/46th Infantry  
Bad Axe, MI  
January 8, 2021

**James McDaniel**  
174th AHC  
Springfield, VA  
April 15, 2021

**John Migacz \***  
B/5/46th Inf  
Ware Shoals, SC  
2020

**Allen G. Pettengill**  
D/4/3rd Inf  
Springfield, MA  
May 5, 2021

**George C. Rogers, Jr.**  
HHC/2/1st Inf.  
Lawton, OK  
April 25, 2021

**Ron Russell \***  
17th Cav F Trp  
Battle Creek, MI  
Date Unknown

**Donald H. Thomas \***  
3/82nd Artillery  
Millersville, MD  
February 25, 2021

\* ADVA Member

ADVA MEMBERSHIP  
31 August 2021

World War II	233
Vietnam	2,463
Cold War	4
Associate Members	183
<b>Total Members</b>	<b>2,883</b>



## Americal Legacy Foundation Report

By Roger Gilmore, Chairman, Board of Directors

### Foundation Web Site

The Contact Us link on the foundation web site has had a considerable number of inquiries or contact messages over the past three months. Approximately a half dozen of these inquiries are requests for unit information or information on individual Vietnam service. Most all these inquiries were from non-ADVA members. Many of the inquiries with specific unit information requests get forwarded to the ADVA Vietnam Historian Les Hines for answers or research. Les already has a very heavy workload maintaining the Vietnam history archives and working with the Texas Tech VN Americal Archive Project, and we sincerely appreciate his efforts to answer any inquiries regarding the Americal Division combat history in Vietnam. Two or three inquiries asked some specific questions about the foundation Scholarship program. If I am unable to answer an inquiry about the Scholarship program, I forward the email to Bill Bruinsma, the Foundation Scholarship Chairman for a response.

Unfortunately, quite a bit of the inquiry traffic the past few months is SPAM or scamming traffic. To wade through this logjam of email traffic is obviously time consuming but is necessary to ensure all inquiries get the attention needed. Seven of the scamming emails appeared to be in the Russian or some other Eastern European language. If any ADVA member is fluent in the Russian language, I would appreciate assistance determining exactly what the text says converted to the English language.

Since April, we have had only one Web store order. Demand for items offered for sale on the web site slowed considerably during the summer months. Books offered on the web site, or the challenge coins make a nice holiday gift for a fellow Americal Division veteran.

### Americal Legacy Calendar – 2021 Edition

By far, the fundraising campaign for the 2021 Legacy calendar is the best response we have ever had. Nearly \$30,000.00 has been received in donation checks since this issue was mailed in early November 2020. The support we have seen for this calendar issue, and the Americal memorials program, will enable us to keep the program alive and continue reaching out to VA cemeteries and memorial parks with our Americal monument placement proposals. We cannot say **THANKS** enough to all who financially support this endeavor.

Monies raised by Americal Legacy Foundation calendars are designated “unrestricted”. This means funds can be allocated to memorization projects other than the VA cemetery program. The VA cemetery program is our primary memorial mission now. We have funded other memorial programs in the past. In the future, funds may be needed to refurbish monuments that have been in place for a long time. The project to replace the Americal Division memorial plaque at Joint Reserve Base Cape Cod is an example. Around the nation, there are many military veteran’s memorial areas and parks that feature monuments or plaques that could

be candidates for some type of permanent memorial to the Americal Division. Paver stones seem to be a popular type of permanent remembrance and are very affordable.

The Foundation’s 2022 calendar is included with this mailing. Again, a very well-done layout and presentation. Our thanks go to Foundation director Gary Noller for his work as project coordinator and Lisa Anderson for her design and layout work to produce the final product. The calendar is yours to keep. Any donation you feel this program is worthy of is deeply appreciated by the directors of the Foundation. Your donation shows appreciation for the work the Americal Legacy Foundation is doing to preserve the memory of the division.

### Americal Monument Programs – National VA Cemeteries

Our monuments placement program designed for national VA Cemeteries was ramped up over the past two months. In the last issue of the Americal Journal, I discussed two different concepts for maintaining our inventory of standard Americal Division monuments for placement at VA cemetery sites. Since the last Journal issue, more VA cemeteries have been contacted by our directors about our monument placement proposal which is in accordance with the National Cemetery Administration guidelines.

Director and First Vice-President Gary Noller has been working diligently with the Fort Snelling National Cemetery in Minnesota for placement. He is also in contact with four other cemeteries (some are state cemeteries) about the program. Director Ronald Ellis jumped into the mix and made telephone contacts at several VA cemeteries explaining our program. Ronald visited approximately a half dozen cemeteries while on a trip through the southeast section of the country.

At this time, the most promising sites for placement that Ronald spoke with are Fort Jackson, South Carolina; Tallahassee, Florida; Natchez, Mississippi; and Biloxi, Mississippi. ADVA member Ron Krul contacted me recently about the possibility of a monument placement at the Western New York National Cemetery near Buffalo. This location is a fairly new VA cemetery. Ron has worked with the director there on another monument project and says the staff there is receptive to monument placement.

With this renewed push and reach out to different sites, we ordered five more monuments from Keith Monument Company in mid-August. The signed contract, along with the required down payment of nearly \$15,000.00 for the order of five, was mailed to Keith Monument the end of August. Our expectations are that we can secure placement approval for at least five more VA cemetery sites in the next eighteen months. For the three monuments we still have in inventory at the Vermont quarry, we have approval to place one and expect approval for one other by fall 2021.

The Foundation’s financial position is very strong going into the 2021-2022 fiscal year, and our budget plans for this purchase of the five additional monuments.

Below is a recap of VA cemetery sites selected and where we stand with our current placement proposals. Comments on the Fort Snelling National Cemetery initiative provided by Director Gary Noller.

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

The placement proposal was submitted to the district office in Philadelphia, PA for review in early June. From a follow-up email in mid-August, I was advised the proposal still sits in the district office and is being reviewed there by the office leadership and engineering staff. The cemetery POC hopes to have a decision by mid-September.

### Riverside National Cemetery (Riverside, CA)

A letter outlining our monument placement program went to the cemetery director here in early May. Recent follow-up for a response states the director retired the end of July. The assistant director located and reviewed the letter. Following his brief review of our introductory letter, he requested all documentation supporting the monument placement proposal. Our package of supporting documents was emailed to him the last week in August. We now await a response from the cemetery staff review of the proposal.

### Fort Snelling National Cemetery (Minneapolis, MN)

Staff at Ft. Snelling National Cemetery have received a formal proposal package and are in the process of reviewing our proposal. Ft. Snelling is in the same VA National Cemetery Administration region as the Rock Island National Cemetery. A monument has recently been completed and dedicated at Rock Island. Ft. Snelling says that it will discuss the Ft. Snelling proposal with Rock Island to see if the Ft. Snelling acceptance may be accelerated.

### Americal Monument/Memorial Programs - Other Locations

#### Fort Polk, LA

I had a lot of email traffic in late July and August attempting to line up a contractor to pour the concrete foundation and set the monument. The first contractor who agreed verbally to do the work apparently lost interest in doing the work as inquiries about starting the job went unanswered. With the help of the post POC, a second local contractor was lined up to do the work. The specifications and work requirements were emailed to this contractor in late July. He got tied up with other on post jobs; by the end of August, he was beginning to get his work completed. At the time this article was written, his plan was to be on post by early September to pour the concrete foundation. At this time, expectations are the placement will be complete by mid fall 2021.

#### Fort Rucker, AL

In the last issue of this publication, I spoke about a monument dedication ceremony for the Americal Division aviation monument placed at Fort Rucker in late 2020. I have confirmed the date with the post POC for March 28, 2022. The ceremony will be in the afternoon, most likely at 3:00pm central time. This will allow the FB Mary Ann Memorial service attendees time to travel to Fort Rucker from Fort Benning for the ceremony if they choose to attend. Post cards will also go out to ADVA members who live in proximity to Fort Rucker with event details if they want

to attend. More details will be given in the First Quarter 2022 issue of this publication, which should be in your mail receptacle with plenty of time for event travel and accommodations planning.

Currently, Fort Rucker is under some Covid 19 mandates which require social distancing and mask wearing for outdoor gatherings. We certainly hope these will be eased by the ceremony date.

### OOPS!

In any major endeavor, mistakes occur from time to time. One always hopes these will be few and minor. Recently, we have had some mistakes or work not holding up as expected on some memorial projects. We are working with the POCs for these projects to get the situation rectified.

The Joint Reserve Base Cape Cod project is to replace an aging and deteriorated bronze plaque placed there in 1978. The plaque was placed into a large boulder located in the memorial park. The plaque dimensions given to the metal foundry producing the new plaque were too large for the finished product to fit into the stone notch designed to accept the original plaque. The foundry company is trying to work with a local stone mason to enlarge the notch so it will accept the new plaque. More in future issues of this publication when a solution has been reached.

Director Ron Ellis made a side visit to the new Americal Aviation monument at Fort Rucker, Alabama in late July to view the monument. He found the Americal Division shoulder patch is severely faded from the original blue color that was applied. Columbus Monument Company out of Columbus, Georgia, our contractor for the project, was notified asap and advised they would locate a more suitable paint and the proper color match to repair the faded image. Columbus Monument Company completed the re-paint job on August 24th. A stronger acrylic paint was used so the color will hold up much longer.

### Other Foundation Projects

#### The Legacy Scholarship Program

A big **THANK YOU** to Bill Bruinsma for coordinating another very successful Americal Legacy Foundation scholarship grant program for 2021. And not to forget Foundation Finance Officer Spencer Baba and his wife Lin for their work getting the grant checks written and back to Bill to be sent on to the academic institutions for the deserving students. Lots of work goes into making this a successful undertaking.

Earlier this year, we received word that an estate bequest directed an amount of \$15,000.00 to the Foundation for future scholarship awards. ADVA member and Foundation director Ed Den Braven passed away in 2020 and generously left this amount for grants to students and children of ADVA members. Bill is looking at options for a yearly award in Ed’s name that will keep the memory of Ed’s generosity alive for years to come. More on this in future issues of the Journal.

If you are doing estate planning currently or have a will in place, you may want to consider a bequest to the Americal Legacy Foundation for future scholarship grants. I can think of no better way to honor the Americal legacy than by benefiting a young person striving to attain their academic goals and future career.



## 2021 Scholarship Awards

By Bill Bruinsma, Scholarship Chairman

The Americal Legacy Foundation awarded a total of \$57,500 in scholarship grants to 68 eligible scholars. This is a record amount of distributions for one year and also a record amount of applicants.

The grants were broken down in to five categories. Two scholars received \$4,000 each, six received \$2,000 each, eight received \$1,000 each, fourteen received \$750 each, and thirty-eight received \$500 each.

The applications were ranked by a committee of high school teachers that have no connection to the applicants or to the ADVA or to ALF. Applicants were graded on completeness of package, quality of essay, legibility of writing, and correctness of information.

The scholarship program originated in 1994 with the Americal Division Veterans Association and were transferred to the Americal Legacy Foundation about ten years ago. In the 26 years of its existence the Americal Scholarship awarded over \$750,000 in scholarships. The program is funded by the generous donations of members of the Americal Division Veterans Association.

**Adelle Aaron; \$500**  
Duquesne Univ.  
Michael J. Aaron  
23 MP Co., 68-69

**Brynna Allen; \$500**  
Manhattan Christian Col.  
Edward Allen  
Co. D, 1/46 Inf., 69-70

**Jacklyn Alsbro; \$2,000**  
Michigan State Univ.  
Donald Alsbro  
23d Admin. Co., 70-71

**Evan R. Barth; \$500**  
MO Univ. -Sci & Tech  
Gary Smith  
Co. E, 4/21 Inf., 68-69

**Tristan B. Beasley; \$500**  
Tarleton Univ.  
Roger Gilmore  
Co. C, 4/21 Inf., 71

**Hunter Beshears; \$2,000**  
Arkansas State Univ.  
William J. Beshears  
Co. A, 26 Engr., 68-70

**Caroline Bowers; \$1,000**  
Mercer Univ.  
Alton Coleman  
2/1 Inf., 69-70

**Mack Branum; \$750**  
Ohio Univ.  
William Bevins  
Co. A, 1/52 Inf., 71

**Samantha Bunnell; \$500**  
Valencia Col.  
Samuel Cox  
HHC, 23 Admin., 70-71

**Justin Christensen; \$500**  
Univ. of NE - Kearney  
Ronald Hadley  
Co. D, 1/6 Inf., 69-70

**Allyson Cowen ; \$500**  
N. Carolina St Univ.  
John T. Young  
23 Admin., 70-71

**Grace M. Dawson ; \$500**  
Dixie State Univ.  
William Dawson  
HHB, 14 Arty., 71

**Jacob Dawson ; \$1,000**  
Univ. of Wyoming  
William Dawson  
HHB, 14 Arty., 71

**Brady Dessart; \$500**  
Univ. of WI - Oshkosh  
Dan White  
Cos. A & E, 5/46 Inf., 70-71

**Bryce L. England; \$500**  
Univ. of Arkansas  
Jesse J Lewis  
1/20 Inf., 66-68

**Molly Forshag ; \$500**  
Univ. of West Georgia  
John H. Forshag  
5/46 Inf., 69-70

**Katharine Germain; \$1,000**  
Texas A&M Univ.  
David Germain  
Btry. A, 3/16 Arty., 68-70

**Ethan Glover; \$500**  
Tallahassee Com. Col.  
John W. Glover Sr.  
23 S & T, 68-69

**Callie E. Gray; \$750**  
North Greenville Univ.  
Leroy H. Davis  
5/46 Inf., 69-70

**Caleb Gray; \$500**  
Univ. of TN - Knoxville  
Leroy H. Davis  
5/46 Inf., 69-70

**Kenadee Hackett; \$500**  
S. Dakota State Univ.  
Gaylord Burley  
3/16 Arty., 70-71

**Montana Harrington; \$500**  
Univ. of NE - Lincoln  
Leo B. Harrington  
1/1 Cav., 68-69

**Aimee Heroux; \$4,000**  
E. Carolina Univ.  
Richard Heroux  
Co B, 211 Inf., 68

**Jonathan C. Hicks; \$750**  
W. Kentucky Univ.  
Don Hicks Sr.  
Co. B, 211 Inf.,

**Sige Hildreth; \$750**  
Boise State Univ.  
Richard Hildreth  
3/16 Arty., 70-71

**Jarod Johnson; \$500**  
Rochester Ins. of Tech  
James Treacy  
Co. A ,1/6 Inf., 70

**Brenna Keaty; \$500**  
St. Louis Univ.  
John Sears  
Co., D 4/3 Inf., 66-68

**Emma Keaty; \$1,000**  
Univ. of Iowa  
John Sears  
Co., D 4/3 Inf., 66-68

**Tristen Kloppe; \$2,000**  
W. Michigan Univ.  
Ronald Hadley  
Co. D,1/6 Inf., 69-70

**Nicholas Krueger; \$500**  
Oakland Univ.  
David Krueger  
11 LIB; 68

**Abigail Laine; \$750**  
Merrimack Col.  
John Laine  
HHC, 1/6 Inf., 67

**Connor Lay; \$500**  
ND St. Col. of Sci.  
Jack Hvezda  
Co. D, 5/46 Inf., 69-70

**Marley McMillen; \$500**  
Kansas State Univ.  
Ralph Heatherington  
Co. A, 1/20 Inf., 68

**Casey Merriam; \$500**  
Univ. of Central FL  
Darryl Merriam  
HHC, 14CAB, 68-69

**Grace Metko; \$500**  
Univ. of WI- Eau Claire  
Philip Krause  
1/52 Inf., 68-69

**Lindsay Mularski; \$500**  
Univ. of WI - Stevens Pt.  
Philip Krause  
1/52 Inf., 68-69

**Annalise Mullins; \$4,000**  
Kent State Univ.  
James M. Mullins  
1/1 Cav., 69-70

**Ashlyne Olson; \$2,000**  
Washington State Univ.  
Arthur Olson  
HHC, 4/3 Inf., 67-68

**Rebecca Ottensman; \$2,000**  
Luzerne Co. Com. Col.  
Michael Stachowiak  
Co. D, 5/46 Inf., 69

**Alissa Ortiz; \$500**  
Metro Com. Col.- Blue River  
Robert Bischoff  
HHC, 1/46 Inf., 70

**Lauren A. Ortiz; \$500**  
Brigham Young Univ. - ID  
Robert Bischoff  
HHC, 1/46 Inf., 70

**Alexis Piekarski; \$500**  
Concordia Col.  
Jack Hvezda  
Co. D, 5/46 Inf., 69-70

**Scott Prieve; \$500**  
Univ. of CO - CO Springs  
Harlan Prieve  
Co. D, 1/6 Infl, 69-70

**Madelaine C. Rogers; \$750**  
S. Dakota St. Univ.  
Joseph N. Caropino  
Co. E, 132 Inf. 43-45

**Brayden Ruland; \$750**  
Western Illinois Univ.  
Russ White  
HHB 3/82 Arty., 68-69

**Aanan Schlieff; \$500**  
Univ. of N. D.  
Dale Stivland  
Co. A, 3/21 Inf., 67-68

**Jordan Seiler; \$500**  
IN Univ. - Bloomington  
Louis J. Seiler  
22 Ord., 41-45

**Nathan Seiler; \$500**  
Indiana Univ.  
Louis J. Seiler  
22 Ord., 41-45

**Emily Shiply; \$500**  
St. Marys Col. of MD  
Gerald Everett  
328 RRC, 69

**Leah Smith; \$1,000**  
Kent State Univ.  
Larry Andrzejewski  
1/52 Inf., 70

**Taylor Swatsell; \$500**  
Texas A & M - Comm.  
Robert N. Swatsell  
196 LIB

**Jakob Syracuse; \$750**  
Univ. of Buffalo  
William Bechtel  
H Trp., 17 Cav., 69

**Robert Tappin; \$500**  
Univ. of MA- Amherst  
Donald Tappin  
23 Admin., 69-70

**Anneka A. Todd; \$500**  
NC State Univ.  
Kurt E. Hoy  
23 Inf. Div., 70-71

**Sebastian Uriarte; \$500**  
S. VA Com. Col.  
William S. Burfield  
Div HQ, 67

**Chloe Valenti; \$750**  
Univ. of Cincinnati  
James Valenti  
Co. C, 4/21 Inf., 71

**Patsy Valenti; \$2,000**  
Univ. of Cincinnati  
James Valenti  
Co. C, 4/21 Inf., 71

**Gabriella Varriale; \$500**  
Penn.State Univ.  
James Tessitore  
HHC 1/52 Inf., 69-70

**Andrew Villars; \$500**  
Samford Univ.  
James Fivian  
Co. D, 1/52 Inf.

**Carly Walker; \$750**  
Stevens Inst. Of Tech  
William A. Walker  
23 Admin., 67-68

**Emily Walker; \$750**  
Stevens Inst. Of Tech  
William A. Walker  
23 Admin., 67-68

**Rheanna Walther; \$500**  
Ball State Univ.  
Kenneth A. Howe Jr  
HHC, 23 Admin., 67-68

**Marissa Watson, \$500**  
Sam Houston St. Univ.  
Charles Watson  
H Trp, 17 Cav., 70

**Daniel Wilkes; \$750**  
Toulane Univ.  
William Sargent  
23 MP, 69-70

**Harrison Wilkes; \$750**  
Boston Col.  
William Sargent  
23 MP, 69-70





Dear editor,

Since 2009, members of C Co., 5/46th Infantry, who served together in Vietnam, have gotten together in Nashville, Tennessee, for a few days to enjoy each others' company. We missed one year, 2020, because of Covid. We continue to search for members and we located a new member just this year. He joined us and will return to be with us again next year. We had a great time. While on the General Jackson our group was recognized and we had a tremendous standing ovation. We are already planning for next year.

Dale Melton;



Dear editor,

I read your article in the current edition regarding your return home from Nam. It was very similar to my experience which tells me we were all trashed upon returning. I know saying thank you for your service has become a cliché but when I hear it or say it to a combat veteran it comes from my heart.

Welcome home and thank you for your service. Also, thank you for printing my "Ambush Nightmare" story in the current edition.

William (Bill) Bowman



Dear editor,

In the past few years I have been increasingly faced with Vietnam veterans wanting to downsize and not knowing what to do with their uniforms and other Vietnam memorabilia. Veterans are faced with the dilemma of what to do with their items. I have had many artifacts added to my collection and my traveling displays that were rooted in this predicament. I offer to purchase, at a fair price, any artifacts that veterans want to sell. I have heard many stories of families throwing away uniforms, equipment, and souvenirs of their servicemen. In most cases they do not care about the items. Many veterans I have spoken with have been troubled by this.

Carl Scott; Carl Scott;



Dear editor,

I read with amusement and sympathy Don Counter's story on "Adapting to Dignity". The attached picture is of Fred Carmosino (l) and myself (r), "burning the nite soil" (as it was also known). Fred was a manual Morse intercept operator and I was a radio traffic analyst. We were both members of the 408th Radio Research Detachment, supporting the 196th LIB. This documents that having an EBI (Extended Background Investigation) and a Top

Secret/Crypto clearance did not exempt us "spooks" from attending to this "doody"! - but it may have made us some of the most trustworthy shit burners out there!

Dick Field; 408th RRD, 67-68

Dear editor,

I have thoroughly enjoyed reading the recent articles in the Old Guard section of the Americal Journal about the formation of the division in the early stages of WWII. Roger Thompson has done a masterful job of documenting the little known story of how the U.S. confronted the Japanese threat early on in the Pacific Theater. This is information you don't find in many WWII history books or TV documentaries.

Roger Gilmore; ADVA National Adjutant

Dear editor,

A new book, Our Helicopter War, is now available for those with interest in Americal related aviation companies. The book covers the 161st AHC unit as they fought first in the area around Lane Airfield, then moving north in Task Force Oregon, and then finally with the Americal Division. The unit was reformed to become the 123rd Aviation Battalion.

This is not just war stories. Kate Hambright, a researcher from Texas, has provided many new insights to explain battles that changed everything for the Americal. For example, the 101st Airmobile Division's 1st Brigade was able to dislodge units of the 2nd NVA division and push them out of Quang Ngai Province into the Que Son Valley in operation Malheur. The 176th Assault Helicopter was integral in many of the stories presented as are several infantry battalions like the 3/1st Inf. Bn. The war stories reveal information about the unit's secret cross border missions that were not even reported to the company commander. These are stories that the crews kept secret even from other crews that they had worked with.

This a hard-copy bound book, almost 500 pages in length, and with almost 100 images and maps. Each book is numbered and signed by the authors. The book is the work of former Scorpion pilot, Garland R. Lively, along with former Pelican crew chief John H. Hastings. They have compiled a book that fairly represents our history in Vietnam.

Books may be ordered direct from John H. Hastings, 161AHC Association LLC, 704 Rosewood Place, Aledo, Texas 76008. Total cost including book, postage, and sales tax is \$75.

Les Hines; ADVA Vietnam Historian

Dear editor,

I am hoping to contact ADVA members in the Denver metro area who would be interested in social gatherings. Anyone interested is encouraged to send me an email message.

Kenneth Rollins;

Dear editor,

My uncle, Ruben Acosta, recently passed away. He was a SGT/E-5, MOS 63B, wheel vehicle mechanic. I never got to hear about his Vietnam service because he never talked about it. His two daughters showed me a small storage container that had some patches, decals, ribbons, and documents that he had kept. He was in the Army between 1967 and 1970. His Vietnam service dates were 14 Jun 69 - 13 Jun 70 and the last unit he was in was Co D, 723rd Maint. Bn. He also had a 198th Infantry Brigade color patch. I am making a shadow box for my cousins and aunt. I went through the Army's website to find any unit awards for the 723rd. I found at least two MUCs and the RVN Gallantry Cross w/ Palm unit citation. These Dept. of the Army General Orders (DAGOs) include all of the 23rd Americal Division and subordinate brigades and whatnot. I am interested in knowing more about the 723rd Maint. from its veterans.

Aaron Acosta;

Dear editor,

I started some time ago a little compilation work on the soldiers who fell in the Vietnam War the day I was born, 30 July 1970. My purpose was to find people who had known these soldiers, both in their childhood and during their stay in Vietnam. I wanted people to tell me if they had photos of the fallen soldiers and how they were still remembered. I wish to do a small tribute. That is why I have been looking on the internet for Vietnam veterans who remember these soldiers.

Among the 22 who died that day, there are the following; Co. C, 5/46th: Edward J. Whitton, Dale E. Sathoff, Robert W. Hart, Jerold Franklin; and, Co. E, 1/52nd: Edison A. Harkins, Richard A. Pomerinke.

According to my research they all died together in an explosion. I assure you that my sole intention is to remember and honor those young soldiers. In 1991-92 I served as a sapper in the army of my country, Slovakia, in a Regiment of Engineers.

Andoni Garcia;



## Experiences of the Vietnam War

By Jim Logue

My best therapy for PTSD from the Vietnam War came through photography, collective memory, and a journey across America and back to Vietnam. The result is the new book, *Rain In Our Hearts*, published in 2020 by Texas Tech University Press. The volume has been nominated for the Indie Book Awards.

I was already a professional photographer when drafted, but the Army sent me to Vietnam where I was assigned as an infantryman in Alpha Co., 4/31st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division, in 1969-1970. To take my mind off the war, I took pictures with my Nikonnos 35mm camera, and came home with 2,500 images in black-and-white and color. I stored them away, and tried to forget Vietnam.

I could not. Some 30 years later, a Veterans Administration psychiatrist advised me to face my past



David Flynn, foreground, and others fly to the field aboard a Chinook on 29 April 1970 to halt the 2nd NVA Division. The flight cut short the company's stand-down in Chu Lai.

in my own images. I spent days and nights looking again at all those young faces, but wanted more: to sit again and speak with these men with whom I shared the horrors of combat.

In 2010, Gary D. Ford, a 30-year magazine editor, and I began traveling the nation to record interviews with men of Alpha Company, many of them beginning with these words: "I never talked about the war." Over coffee at kitchen tables, most sessions lasted hours, some even all day. We pieced together our shared experiences of a year when we grew from boys into men in a war far away, then in distance, now in time. We laughed. We cried. Together, we learned, as did veterans of all conflicts, the



Night Laager, the troops killing time waiting for sundown and nightly guard duty to start. Two ponchos were used to create the sleeping positions.

war will always be with us.

The interviews that hurt most were with mothers, widows and siblings of those who didn't make it home. All welcomed us. All were so kind to share memories of their beloved lost to them forever.

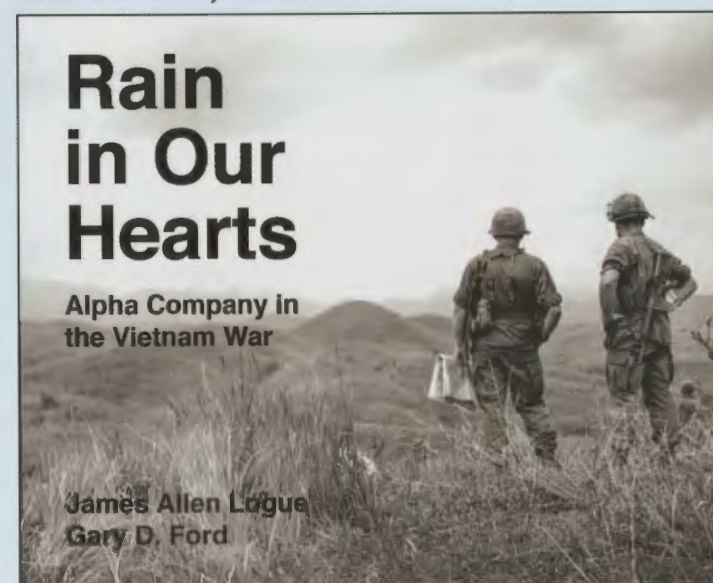
In 20 chapters illustrated with dozens of my photographs, *Rain In Our Hearts* reveals the men of Alpha in base camp, "humping the boonies", in combat, among civilians, and yes, even in those occasional beer-soaked weekends in the rear called "stand-down". Readers will see choppers delivering supplies, landing us in "hot" LZs, and taking away wounded. Gore they will not see. I did not photograph the dead nor the seriously wounded—friendly, enemy, or civilian.

*Rain In Our Hearts*, we feel, portrays the universal experience of the Vietnam War, told through narrative and in words of those of us who fought it. The book is available through Amazon and Texas Tech University Press.

## Rain in Our Hearts

Alpha Company in the Vietnam War

James Allen Logue  
Gary D. Ford



## Tribute to Nolan Bingham

By Gary L. Noller

In late June 1970, U.S. Army helicopters transported about 100 Americal soldiers to the top of a remote jungle hilltop. The soldiers quickly exited the choppers and dispersed in all directions.

Once on the ground, a staff sergeant pointed to two green troops and shouted, "You two, go down the side of the hill and dig in. That is where you will spend the night."

I was one of the two new soldiers. The other was Nolan Bingham. We arrived in Vietnam just two weeks prior and received assignments to Co. B, 1/46 Infantry, 196 Light Infantry Brigade.

Nolan, who usually went by the nickname "Bing", and I were already familiar with each other. Earlier in 1970 we trained together at Ft. Knox, Kentucky.

Bing and I did not hesitate to complete our task. We began digging and were happy to find that the ground was easy to excavate. We quickly completed a two-man foxhole that was knee deep. But we did not stop there. After a few more hours the foxhole was waist deep. We decided to stop there.

That night we slept in the open next to our foxhole. We took turns standing guard. Thankfully the night was quiet and we did not need to use our foxhole.

The next morning the staff sergeant came by and said, "Come with me, I am moving you to a different spot." We shook our heads but quickly gathered our gear, left our well constructed foxhole, and moved to a new position.

Over the next months Nolan and I would become good friends. We were both radio-telephone operators in the command platoon. Months later we both received promotions to handle the radios at the battalion tactical operations center on Fire Support Base Mary Ann.

One night we established a night laager in a very small area that provided few sleeping positions. Bing tied his hammock between two trees and covered it with a tent made from his poncho. I always slept on the ground and asked him if I could sleep under his hammock. He agreed.

About midnight we heard a loud explosion just outside our perimeter. Everyone immediately jumped on guard. Nolan whispered, "Noller, is it okay if I come down there with you?" "Yeah, that's okay," I replied. He slid out of his hammock and we both spent the rest of

the night on my twenty-four inch wide air mattress. We never found out what the explosion was about but no one was hurt.

A few weeks later we went on patrol to look for an enemy base camp. We were told to take a light load as we did not expect to be away from our laager very long. But we did not find any signs of the enemy until late afternoon. We quickly went on line and swept through an enemy hootch area.

As we moved out I quickly lost track of Bingham. He had been behind me but as we spread out but he went a different direction. I did not know the guys to my right and left. I felt unprotected and very ill at ease. I asked one of the others, "Did you see which way Bingham went?" He said, "He is up ahead to the right."

I quickly moved up and found Bing. I felt relief to be back alongside someone I knew very well and trusted without hesitation. I knew he would protect me with his life.

It began to get dark. The captain told us it was too late to move back to our laager. We received orders to move down the trail a short distance and sit down for the night. We had not prepared for this. We had no sleeping gear. Many in the group, including me, did not bring food for the night.

Nolan and I clustered together with Sonny Crowder, another RTO. He also went through training at Ft. Knox with us. Sonny opened a can of cheese and crackers. Nolan opened a can of pork slices and heated them over a heat tab. I just sat and watched.

The sky was dark as the two began to eat their sparse meal. Sonny said, "Noller, are you going to eat tonight?" I told them I had not brought anything more than an afternoon meal. Sonny and Nolan both pointed to their food. Sonny said, "You can have part of ours."

I declined. I did not feel like I should eat their food after they had carried it all day. I could do without. I said, "No, I will be okay."

Nolan lowered his food and said, "Noller, if you don't eat something then I am going to dump mine on the ground." I looked at Sonny. He shook his head in the

affirmative. I felt perplexed.

I did not want to take their food but I also did not want them to throw it away if I did not eat with them. So I took a cracker and a pork slice and we dined in the dark.

The last time I saw Bing in Vietnam was the afternoon of March 27, 1971. I was leaving FSB Mary Ann to go to LZ Mildred to establish a battalion radio position. As I prepared to leave he came by and said, "Hey Noller, since you are leaving, can I have your sleeping bunker?" I replied, "Sure, I am not coming back here."

A few hours later he received severe wounds as an enemy sapper attack inflicted massive damage to the firebase. He was eventually evacuated to the United States.

I was able to catch up with him a couple of months later. He was in Muncie, Indiana beginning a school term at Ball State University. He became an architect and returned to his hometown of Columbus, Indiana to serve the needs of his community.

About six years ago Nolan informed his family and friends that he was battling cancer. He fought with courage. There were many ups and downs but he never gave up his spirit. He was continually thankful for what he had enjoyed in life. He never complained about his severe illness.

In May of this year we learned that Bing only had a matter of days left to live. Sonny and I, joined by our former squad leader, Tommy Poppell, paid a visit to Nolan at his home in Indiana. It was a great reunion and we shared many memories. Nolan passed to his eternal reward ten days later.

I am glad that I was able to serve with Nolan. He helped take care of me in Vietnam. He will not be forgotten.



Nolan "Bing" Bingham (facing camera) and Gary Noller hitch a ride to the PX at Chu Lai, October, 1970.



## The Americal's Japanese Americans: An American Tale from the South Pacific

© Roger R. Thompson

**Author's Note:** I dedicate this to the memory of my father, Lloyd R. Thompson (1926-2021), who died while I was writing this fourth article in my Americal Journal series. I mourn the death of this patriotic World War II enlistee. As I wrote these articles, my father and I returned to the stories he had been telling me for over sixty years about his Army Air Corps experiences (1944-45) and his small part in the vast effort of America's "Greatest Generation." Let us hope that the men and women of this generation, some of whom we have met in these articles--Walter Walt, Dale Friend, Peggy Hammer, and now Shigeru Yamashita--never become strangers to future generations of Americans.

### Introducing Shigeru Yamashita

The Americans Shigeru Yamashita, Masanori Minamoto, and Iwao Kawashiri were elementary-school students in Japan when Hirohito became emperor in 1926. A decade later, soon after Yamashita graduated from the only high school on the island of Shodoshima, the American Yoshio Noritake started the 1936-37 school year in the nearby

city of Okayama, just a short boat ride across the waters of the Inland Sea. During Noritake's summer vacation of 1937, Japan started its undeclared war with China. Its troops in China, many of whom had embarked from nearby Hiroshima, would eventually number a million. Yamashita's and Noritake's high-school friends would be subject to Japanese military conscription after graduation. Not so for the Japanese Americans, yet. But that would change in 1940.

All four of these Americans, along with sixteen million other men, citizens and aliens alike, registered with the Selective Service on 16 October 1940. Roy (Iwao) Kawashiri and Yoshio Noritake had recently turned 21 by that day in 1940, just old enough to be required to register; Yamashita was 22, Minamoto 24. All four, soon "selected" to serve in the U.S. Army, began basic training in 1941. Eighty years ago this fall (2021), Yamashita, Minamoto, Kawashiri, and Noritake were brought together on 1 November 1941 in an empty airplane hangar at Crissy Field to study Japanese. During study breaks they could stretch their legs outside and take in the spectacular view of the recently-completed Golden Gate Bridge. Neither Pearl Harbor nor anti-Japanese war hysteria on the West Coast would disturb their studies.

Five months after the 7 December 1941 Japanese attacks on Pearl Harbor, these four Americans who had lived in Japan (Kibei) were joined by three other second-generation Japanese Americans with little or no experience in Japan (Nisei),

and sent to join the code-named task forces that had steamed to the South Pacific in the desperate days of January 1942: BOBCAT (Bora Bora) and POPPY (New Caledonia). The need was so urgent that Mas Minamoto went alone to Bora Bora before his classmates had even finished their studies in late April. After hurried visits home for some students, Yamashita, Kawashiri, Noritake, and three Nisei--the "New Caledonia Six"--received their orders at roll call on the morning of 7 May 1942.

On one busy day, the six graduates immediately packed up their belongings at the hangar, headed to the San Francisco Port of Embarkation, boarded the new Liberty ship SS Timothy Pickering, and departed for the South Pacific via Long Beach, the former headquarters of America's Pacific Fleet. These soldiers, barrels of high-octane aviation fuel, and steamrollers needed for New Caledonia's critical new airfields, reached Noumea Harbor on 6 June 1942. They would soon learn that the mysterious "C.O. POPPY" on the envelope they were each handed at Crissy Field on 7 May 1942 was Task Force 6814's General Alexander Patch. The general was now the commanding officer of the week-old Americal Division.

As the Battle of Midway far to the north near Hawaii was ending, the attention of both the Japanese and the Americans would shift once again to the South Pacific, and the line of communication between Hawaii and Australia. The New Caledonia Six were ready. This is their secret tale, known by few on New Caledonia as the Americal Division prepared for the Battle of Guadalcanal.

### A Secret Language School in the Shadow of the Golden Gate

On the night of 16 October 1940, President Roosevelt addressed the nation, and especially the sixteen million young men, citizens and aliens alike, who just that day had registered for possible training and service in the United States military. He said their acts affirmed their loyalty and were part of America's mobilization for total defense against total war. This act was, the president said, "the keystone in the arch of our national defense." A month earlier, on the day he signed into law the Selective Training and Service Act, he tied it to a "broadened" concept of citizenship, with equal rights, equal privileges, equal

opportunities and now, "equal service." Roosevelt ended this statement with a vision of military service, that, through the luck of the draw and the power of numbers, would show the rich and poor, those from rural and urban settings--men from all "walks of life"--how to "depend upon" and to "appreciate" each other's "dignity as American citizens."

This remarkable effort on 16 October 1940 reached down to over 6,500 localities in America.

It meant, then, that the selection rolls mirrored the diversity of America. For the Japanese American citizens on the West Coast, rigorous statistical equity meant that selection letters went out to them too. As long as they were twenty-one to thirty-five years old, even young men of Japanese ancestry born in Japan--aliens--could receive selection letters.

This meant, in the summer of 1941, as the training of America's growing peace-time army included great nation-wide maneuvers, officers could consult new personnel rosters and identify about 1,300 Japanese Americans from the continental United States now serving in the U.S. Army. From this pool, they hoped, they could find soldiers who could read and speak Japanese and send these select few to a planned Japanese-language school at the Presidio in San Francisco.

The officers were disappointed to discover how poor the language skills of the second-generation American citizens--Nisei--were. Only ten percent seemed viable as students, and many who made the first cut were struck off the list because of security or other concerns. In the end, after a four-month search from July to October in 1941, the Army selected fifty-eight Nisei soldiers for the language school. Of this select group, only a special sub-category of Nisei, the Kibei who were born in America but educated in Japan, were qualified to be in the A-1 class of 15 at the Presidio. But the Army had its first classes of differing abilities for its new language school. (Of the ten Caucasian officers, only two older Reserve officers who had lived in Japan as children--John Burden and David Swift--would graduate with the forty Nisei students who passed the course of study.)

This was a significant achievement of the U.S. Army. The power of numbers, and statistical control, had made it possible to quickly compile selection lists. Because about 110,000 people of Japanese



Left to right: "Ace" (Asao) Kusuda, Shigeru Yamashita, and "Mac" (Nobuo) Nagata. In the back of the photo, Shigeru Yamashita sits across from his partner, Ace Kusuda, a 1941 graduate of the University of California-Davis. Team leader Mac Nagata, whose father had served in the Russo-Japanese War and had emigrated from Japan shortly afterwards (around 1907) to the United States, sits next to Yamashita. Not pictured: Jim (Masaru) Ariyasu, Roy (Iwao) Kawashiri, and Yoshio Noritake. Païta, New Caledonia, 30 August 1942.



ancestry lived on the West Coast, inevitably, when the numbers were crunched, there would be a small but representative pool of young Japanese American male citizens and aliens called to service. And given that there was scant interest and opportunity for white Americans to study Japanese in the 1920s and 1930s, it was fortuitous that some immigrant families had sent their young Japanese American children to relatives in Japan to live and study.

America was very lucky.

Shigeru Yamashita, who is at the center of the photograph on the cover of this issue of the *Americal Journal*, was one of these Japanese Americans. In 1921, his immigrant grandparents took the toddler Shigeru and his older sister back to the family's farm on the poor island of Shodoshima, across the Inland Sea from Okayama. His grandparents soon died, but Shigeru's struggling immigrant parents farming in Nevada could not afford to send for their children, stranded and now essentially orphaned in Japan. But Yamashita persevered, and graduated from Shodoshima's only high school in 1936. Earning passage home to America after a year's work in Kobe, Yamashita was reunited with his parents in Nevada in 1937. He learned enough English to graduate a second time in 1939, this time from Moapa Valley High School in Overton, Nevada. He was working in Los Angeles in 1940, improving his English-language skills, when President Roosevelt addressed his generation of young Americans on the evening of 16 October.

Like many American men, Shigeru Yamashita took his chances. But he was one of the five percent of the sixteen million men the president had said would be selected. His letter, like Walter Walt's, came from a local board in Los Angeles in 1941. The Army soon discovered Yamashita's Japanese-language abilities, and he was one of the fifteen students selected for the A-1 class at the Presidio on 1 November 1941.

This was a novel undertaking by U. S. Army--the Navy, by contrast, focused its attention on Caucasians only, who were taught by contract teachers hired at universities with established Asian studies programs--and in November 1941, the curious commanding officer of the 4th Army, General John DeWitt, left his office at the Presidio and came by the abandoned aircraft hangar at Crissy Field that served as both

classrooms and living quarters. General DeWitt quietly slipped into the A-1 class and sat for a few minutes in an empty chair among the students. Before leaving, he spoke a few words of encouragement to Roy Kawashiri, the Japanese American soldier sitting in front of him.

By the time Shigeru Yamashita and his classmates graduated on 1 May 1942, with America at war with Japan, war hysteria had led to the evacuation and eventual internment of all persons of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast, and given rise to "Fifth Column" suspicions even within the ranks of the U.S. Army. Yamashita and his fellow classmates would have had good reason to comment cynically on President Roosevelt's lofty 1940 words of equality and loyalty.

But in a yearbook-style set of entries made by Yamashita and his classmates in April 1942, as classes were wrapping up, almost all students--Kibei, Nisei, and Caucasians alike--signed.

There was no apparent cynicism in the few substantive entries. One student wrote to "Mas" (Masami) Maeda: "We have the chance to show our duty to the United States. As Nisei let's beat our enemy wherever they might be. Our task is none too great. Carry on. Fellow American, Hiro Oyama." Another student, Masaru Ariyasu, who would go to New Caledonia with Shigeru Yamashita, becoming a life-long friend and a fellow recipient of the Legion of Merit in 1997, wrote: "Let's beat Hirohito, Mussolini, and Hitler." Kaye Sakamoto wrote on 24 April 1942: "Let's give 'em hell." (Caucasian students in the Crissy Field Japanese-language classes also signed the "yearbook." Faubion Bowers--who wrote "With best wishes" to Mas Maeda--was destined to restore, at General Douglas MacArthur's September 1945 order, the United States Embassy in a devastated Tokyo to its pre-war splendor.) Duty still called; the Japanese American soldiers at Crissy Field were still answering.

#### **Five Generals: Principles and Pragmatism in War**

In the mid-1930s, the U.S. Army's best and brightest studying at the most selective post-graduate school in America, the Army War College, had factored in Japanese Americans in their "war games." By 1937, the students' daily routine included studying and

reporting on all world events: military, diplomatic, political, economic, and social. In their study of a two-front war in Europe and the Pacific, the students, when assessing the home front, were much less concerned in 1937 about the loyalty of those with ancestral roots to Germany and Italy than those with ties to Japan. They were most concerned about the Japanese in "California, Hawaii, and the Philippines." One student, in these empirically-rich studies, noted that in Hawaii forty percent of the population were Japanese immigrants or their descendants.

Why were these bright, well-informed, and capable mid-career Army officers more concerned about the loyalty of Japanese than any other ethnic group in America? The answer thought the most likely by the foremost scholar of the Army War College: "Racism, pure and simple." These students would go on to high-level staff positions at the War Department and wherever else the Army was active. They would be staff officers as America prepared for war in 1941, and went to war in 1942. They would remember, these one-time students in the mid-1930s, that they had decided it would be easier to mobilize Americans to fight against Japan than European powers.

And yet the U.S. Army generals who could be advised by these men responded to the crises of 1941-42 in nuanced and varied ways with respect to Japanese Americans. Five generals--Marshall, DeWitt, Emmons, Patch, and Harmon--made pragmatic, principled, and nuanced decisions.

General John L. DeWitt, who had sat in on a Japanese-language class at Crissy Field before Pearl Harbor, had the greatest responsibility as he commanded the 4th Army and its defense of America's West Coast. It was General DeWitt, on the basis he said of "military necessity," who decided citizens and aliens of Japanese ancestry must be removed from the coastal zone to the interior. This led, eventually, to President Roosevelt's Executive Order 9066 of 19 February 1942 and the forced evacuation of over 110,000 West Coast Japanese to "war relocation camps." Anti-Japanese war hysteria continued to characterize some in the civilian population for which General DeWitt was responsible.

In the American territory of Hawaii, where Army War College students had noted the forty percent population figure, General Delos C. Emmons could

not follow General Dewitt's approach. While he had more power over Hawaii's civilian population, put under martial law on the day of the Japanese attack, General Emmons had no choice but to keep Hawaii's economy going with Japanese labor.

Meanwhile, in the South Pacific, General Alexander M. Patch had a much smaller population of Japanese under his control in the French colony of New Caledonia. There were more than a thousand Japanese, mostly men, on New Caledonia. (Caucasians numbered about 17,000 in 1941.) Patch could read in the January 1942 "Survey of New Caledonia" written by a recent Harvard Ph.D. in French history who worked for President Roosevelt's Coordinator of Information, William Donovan, that in 1936 about five hundred Japanese worked in mining and industry, with an equal number working in agriculture, as merchants, and as artisans. There was a potential, Patch could infer from this report, for a Japanese presence throughout New Caledonia. Thus, as Patch surveyed the scene in March 1942 when he arrived at Noumea, New Caledonia's capital, the need for soldiers with Japanese-language capabilities for counter-intelligence work was apparent. Like BOBCAT's commander, POPPY's commanding officer would soon receive a few of the students at Crissy Field scheduled to graduate on 1 May 1942.

But neither the BOBCAT nor POPPY task forces could have called for this talent without the intervention of the Army's Chief of Staff, General George C. Marshall. As Patch was settling in to his New Caledonia command in late March 1942, war hysteria in the United States had not subsided. Japanese Americans selected and inducted for training and service in the U.S. Army in 1941 were shipped to bases in the Midwest and elsewhere, some were put to menial tasks, and others were discharged. After the War Department insisted it would no longer accept Japanese Americans for induction, the Selective Service instructed local boards to re-classify the Japanese Americans on their lists. The category often selected--IV-C--had been in use for enemy aliens unfit for service. And no Japanese American still in uniform could be deployed overseas.

Colonel Kai Rasmussen, the Japanese-speaking Dane so pivotal in the Crissy Field language school,



and his supervisors in the War Department, sounded the alarm. While they could not stop General DeWitt from shutting down their Crissy Field School after the first classes graduated on 1 May 1942, they worked on a re-location plan, and they argued that their students must be given overseas assignments to the Pacific Theater. Within days of General Marshall's receipt of a 3 April 1942 memo from the Military Intelligence Division, his office waived the no-overseas-assignment rule and authorized the school's relocation. In General Marshall, Colonel Rasmussen had an advocate who knew Asia and who knew how important foreign-language skills could be for Army officers overseas. Stationed in China in the 1920s, the young George Marshall had picked up enough spoken Chinese to use it professionally. He needed no persuasion in 1942.

By 8 April, orders were cut for the school's relocation and for the dispatch of new Crissy Field graduates to BOBCAT, POPPY, and to the Aleutian Islands in the American territory of Alaska. These first three contingents (eleven graduates) of Japanese American enlisted men were the pioneers. The largest group went to New Caledonia. General Patch put them to work immediately after their 6 June 1942 arrival at Noumea. By the end of July, General Millard F. Harmon, our final general in this sketch of the variety of ways in which Army generals responded to the Japanese Problem, took stock of his small contingent of six Japanese American linguists under his newly-

established command: the United States Army Forces in the South Pacific Area. General Harmon would know, unlike the men themselves, that their skills would soon be needed as the United States military took on the Japanese at Guadalcanal. (Almost two years later, General Harmon still remembered "the great and immediate tactical value" of POW interrogations and the "skillful translations of Japanese documents, maps, and code books" in his letter of commendation to Shigeru Yamashita for his outstanding service in the Americal Division's Guadalcanal and Bougainville campaigns.)

America's response to Japanese Americans in a time of war was multi-faceted.

#### **New Caledonia's Japanese Americans, North Dakotans, and the Battle of Guadalcanal**

Japan's devastating losses in early June 1942 at the Battle of Midway—four aircraft carriers—diminished the likelihood of the Japanese carrying out their planned invasion of New Caledonia. At the least, they soon postponed it to July and then, as American and Japanese attention shifted to Guadalcanal in July, they abandoned it altogether. As the Navy and Marines prepared for the invasion of Guadalcanal, General Patch, the Task Force 6814 commander now leading the new Americal Division, continued training activities for his three Regimental Combat Teams. And he tried to put the New Caledonia Six to work.

Patch posted them to the new Advanced Command Post at Paita, about eleven miles northwest of Noumea, slightly inland from the island's west coast. The Japanese linguists soon had a tent office with a new wooden work table and an area for their dictionaries and files. Counter-intelligence tasks awaited them as the papers, documents, and ephemera of Japanese life on New Caledonia were reviewed. As this work continued into early July, General Patch, having repaired the fraught relationship with General Charles de Gaulle's Free French representatives, put on a traditional July 4th parade in Noumea. The band of Massachusetts' 101st Medical Regiment (Walter Walt's unit) led some of the men from the Rifle Company, and the Heavy Weapons Company, of North Dakota's 164th Infantry Regiment's 3rd Battalion at the head of the parade. The local New Caledonia militia brought up the rear as the troops were reviewed by General



**101st Medical Regiment Band, Rifle Company and Heavy Weapons Company, 3rd Battalion, 164th Infantry Regiment. Noumea, New Caledonia, 4 July 1942.**



**Guard Mess Hall, Japanese POW Stockade. Paita, New Caledonia, 2 October 1942.**

Patch and High Commissioner of France in the Pacific Admiral Georges Thierry d'Argenlieu in front of the Hotel du Pacifique, now serving as the headquarters for Patch's American forces. The people of Noumea lined the parade route. Little did the American men on parade know that some of them were destined to play pivotal roles in the desperate battles to hold on to Guadalcanal in October and November.

It is unlikely that any of the men of the New Caledonia Six saw the parade, but they too would, even sooner, make key contributions to the Guadalcanal campaign. The attempt to take the almost-completed Japanese airfield on Guadalcanal began on 7 August. There was no resistance on Guadalcanal, but across Sealark Channel the Marines faced fierce resistance at Tulagi, which had been the administrative center for the British Solomon Islands Protectorate. Soon a vast amount of captured Japanese materials—orders, diaries, and other documents—was being sent to Noumea.

Although the details are obscure, a Japanese navy codebook soon made it to New Caledonia and became the object of a crash translation effort by the New Caledonia Six. We do not know what they were working on, but

the U.S. Army Signal Corps photograph taken on 30 August 1942 shows half of them at work. The men could also soon begin interrogating Japanese POWs from Guadalcanal and Tulagi; on 18 September the Navy evacuated 162 wounded Marines and eight POWs. (The POW stockade was located at Paita; a Signal Corps photographer caught a group of soldiers on break at their "guard mess hall" on 2 October 1942.)

As this work of the New Caledonia Six continued in September, it became clear that neither the Japanese nor the Americans had assessed accurately their enemy's intentions in the southern Solomons. As both sides soon discovered, the Japanese position to the north at Rabaul in New Britain was a prime target for the Allies. Its successful defense by the Japanese against a "reduction" by the Allies would turn on who won the Battle of Guadalcanal.

It was a battle of logistics: Which side could get the men, weapons, ammunition, and supplies to the island in sufficient quantities to win? As the stalemate stretched into late September, malaria was beginning to enervate the Marines and diminish their battle effectiveness. This scourge had appeared in late August; in October it would send ten percent of the Marines on Guadalcanal to Navy tent hospitals. The big Japanese push to defeat the United States was



**Left to right: General Patch, Admiral Nimitz, Admiral Ghormley, and General Harmon. Patch Residence, Noumea, New Caledonia, 2 October 1942.**





Left to right: General Patch, Admiral Callaghan, General Twining, General Harmon, General Sebree, and General Beck. Patch Residence, Noumea, New Caledonia, 8 October 1942.

scheduled for October.

Signs were ominous enough in September that Admiral Chester W. Nimitz, Commander in Chief of the U.S. Pacific Fleet and the vast "Pacific Ocean Area," and who had overall control of the Guadalcanal campaign, decided to leave Pearl Harbor and see for himself what was going on in the South Pacific. In an extraordinary series of high-level command meetings held on land at Noumea in the residence of General Patch, who had commandeered the elegant home of the Japanese consul in Noumea, and on Noumea Harbor on the USS Argonne, the flagship of Admiral Robert L. Ghormley, Commander of the South Pacific Area and the South Pacific Force, critical decisions were made in late September and early October. Attendees at meetings included Admiral Nimitz, Admiral John McCain, General Harmon, representatives from Australia dispatched by General MacArthur, and from Washington, D.C., even General Henry Arnold, the head of the Army Air Forces who, like Nimitz, was touring the South Pacific.

The situation was bleak for the Marines on Guadalcanal, but also for the Navy ships that were part of the battle. The Japanese Navy controlled the night and could reinforce and re-supply at will. And a few weeks before these high-level conferences, the Navy had lost the aircraft carrier USS Wasp, leaving Admiral Ghormley with only one aircraft carrier to deploy in the South Pacific. Nimitz, who had welcomed Admiral William

F. Halsey back to Pearl Harbor from his stateside convalescence in early September, rushed the repairs on Halsey's flagship, the USS Enterprise, for a quick return to the South Pacific. But the aircraft carrier would not be ready to leave Pearl Harbor until 18 October.

It was clear the Marines desperately needed reinforcements. But who? As we shall see, after all the possibilities were reviewed, and the emergency timing assessed, the answer was a very, very local one.

Nimitz, who had just completed very quick inspections of U.S. forces at Espiritu Santo in the New Hebrides, and on Guadalcanal, convened a 2 October 1942 meeting at Patch's Noumea residence with Patch, Harmon, and Ghormley. These four men reported directly, or almost directly, to their respective service heads in Washington, D.C.: General Marshall and Admiral Ernest J. King, Chief of Naval Operations. Patch, who had briefed Nimitz a few days earlier, would probably have reminded Nimitz of the Americal's September re-organization that put General Edmund B. Sebree at the head of its new Mobile Command.

As Nimitz returned to Pearl Harbor decision-making continued in the South Pacific. In an extraordinary SECRET dissent written on 6 October 1942, General Harmon argued in the direst of terms that Admiral Gormley must focus on the Battle of Guadalcanal: Henderson Field must be developed, Army reinforcements must be sent, and the Navy must step up its actions in the waters surrounding Guadalcanal. Harmon's alarm won the day. On 8 October 1942,

Harmon and his chief of staff General Nathan F. Twining, Ghormley's chief of staff and personal friend of President Roosevelt, Admiral Daniel Callaghan, Ghormley's planning officer General Dewitt Beck, General Patch, and the head of the Americal's Mobile Command, General Sebree, met for a final time at Patch's residence.

The next day the men and supplies of North Dakota's 164th Infantry Regiment were loaded on the USS McCawley, the flagship of Admiral Richmond K. Turner, the Commander of the Amphibious Forces of the South Pacific Force. They were ready for inspection, wearing their just-issued World War II-style helmets, by Admiral Ghormley, General Harmon, and General Patch on the morning of 10 October 1942. The Army's reinforcements--2,852 men strong--were soon on their way to Guadalcanal, escorted and covered by a flotilla of fifteen ships (cruisers, destroyers, and mine-layers). The Signal Corps photograph caption written later described and captured the significance of this moment: "The first joint offensive action of Army, Navy and Marine forces was placed under Navy command to be used to reinforce Marines in the Solomon Islands."

By 13 October the men were on the beaches at Guadalcanal, about to experience, with the Marines, the fiercest Japanese bombardment to date of the embattled forces defending Henderson Field. On land, Japanese forces were maneuvering to attack the field from the south. The battle lines on land and sea were being drawn by the night of "The Bombardment,"

13-14 October 1942, the first night on Guadalcanal for the men from North Dakota. Would the Marines, reinforced with General Patch's fresh and untested Regimental Combat Team from New Caledonia, be able to hold the lines at Henderson Field? Patch kept training his remaining two Regimental Combat Teams, Massachusetts' 182nd Infantry Regiment and Illinois' 132nd Infantry Regiment. And in their tent office at Paita, the Americal's Japanese Americans continued their work. Shigeru Yamashita and Ace Kusuda (both pictured on the cover of this issue of the *Americal Journal*)--the U.S. Army's best Japanese American interrogator-translator team in the South Pacific--would soon volunteer to go face the Japanese enemy on Guadalcanal.

\*The author enlisted in the U.S. Air Force (1970-74) and served a tour of duty in northern Thailand in 1973. He teaches Chinese history and "WWII: The Pacific War" at Western Washington University. He thanks Cheryl Yamashita for sharing with him the story of her family, especially her father Shigeru's personal history and his papers. He also thanks Rosalyn Tonai, Executive Director of the National Japanese American Historical Society, for introducing him to Cheryl. The society published *First Class: Nisei Linguists in World War II* (2008) by Dr. David W. Swift, Jr. Dr. Swift's assiduous research documented the personal histories of the first graduating classes of Japanese-language experts, including his father, who studied at Crissy Field in 1941-42.



Left to right: Admiral Ghormley, General Harmon, and General Patch inspecting the 164th Infantry Regiment on the USS McCawley. Noumea, New Caledonia, 10 October 1942.



## Brothers Forever,

By Chuck Wanko, Joe Emma,  
and Bill Stoneman

Continued from Apr-May-Jun  
2021 edition



The following set of stories are from Chuck Wanko. Beginning in 1968, Chuck served with 1/82 Field Artillery as the battalion ammunition officer and then as fire direction officer (FDO) in Delta Battery.

**Story #4: Monsoon Season, 1969.** After a short stint at battalion I was assigned to D Battery where I would spend the rest of my tour of duty. Shortly after New Year's 1969 the rains came and the temperatures dropped. My gunnery instructor at Fort Sill, OK (USMC MAJ Tom Gnibus) had spent a tour in the I Corp area and advised me to bring some thermal underwear and a field jacket because it got cold.

One morning I was wearing my thermals, uniform and field jacket and still felt cold. I checked the thermometer at the orderly room and it was 68 degrees. When your body is used to 100 degrees plus every day, 68 felt like freezing. The howitzer crews had M548s (Ammunition Carriers) with heaters which provided limited opportunities to warm up.

**Story #5 : LZ Dottie Perimeter Breached, 1969.** It was business as usual one night to shoot the usual harassment and interdiction (H&I) mission to blow up a few trail junctions and suspect rocket launching sites. The still of the night was suddenly lost when all hell broke loose with mortars, grenades and rifle fire all along the perimeter. Fortunately, after what seemed

forever, the attack stopped and quiet returned to the LZ.

Later in the night we had to resume the scheduled H&I fires. Rather than waking the XO or the Chief of Firing Battery (CFB), I walked out to the aiming circle to lay howitzers on the directions of fire. I climbed the tower (south aiming circle) and proceeded to lay the howitzer. Once completed, I climbed down from the tower and returned to the FDC bunker to supervise the firing commands to the howitzers.

The next morning, I walked to the mess hall for breakfast and when I was returning to the FDC I noticed several armed soldiers surrounding the base of the tower that I had climbed the previous night. The armed soldiers had found three young enemy soldiers in the brush under the base of the tower. They had at least two AK-47s with them. Realizing that they had been there when I was climbing and standing that close when I went to lay the howitzers made my legs so rubbery I could barely walk. I do not remember the fate of these enemy soldiers but believe they were turned over to the ARVN's. Needless-to-say, I was extremely grateful that they were so frightened after being abandoned by their comrades that they did not shoot up through the base of the tower. That was also the last time I ventured out to the aiming circle in the middle of the night.

**Story #6: Memorial Day, 1969.** The week before Memorial Day we decided to make our life on LZ Dottie a little more like home with a party to celebrate with our D Battery family. The mess section had steaks, burgers and hot dogs, various salads and all the fixings for a nice holiday meal. The motor pool had made a charcoal grill out of a 55-gallon barrel and we were planning a good time – at least we were until we opened the Conex container where we stored the beer and soda only to find we did not have any beer.

Two of my additional duties were those of Mess and Supply Officer. I did not want to ruin the morale of the soldiers by the lack of appropriate picnic beverages so I dispatched a ration run into Chu Lai with the story that our Conex was hit by a mortar round the previous night destroying the contents and that we needed a resupply of beer and soda for our holiday party. This mission was unsuccessful and the soldiers returned with a message that the person at the ration point wanted to see me.

I went into Chu Lai the next day and walked into the office. The SP4 in charge of beverage distribution looked up from his desk and said, "Hi Chuck, what is the problem?" I responded, "Lee, we have a holiday picnic planned for the soldiers and don't have any beer or soda." Lee was a college classmate of mine and this was the first time we had seen each other since graduation. His records consisted of an accounting spreadsheet with the unit designations down the left side and months across the top. He put the eraser end of his pencil on the right side of the page and moved it to the left to the month of May and said, "I do not see that you have drawn your allotment for this month (which was three pallets of beer and soda)".

After some friendly conversation catching up on our time since graduation to our meeting here in Americal headquarters, Lee asked if I had "one of those light weight camouflage blankets (a poncho liner)". I assured him that I could find one in our supply room. He responded that if he was not at his desk when the truck came to pick up our beverage supply that they could just leave the poncho liner in his desk drawer. I traded a poncho liner for three pallets of beer and soda. Needless to say we had an enjoyable picnic and it was a morale boost for the soldiers. Lee went home shortly thereafter and fortunately our Conex never got hit again. When I related this story to a fellow Americal Vet a few years ago he commented that Radar O'Reilly (MASH if you forgot) would have been proud.

**Story #7: An Unusual Farmer, 1969.** One evening just after dinner I walked out to the north aiming circle, climbed the tower and looked out over



8" Howitzer overlooking the targeted area.

the area to the west of LZ Dottie. Across Hwy. 1 was a hill that was devoid of any vegetation – just bare dirt. There was a man wearing a khaki uniform "grazing" a water buffalo on the hill and looking toward our position. I called a for fire mission from our B Battery at LZ Gator and notified our perimeter personnel to seek cover. We had fired direct/indirect fire a number of times on the same hill. The rounds were on target and also impacted on the back side of the hill. Intel received a day or so later reported several casualties to enemy troops in that area. Just another evening stroll around the LZ.

**Story #8: The 10 Day Drop, 1969.** I had received a set of orders reflecting a departure date 10 days prior to my scheduled DEROS. I was really excited and began packing and clearing the unit. Each day I returned some piece of organizational equipment that I thought I could live without for my remaining time. The last items to turned in were my .45 Cal pistol and my M-16.

On the appointed day I waited on the helipad for the chopper ride to Chu Lai. As I put my bag in the chopper the pilot handed me a paper and said "you better read this before you get aboard." The paper was a revised set of orders stating that effective immediately all 10-day drops were canceled. It was a long walk back up the hill. Shortly thereafter signs were prominently posted to the effect, "If you find a helmet lying on the ground do not kick it, the LT may be under it." This was not too far from the truth for they were the longest 10 days of my tour.

**Story #9: If the Army wanted you to have a wife, 1969 - 1970.** Upon my return from Vietnam I was assigned to Ft Dix, NJ. It was the Holiday Season 1969-1970. The Commander of the Basic Training Committee Group at Fort Dix, New Jersey invited all officers in the Group to a party at the Fort Dix Officers Club. Everyone was expected to attend. Married officers were to bring spouses and bachelor officers would have a date. All military attending would wear the dress blue uniform. (This was informally referred to as a mandatory good time - you would attend and you would have a good time.)

We had one 2LT in the Group who was very quiet and shy. LT Steve did not have a date and in fact this may have been his first formal social event requiring one. This became a problem for me and 1LT Mike Lawson when our boss, CPT Alan Brooks, called us into his office and tasked us with finding a date for Steve. Fortunately, Mike was engaged to a girl who worked in the personnel department of a major corporation and there were several young women that worked there. Mike's fiancée was able to arrange a date for Steve.

The night of the party arrived and my date and I arrived at the club, went through the receiving line and went to our assigned seats for the evening. LT Steve was one of the last to arrive. I looked across the room and saw him in the receiving line with a beautiful blonde and I knew right away that I needed to meet her. During the course of the evening I met Liz and needless to say I was very impressed. The next morning, I asked Steve what he thought of his date from the previous evening. Steve was his usual quiet self and when I asked if he intended to see her again, he said he did not think so. I then asked if he would give me her phone number, which he did.

I proceed to call Liz and asked for a date on the next weekend. I continued to date her for several months and the relationship blossomed. At the same time, I was facing a major career decision. My active duty commitment was to expire in May 1970. The Army offered me a promotion to captain if I extended for one year on active duty (as they did to most of us). The problem with this was that the additional year was to be spent on a second tour in Vietnam. I made it through one year and did not desire to spend two out of three years in the Army in a combat zone.

I made the decision to leave the Army and return home to upstate New York and my career in Public Accounting. I also realized that I needed to make a serious decision about my relationship with Liz. Leaving the Army was an easy decision but my feelings for her were such that I did not want to leave her. Not knowing what to expect, I asked her to marry me. Much to my surprise she said yes and we set a date at the end of September to get married. I left active duty and returned to my civilian job. Every weekend I would leave work on Friday afternoon and drive four hours to NJ to spend the weekend with Liz, returning on Sunday night. Liz came to upstate New York on a couple of weekends to help look for our future home, shopping for furniture and discussing the wedding plans with my parents.

After a very busy and short engagement we were married on September 26, 1970. It has been a wonderful life and as I write this, we will be married 50 years this September 2020. We had planned a celebration trip to Hawaii, however the CORONA Virus pandemic forced us to cancel our plans. There is an expression that if the Army wanted you to have a wife, they would issue you one. In our case that was true.



## The Ambush (C)

By Gregory C. Reeser

[The Ambush is one chapter of the book *Real Bullets* by Gregory C. Reeser. Reeser began Vietnam duty in February 1968 and rotated through assignments with the 1/52, 5/46, and 1/46, 198 Light Infantry Brigade. The book is available at Amazon. -Editor]

This day we were missioned again to patrol west of Firebase Colt and to "secure" the small village of Phuoc Thuong (1), located along road 611, about six miles southwest of LZ Baldy. "Secure," meant to rob the villagers of any excess rice they might be storing, and to take possession of any firearms, ammunition, or other military equipment that could be used by the enemy.

To me, the huge ceramic containers of rice that were common in these villages were really the only wealth that the peasants had. To take that away from them, with the thought that we would then deny the enemy's ability to have a constant source of food, seemed an unrealistic stretch of logic. There was no shortage of rice to be had by the enemy, even if it was just enough for dinner.

### Real Bullets



1968 Vietnam —  
Getting There, Being There, Getting Back

Greg Reeser

Anyway, we spent most of the day loading the rice onto choppers. As they lifted off, one could easily see the sadness and despair in the faces of the people. No wonder, the Vietnamese in the countryside did not adore or trust us.

Toward late afternoon, I decided to take a machine gun team, along with the dog team we had attached to us, to check the path toward an NDP. These dogs were highly able to sense enemy presence, and they took their jobs as seriously as any of us. I wanted to scout the way toward the big hill next to the stream called Suoi Cho Dun, which I intended to be our NDP (night defensive position). As we got to the near riverbank, the dog alerted, indicating that it was likely that the enemy was near by.

I sent the machine gun team across first, while we guarded their crossing. As they reached the far bank, I started across with my RTO right behind. The water level was very low, which exposed many rocks on the stream bed. When we reached the middle of the stream, the enemy let loose with everything they had, and we dropped straight down, trying to get inside the rocks. My RTO and I were pinned down with automatic fire. At the same time, my machine gunner was face to face with the enemy's rear guard, an NVA, wearing a green pith helmet with a red star on it. Then, his machine gun jammed, allowing the NVA soldier to disappear.

Meanwhile, gunships arrived (just like in the movies when the cavalry rides in to save the day). They told me to pop smoke, to show them where we were. I gave them a direction and distance (about 15 meters) from me to the enemy along the riverbank, and man, they blasted that bank with rockets and machine gun fire like I never saw before.

We were pinned down by the enemy fire, but I jumped up anyway and tried to fire my M16, which jammed, so I grabbed my .45 and shot at the enemy area so my RTO and I could rush to the far bank and better cover. When the smoke cleared, the enemy seemed to disappear. One of the gunships caught one of the bastards on the run, and sent him to see his ancestors. We had some casualties, cuts and scrapes and one shrapnel wound, but all minor.

We made our way back to the village and the rest of the platoon, and prepared to move out through the ambush area and up the big brown hill. This time I had one squad get over and set up to cover for the rest of us to cross. We made it up to the rocky top which gave us plenty of cover, but I could not help thinking that the enemy, instead of running off, was actually right under us in a tunnel complex in that hill. I called in checkpoints for artillery from LZ Baldy, had Mauricio set up three man positions, but still did not sleep much that night.

A few days later, the company had a mission to take and occupy a very high hill (I'd call it a mountain). We had a dog team with us, and when on patrol, it was very comforting to have that dog toward the front, knowing that he would alert us the moment he smelled the enemy. We would set out nightly ambushes, and once I decided to let Sgt. Davis lead one, with me as an observer. He did well, and we spent the night in a shallow trench without enemy contact. The next day, the company was told to move across the valley to a higher hill, and conduct similar operations from there.

I was tasked to go first and provide security at the bottom of the hill for the rest of the company, as they descended and then climbed the new hill. After the three other platoons and Shotwell's HQ staff had made it up to position, it was my turn. By this time it was about 2 p.m., right at the heat of the day (200 degrees maybe?), and a couple of my guys dropped in exhaustion. I was also, almost at that point of exhaustion and called for a break, about half way up. After about 20 minutes, Shotwell called to

ask what the hell we were doing. I told him we were almost there, and started climbing.

I looked back and saw about 10 Vietnamese climbing our previous hill. They were dressed in black, so our standard assumption was that they were VC. An Air force bird dog was in the area, so Captain Shotwell called for an airstrike, and had me direct fire from my position. The jet blew the hell out of that hilltop, but the VC just disappeared.

Another mission was a combat air assault on a suspected VC hideout. This time we had two RFs (local militia, or regional forces) with us, who were supposed to help us locate the enemy. Generally, none of us had much use for these characters, as they did not have much discipline or a love of their work.

We jumped off the choppers to a hot LZ, and then rushed to the tree line for better cover. When it had quieted down, we started moving toward our objective. The "ruff" in front of me, tossed a c-rat can that he had been eating from, which landed right in front of me.

Thinking that it was a grenade, I yelled "grenade" and did a kind of backflip into a slight depression in the ground, then got up with a sprained shoulder. "What the fuck are you trying to do," I yelled, but he just giggled as we continued.

The rest of that patrol was uneventful, and the presence of the RFs again proved worthless.

## Award Sought For Dustoff Crews

By LTC Christopher M. Siedor USA, (Ret.)

There is an ongoing effort to obtain the award of a Congressional Gold Medal for Vietnam War helicopter air ambulance crews. Letters of support to move this through Congress are requested from all interested parties.

Helicopter air ambulance "Medevac" and "Dustoff" units had the most dangerous aviation mission of all the services and were flown by the Army helicopter crews. To share Major Charles Kelly's final words, "When I Have Your Wounded," when told to abort his Dustoff mission due to enemy fire. He subsequently lost his life. His successors who followed his hallowed words and many times paid the "ultimate price" to save others.

Initially, there were five aeromedical evacuation helicopters assigned to cover 67,108 square miles of combat area. During the war's peak period in 1969, there were 140 helicopters authorized for this area. In that one year, more than 104,112 missions were completed by crews flying about 78,652 combat hours.

Combat losses were 199 helicopters, for a loss ratio of 142%. Of the 1,400 pilots, 90 were killed and 380 wounded while enlisted crew members experienced 121 killed and 545 wounded. This is a loss ratio

of 33%. Comparing their loss rate with all other helicopter crews, the rate was 1.5 times greater.

DUSTOFF and MEDEVAC units in Vietnam flew 496,573 missions from 1962 to 1973. Over 900,000 casualties were evacuated to various medical facilities.

Approximately 8,000 hoist missions were made by the Dustoff crews. Those aircraft and crews were "sitting ducks" as they hovered to await the hoisted patient. If they were fired on the crews had two choices: Hope that the "fire" did not hit anything critical. The other choice: to cut the cable and let the patient drop to their death. The level of heroism in these missions was immeasurable. Crew casualties during hoist mission represented 10% of the medical evacuation crews who were killed or wounded in Vietnam.

Most U.S. ground combat forces left Vietnam by the fall of 1971. Dustoff left in March 1973. In January 1972, the Dustoff aircraft began to be painted white. For context to understand the danger: the Tet Offensive in 1968 brought 40,000 NVA soldiers into South Vietnam. The Easter Offensive in April, 1972, brought approximately 300,000 NVA soldiers and their anti-aircraft weapons into South Vietnam anti-aircraft weapons.

**PLEDGE: NO HESITATION - NO RESERVATION - NO COMPROMISE - YOU GET THE WOUNDED OUT** were the words that Dustoff lived and died by.

In 2020, Senator John Cornyn (Texas) introduced Senate Bill 3748 - the Dust Off Crews of the Vietnam War Congressional Gold Medal Act. This effort needs to be revived and pushed to success. Endorsement letters can be sent to: LTC Steven Vermillion USA, (Ret.), Vietnam Dustoff Association President, 3103 31st Avenue SE, Puyallup, WA 98374.





**Bad Day Off 251**

By Charles Gill

**PREFACE**

There are some people who want to hear about Vietnam. If they haven't been there, I generally don't want to tell them about it. I guess there are a lot of reasons for that. Usually, I don't want to bore them with another old "war story". But many times, I don't want them to know. My wife used to say I'm too private about things like that. She thought I'm not proud of my service. Indeed, I am proud, but I figure most people don't give a damn because it was only Vietnam, and today most people don't know or can't remember what our objectives were in Vietnam, or the sacrifices that were made there.

I've thought about it off and on now for 51 years. Sometimes I think about it and about what happened and about the men I was with at the time. Usually, I don't like to think about it because it's pretty much "old news", and it has little or no bearing on the present. There are only a few people with whom I am willing to share it. My wife, Sherry, was one, and her brother Joe, is also one. He was 11B; I was too. But the real reason I'm writing this at all is because of my daughters: Lisa, Angie, and Katie. They're the ones who should know what happened. Maybe they'll tell their children.

**BACKGROUND**

I was assigned to Bravo Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry, 196th Light Infantry Brigade, Americal Division from 1 November 1969 to 30 March 1970, or as we used to say, "B Co, 2/1, 196th LIB, Americal". It wasn't really a very long time, certainly not as long as most men who "served" in Vietnam. I don't know too many who actually "served", most of us were just there. We were trying to stay alive for the duration of the infamous "tour of duty" which was 12 months long. We just wanted to get back to our block, our neighborhood, our friends, our Nova, college, wife, or home. We thought about things like that a lot over there. Between contacts with our Viet Cong brethren, we talked about it with whomever would listen. It's funny how when you're in a large group of people you gravitate to people who have similar interests, backgrounds, and outlooks as your own. Not unlike it is in a college dormitory or a Boy Scout Troop. That's the way it was over there.

By the time I got to Vietnam, there almost seemed to be a lull in the major fighting. The Tet Offensives of 1968 and 1969 had come and gone. In late 1969, the North Vietnamese Army, which had taken some hits down south, was pulling back, leaving the local Viet Cong guerrillas to do battle with the Americans. Most of the encounters with the VC were either with snipers or booby traps. Those damn booby traps.

Company B operated out of Landing Zone Hawk Hill or Hill 29 on the map. LZ Hawk Hill was located about seven or eight miles south of Da Nang, just west of Highway 1. Bravo Company patrolled the coastal plains and foothills west of Hawk Hill. In my experience, we rarely went up into the real mountains. Most of the hills we climbed were no more than 300 meters in height. Still, it's a pretty good struggle if you're carrying a fully-loaded rucksack. In our area of operations and at the request of our battalion, we built Observation Post Legionnaire on Hill 251. We were camping on Hill 251 from late January 1970 through the day I was hurt, March 25. Actually, life on 251 wasn't too bad. We had hot breakfasts, lots of rations, water, and mail. We occasionally received incoming fire, but it was when we went hiking off 251; well, that's when we really had problems.

The Viet Cong were very intelligent, and very observant. We were in their backyard. They knew the neighborhood; they knew the shortcuts, the back alleys. We were just trying to follow the main thoroughfares without getting lost or hurt. The VC always knew where an infantry company of 166 loud, raucous "men" and boys were located.<sup>1</sup>

The VC often made our daily hikes down the hill and into the valley very dangerous. The common practice was to booby trap the trails we walked down each morning. Our platoon usually started out by 7:00 am so we became very predictable. The booby traps were rarely fatal, but could easily blow off a leg or a foot, an awful price to pay just to get home. The explosives were usually of U.S. origin, something we or another company may have dropped along a trail, or left behind after a sit-down break. It was easy to do. Most often, we'd find that the VC had used a 40mm M-79 round, or one of several varieties of mortar rounds, or a grenade, which was a most lethal booby trap.<sup>2</sup>

**PRELUDE**

Starting sometime in January 1970, Bravo Company along with some artillery forward observers moved up onto Hill 251 and the Army promptly renamed it "OP Legionnaire". We spent several days digging foxholes and sleeping positions and clearing lines of fire and generally making ourselves at home. But we soon began our daily patrols and occasional night ambushes down off the hill in an effort to become more familiar with the surrounding terrain and to see if we could meet the local VC. Our patrols were usually platoon-size, that is, we generally had three squads of about eight or nine men each along with the platoon leader, his RTO<sup>3</sup>, and the medic. A typical day patrol would usually consist of about 27 men in all. Each squad would leave one man back on 251 to perform work details and to guard the squads' equipment.

The booby traps were becoming more than a daily nuisance. By March it was not uncommon for one of the three platoons to hit one. And when your platoon did hit one, everybody became a little more afraid and a little more irritable. No one would volunteer to walk the first position in the column. This position was called "point". My point man quit unless we were following some other group in the platoon. The squad leader couldn't force someone to walk point, no matter what the officers say today. Nobody wanted to get hurt, and nobody wanted anyone else to get hurt.

So, there we were that morning of March 25, 1970 having breakfast on Hill 251. My point man just informed me that since my squad would be leading the platoon that morning, he wouldn't be on point. No body else wanted it. I trusted only one or two of the other guys to walk point because as squad leader, I walked behind the point man. And my safety depended upon how alert he was.

I remember one day, my point man raised his rifle to fire at a VC running through a rice paddy, and his weapon failed. I was surprised and angry when I realized that this guy was giving me no protection whatsoever. I asked when was the last time he'd opened the bolt and resealed the round in the chamber on his weapon. I don't remember what his exact reply was but it was less frequent than the once a day recommend to prevent such problems.

What does a conscientious squad leader do after everyone refuses to be "point man for a day"? Well, that March morning, I walked it myself with one of my most trusted soldiers behind me. The second position in the column and just behind "point" is referred to as the "slack" position. That fateful day, I was on point and on slack was Robert Duane Tatum from Blue Grass, Iowa. We called Bob "Doc" because he held a degree in chiropractic from Palmer College.

That morning we were to go off the south side of Hill 251, across the valley, and up onto two smaller hills just south of 251. These two hills were connected by a saddle, or a lower ridge, which ran between them in an east-west line. We had camped on the eastern-most hill a few months earlier, but had only stayed there a night or two. So, I was familiar with that area somewhat. What I wasn't familiar with was going off the south side of Hill 251. We had taken most of our hikes off the north side and I knew that side pretty well. But I can only remember being on the south side trail once, and that was to come up the trail. In addition, that day we were to follow a slightly different route down than the other platoons had been using.

All this foretold problems I couldn't even think about that morning.

**INTO THE VALLEY**

Doc and I started off down Hill 251 trying to stay off the regular trails. Staying off the trails was relatively easy in clear terrain, but became very difficult when moving through thick underbrush or over very uneven ground. I remember that 251 was grass-covered near the peak and down most of the sides, but about one-third of its base was covered in thick brush and jungle before it opened up into the rice paddies on level ground in the valley. In order to get the column through that dense thicket, I chose to follow one of the established paths. Entering the bushes, we found an empty GI combat boot, which had been cut off of its previous owner. It appeared to be maybe a day or two old. Next to it was a place on the trail where an explosion had taken place. I put two-and-two together and realized that we'd better get the hell out of there.

As we came out of the thicket and into the knee-high grass, I didn't notice

anything different or unusual. But behind me Doc called to "Hold up". I turned around in time to see him pulling at something, which had caught on his boot or pants leg. As he removed the vine or whatever it was, he noticed that it came from the side of the trail at the very point where we left the thicket and walked into the grass. I heard him exclaim "sonafabitch" or a similar epitaph. I walked back to see what he'd discovered. Lying in the grass was what looked like an 82mm mortar round! It had a trip wire sticking out of the nose. The VC had put the booby trap at the exact spot where a GI would be least careful as he stepped out of the thicket into the clearing.

I'll never know how I had stepped over that trip line and how Doc had found it without it detonating the mortar round. God had sent one of his angels to walk in the column with us that morning.

We quickly told our platoon leader, a sergeant first-class by the name of "Mason", that we'd found a little problem. He was what we referred to as a "lifer" which meant that he had made the Army his career. Most GIs berated "lifers", but actually they had a lot of good, practical experiences, which usually kept people from getting hurt. We decided to get everyone away from the trap and to blow it up where it lay. And that's what we did.

After all the excitement we were ready to get the platoon moving. Again, I was on the point as we move slowly along the well-worn path in the knee-high grass. I don't know why I followed the path. Probably because I thought I could see any obstacles easier than if we were all tromping through the grass.

I was moving very slowly as we were leaving the thicket where Doc had found our first booby trap of the day. Not more than 100 feet from that spot, I saw out of the corner of my eye, the grass on the side of the trail move as I brought



my right foot forward! Looking down at my feet I spotted a thin line running across the path. As I stood there dumbfounded, I noticed that my foot was still pulling the line from parallel. Slowly, oh so slowly, I moved my foot back and reached down and parted the grass next to my right foot. Hidden in the weeds was yet another big mortar round just waiting to ruin the whole day. Our angel was sure doing his (or her) job!

Now it was my opportunity to turn white. I stopped the column of troops, whom by now were becoming a little agitated at being held up again just after resuming our morning walk. Again, we brought Sergeant Mason forward. Again, we blew the mortar round in place. All of this sounds easy and expeditious, but moving 35 young Army privates and specialists back a safe distance, and finding someone who will blow this thing up so we can get moving, takes a lot of time. And time can make a soldier in the jungle vulnerable. We were getting tired of being vulnerable that morning and just wanted to get to a safer, more defensible location.

We removed that obstacle and continued on our journey. Slowly we moved off the hillside and down into the valley advancing toward the two smaller hills south of Hill 251. The valley had been rice paddies years earlier, but these were dry now and covered in ankle-high grass. Going through the valleys was always precarious because you can be seen from a long way off. And a column of American soldiers is an easy target for a young VC soldier with a rifle. Usually, the snipers would shoot at us from long-range, maybe 300 yards or more. I'm sure it was fun to watch us duck and run for cover at the sound of one or two shots from an AK-47. But it sure wasn't fun on our end. I hated being sniped at because you never knew when some guy might get lucky. We were normally able to return fire and move quickly out of the shooting zone.

But this morning we met no snipers. They were probably sleeping after having spent the night before placing the two booby traps that Doc and I had just found. They would probably be disappointed when they realized that we made it safely down 251. They didn't know about that little angel helping me and Doc.

I don't think that we had much to do that day. I know we were all a bit unnerved after the bobby trap incidents. So, Sergeant Mason directed me to move our platoon toward the closest of the two hills in front of us, the eastern-most hill, the one on which we'd camped a few months earlier. I'm sure he just wanted to get us some place where we could sit down and catch our breath after escaping injury. After all, he could've been hurt also because it was common for the platoon leader to walk behind the slack man. That makes him third in the column, and that's too close for an exploding 82mm mortar.

I remember walking up the eastern hill and looking at a few of the old foxholes that we'd dug during an earlier camp-out. The bottom part of the hill was

like Hill 251 in that it was covered in brush, but the top portion of the hill was grass covered with paths through the grass where GIs and VC had walked. We led the platoon over the top of that hill and then down through the saddle and up the western hill. I suppose the hills were only 100 yards apart from peak to peak through the saddle.

I had never been on the western hill, which we were approaching. I knew that GIs had been there because it also had old foxholes and trash lying about. It was somewhat open on top of the hill with overhead brush and trees covering the bottom half. As hills go, these two hills were nothing like humping up 251. These hills were less than 100 meters high, and once we got up one hill it was an easy walk over the saddle to the next hill. We were beginning to feel a little safer getting off the valley floor.

At the hilltop, Sergeant Mason had us disperse our men in a perimeter around the very top of the hill. Just below the top of the hill was another plateau with foxholes where GIs had been camped earlier. The drop between the two levels was somewhat steep, probably about five feet in height. There were several worn paths, or "cuts" between the two levels, which provided easier access than trying to climb up one of the steep banks between levels. After I got my squad settled down and resting, and looking outward, I decided to go down to the lower level and check things out. It must have been pretty warm that March afternoon in 1970 because I had taken my shirt off and was bare-chested as I walked down a well-worn "cut" between the two levels. Half-way down and through the cut, I felt something on my chest. I hadn't seen anything as I entered the cut, but I sure felt something now. "What the hell is this?" I thought.

Stretched across my breast was a thin nylon line. By that time of day, I knew what it was. Carefully I retreated, releasing the tension on the line. I could see that on the left the line was tied around nothing more than a handful of grass. I couldn't see what was holding the line on the right side. Carefully, I pushed aside the grass where the line entered the grass at a point that was about "head-high" with me. I found that the line was connected to the nose of yet another mortar round! This time it was a smaller round than the two 82mm rounds that Doc and I had found earlier in the day coming off of Hill 251. This one must have been about a 60mm round. Nonchalantly, I took out the pocketknife that Bobby, my nephew had sent me, and cautiously cut the nylon line on both ends. A good souvenir, I thought. I had something to take back to the World. If I had tripped that one, I'd be dead. No helmet; no flack jacket. An explosion occurring three feet from my right ear would have been the worst.

I got my line and reported my new find to Sergeant Mason. He was stunned when I told him about yet another booby trap. I remember that by that time we

were all out of C4 explosive having used what we had been carrying to detonate the two booby traps we'd found earlier. So, somebody suggested that we use a grenade to blow the newest one I'd just found. The problem is that a grenade has only a 4-5 second time delay before it explodes. And four seconds is just not quite enough time to get safely away from an exploding grenade and an exploding 60mm mortar round. But in every group, there's a hero. And we were no exception.

Fortunately, it wasn't me. We had picked up a replacement soldier a day or two earlier. He wasn't in my squad. I think he was assigned to second squad, Paul Thomas' squad. Apparently, he was a former Marine because we called him "Jarhead" instead of his real name. Well, Jarhead said he would pull the pin on the grenade, place it next to the mortar round, release the handle and run like hell. And that's what he did, but he wasn't fast enough. Before he could reach cover the whole mess exploded. He wasn't hurt badly, but he received a slight wound to his right side below one of his armpits. It looked like a small puncture wound, and I was sure he'd been hit by a piece of wire fragment from the grenade. He was alert and not in much pain, but we had to call in a Medevac<sup>4</sup> to take him back to Hawk Hill. And all this was going to take time and would certainly reveal our exact position to anyone who happened to be interested. I hated delays of this type, but this kind of immediate medical attention kept everyone's morale up.

Our platoon had a medic attached to us. We always had a medic with us when we went out for our walks. Our medic's name that day was Leland Reed. There wasn't much he had to do for Jarhead because he was awake and the wound bled very little. So, Doc Reed put one of the GI bandages on Jarhead's small puncture wound just to keep the dirt out. The medics were pretty good guys. Sometimes they'd carry a rifle, but usually not. But they didn't have a big red and white cross on their helmet either. Can't say I blame them. I didn't know Doc Reed very well, but he was a likable guy. I remember I took his picture one morning after breakfast. I'm glad I did because I have fond memories of him.

Sergeant Mason got on the radio and called in the Medevac for Jarhead. I remember that Doc Reed classified his condition as less than "urgent", probably something like "important", but certainly above "routine" which was reserved for toothaches and athlete's foot. So, we had to wait for a chopper<sup>5</sup> a little longer than normal because they would pick up all the "urgents" first, then all the "important". And when that chopper arrived there had be no doubt where we were.

While we waited, one of the guys in my squad called me over to his position on the perimeter. I think it might have been Doc Tatum. He had been listening to some noise or something moving in the brush down the hill in front of our position. It's funny how quiet 25

soldiers can be when they want to be. And we could hear some slight movement in the trees and bushes out in front of where we were laying. Why we didn't open up with all our firepower and see what happened, I'll never know. Thinking back, I imagine that Sergeant Mason didn't want us to open fire while waiting for a Medevac for Jarhead, thinking the pilot wouldn't land if we had a hot LZ. So, we didn't, but we kept hearing that movement. Couldn't see anything; we would've fired if we'd seen somebody.

Soon, we got word on the radio that our chopper was inbound. The pilot asked that we put out a colored smoke grenade to identify. Somebody popped a smoke grenade and the pilot correctly identified the color, and he landed the helicopter nearby. I helped put Jarhead on the chopper and wished him well. He was getting a free ride out of the woods, and would be sleeping on sheets and a mattress that evening – and he didn't look too worse for wear!

After the Jarhead's chopper took off, Sergeant Mason told me to get us back to camp. Everybody was ready to move, me included. We hadn't had much fun that day and we were beginning to get a little weary. I imagine it was about 1:30 in the afternoon when Mason had us "saddle up" and get ready to move. I wanted to get us back to 251 as soon as possible, and we decided to go back on the same trail on which we'd arrived. That turned out to be a big mistake. Doc Tatum and I were on point as we began to move steadily off the top and down to the saddle between the two hills. All of a sudden there was a loud siren going off in my right ear, and I was lying on the ground and people were yelling. I remember hearing the first half of an explosion and then the siren. My right buttock felt like it was on fire and it really burned. I was lying face down with my head turned to the right. That's when I closed my eyes.

Well, I was hurting, and somehow, I knew that Doc was hurt also. We weren't dead, but I didn't know how bad we were hurt. I couldn't tell much because I had my eyes closed. Truthfully, I didn't think about too much except how I was doing, and my butt burned like hell. I asked Doc Reed to check my butt and that's when he said he wanted to work on the *head* wound first! I didn't feel the head wound, but apparently, I had one just behind my right ear. I also remember calling out for Jackie Thomas. Jack answered and I told him to dig my billfold out of my fatigue pants because I had over \$400 on me and I was afraid I might "lose" that somewhere between the Medevac helicopter and Ireland Army Hospital at Ft. Knox. Jack retrieved my wallet and told me that he'd give it to Lt. Rodman, the company's executive officer. I remember that I briefly opened my eyes as I talked to Jack and again as they lifted Doc Tatum and me onto the chopper. We were getting a ride out of the war, but I was still scared. I can't begin to recall the fusillade of thoughts, concerns, and worries that must have been going through my



mind. I didn't talk to Doc on the ride into LZ Hawk Hill. I had my eyes closed.

I briefly remember getting back to Hawk Hill and being taken into the hospital. There were numerous people around. I remember that the Catholic chaplain was there. I remember that another medic we'd worked with before, Doug Alridge was there too. I remember asking them to pray for me. I was pretty scared. I remember that a man asked me if I could breathe. I said yes, I could. He asked me to breathe deeply. I did so with no undue effort or pain except for that in my butt. I later learned that I had a wound in my back, which the doctors feared might have punctured my lung. But luckily, it hadn't. I guess my angel had gotten in the way.

We had been real lucky, Doc and me. Several weeks before, the battalion commanding officer had issued an order that all combat personnel walking out in the woods were to wear flack jackets. Well, those damn things were thick and heavy and hot. We hated wearing them because they were very uncomfortable and they were just one more thing to carry. And we already had enough to carry. But that day, true to form, Doc and I had our flack jackets on as I tripped that damn booby trap — probably another 60mm mortar round like the one I'd found on top of the hill. They had to throw those flack vests away. I'm sure that had I not been wearing it, that the wound I received in the back would have torn a hole the size of a silver dollar in my lung, and that could have changed everything. As it was, I wished I'd been wearing flack *pants*!

Doc wasn't as lucky as me. The explosion had cost him the sight in his left eye. Surprisingly, he told me later it really didn't hurt at the time. I still feel bad about being the cause of that even though I know that he's forgiven me. Doc also happened to be wearing a belt of M-60 machine gun ammunition around his waist. A piece of the exploding shrapnel was stopped short of his abdomen by one of the rounds of ammo. Doc still has the bullet from that round. It has a cavity more than half way through where it stopped the shrapnel.

Well, I don't think we stayed too long at LZ Hawk Hill. I remember that they flew us down to the Americal Division hospital at Chu Lai, probably late that afternoon. I think I slept a little in flight, but I had my eyes closed. I don't remember too much at all. I know they took us back into surgery to examine and clean our wounds. We were sedated at the time. I woke up in the recover room later with a man looking over me. I opened my eyes.

"Are you a doctor?", I asked.

"Yes, I'm the doctor who took care of you; you're going to be fine".

"What time is it?"

"It's about 11:00 in the evening".

"Is there a guy named Tatum in here?". I wanted to know where Doc was.

"Yes, he's just across the aisle; he's going to be fine too".

"Tell him I said he's a damn good man".

With that he left my bedside and I watched him walk across the room to another bed and talk to someone laying there. I could hear him talking, but I couldn't understand what he said as he looked down at the person in the bed.

I called out, "Doc!".

A hand went up from the bed as if to say, "here I am".

"You're a damn good man!"

We spent five more days in Chu Lai, and then we were transported to Camp Zama outside of Tokyo. Camp Zama was doing a big business with all the wounded soldiers coming out of Vietnam. I lost track of Robert Tatum at Camp Zama because they put us in different wards. And I started feeling sorry for myself. I wasn't walking yet because of the wounds to my buttocks, upper leg, and behind my knee. Finally, one afternoon at Camp Zama, I got so mad I got out of bed and began to shuffle behind a wheelchair trying to get my step back. Well, I got it, but I continued to limp for about a year afterwards.

One evening in the hospital ward at Camp Zama, several young women who were dispensing cookies and punch and conversation visited us. One pretty girl came by my bed and as we talked, I boasted that I had graduated from Notre Dame. She was nice and polite, but she obviously didn't believe me. I was somewhat surprised and mentioned some of the ND guys names whom I knew in college. I mentioned John Kukankous, John McGrath, Mike Bresnahan, and for some reason I mentioned a guy I knew, but never did anything with: Frank Mashuda. Her mouth dropped open. I had just named her husband! I don't know why I said Frank's name. It must have been that the angel on 251 had followed me all the way to Japan. Anyway, we had a very nice talk for the next half hour and she told me that after graduating from Notre Dame, that she and Frank had married and since he was in Navy ROTC, that he had to fulfill his four-year commitment to the Navy. And Tokyo is where they were currently stationed. She told me that one of my old roommates in Howard Hall Annex, Mike Bresnahan, and his wife were also in Tokyo. I told her to tell Mike hello for me. The next evening Mike and his wife made the two-hour trip out to Camp Zama to see me. What a neat occasion that was.

I spent a couple of weeks at Camp Zama where they sewed up my wounds and changed my bandages everyday. By the middle of April 1970, I was on my way home. I remember arriving at Scott AFB just south of St. Louis. My first night back in the World, my wife and her parents came from Vincennes, Indiana to

see me. What a sight for sore eyes! I can never forget seeing her again after the six months of separation. Our emotions were cascading; we were so relieved to see one another and to know that we were both safe. Now, we could begin our lives together again.

I didn't talk to Bob Tatum again for 17 years. I knew that he lived in Iowa someplace. I was going to be in Rock Island, Illinois on business and decided that would be a good time to contact Bob. In October 1987 I reached Bob on the phone and the first thing he said to me was "We should've fired into the brush and killed that SOB". No "hello", no "how're you doing"; no other greeting, no anything except to exclaim how we should've shot and kept that VC off the path on which we were going to exit. It was as if we hadn't spoken to each other for 15 minutes after the explosion. But we spent a couple of evenings that week catching up on each other. It was a very memorable occasion.

## POSTSCRIPT

My story pales in comparison to the sacrifices of many other men and women who went to Vietnam. It is only one short story among all the stories from soldiers, marines, sailors, and nurses who got to make that trip. Each of us who went to Vietnam experienced a different view of the war. It's like blind men touching different parts of the elephant. None of us touched it all. But all of us who went touched part of the elephant, and the elephant touched us in ways you can never imagine if you didn't serve.

I didn't like leaving wife and home and family for the US Army and ultimately, for Vietnam. But I and many like me did leave because we were expected to do so. I am proud of the fact that we went. It was our contribution for living in a free republic. We learned many lessons from our time in the service and from our tour in Vietnam. Some of us never came home from that trip. As has been said before, they are the ones who gave the most. Our deepest respect and gratitude go out to them and those we left behind. We will never forget them.

1. I know I put "men" in quotes. That's not to demean the valor or courage of the individuals who were there, but most were a hell of a lot younger than most men. I had two 18-year-old boys in my squad. They were Glen Chastain and Jesse Ortez. They needed help and leadership, hated being in Vietnam, and they hated to listen to anybody in authority, especially Jesse. I often wonder whatever became of him. I know he re-enlisted just to get out of the field in Vietnam.

2. In one of the other platoons, a guy I remember from NCOC School at Ft. Benning, Roger Ferland, tripped a booby trap consisting of a 105mm artillery round. Roger lost both legs in that explosion. Later, sometime in the

mid-1970's, Dean Gowin of Effingham, Illinois told me Roger had been to see him. Dean said Roger was doing pretty well for a guy who'd lost both legs.

3. Radio-Telephone Operator. This man carried a backpack radio communications unit. We had a second radio in my squad.

4. Medical Evacuation helicopter.

5. Helicopter

## PX Update

By Dave Eichhorn

We continue to draw down and consolidate the inventory of the Americal PX. The following items are no longer available:

- 2315 - playing cards
- 2334 - shirt
- 2335 - flag
- 2336 - shirt
- 2342 - shirt
- 2343 - shirt
- 3515 - shirt

All other items on the order form are available until further notice. In addition, the following items are also available at this time.

- 3516 - Americal Shot Glass \$4
- 3517 - Americal Magnet Large \$5
- 3518 - 11th LIB magnet \$3
- 3519 - 196th LIB magnet \$3
- 3520 - 198th LIB magnet \$3
- 3521 - C I B magnet \$3
- 3522 - Americal Vietnam History Book \$28

Price includes postage. Send your orders and payment made to ADVA PX to Ronald Ellis, 4493 Highway 64 W, Henderson, TX, 75652. A full refund will be made for items that are not available to fill your order. Charges can be made to Visa and MasterCard. Specify items and quantities of your order. Be sure to include your name, mailing address, telephone number, and email address along with payment.



## A Glimpse of a Unique Lifer

By Don Counter

Sergeant First Class (SFC) Paul E. Davis was a professional soldier who had served in Korea and was on his second combat tour in Vietnam when I became aware of him.

This older veteran served as the First Sergeant for Alpha Company, 1/46th Infantry, and could be seen humping the same I Corps jungle landscape alongside of newly minted (drafted) soldiers 15-17 years younger than him. I was one of those newer soldiers.

He was a seasoned infantryman whose faded tattoos, scarred body and weathered features reflected the many years of enduring the difficult circumstances in soldiering and combat. He was an old school soldier and had a look that he may never have been young.

Despite the gruff facial expression of a hard-ass, he was a remarkably even-tempered man who led for the common good and valued the merits of others.

Before the break of dawn at our jungle encampments he would awaken and conduct his first order of business... making C-ration coffee thickened with multiple packets of creamer. As the platoon stirred awake and shuffled about he would exclaim, "Good Morning Heroes", closely followed with, "I Love This Man's Army."

Many a day, as the platoon rustled along the trails of exhaustion, he would encouragingly announce, "God Bless the Infantry."

Following the catastrophic attack on Fire Support Base Mary Ann, the brigade was moved north to Da Nang to fill-in for the departing 1st Marine Division. It was there atop a lofty boomerang shaped hill which was located eight kilometers SSW of Da Nang, that the 1/46th Infantry Battalion Tactical Operations Center (BnTOC) was subsequently relocated. The location was also identified as Hill 270 and LZ Linda.

The isolated command post was complimented with artillery and mortar crews, two helicopter landing pads, and functioned as the hub of the fighting man's area of operations.

This BnTOC was commanded by LTC Clyde J. Tate, with MAJ Stanley J. Wisniewski as the Operations Officer, and SP4 David J. Tarnay fully immersed in monitoring the brigade wide radio chatter.

SFC Paul Davis was hand-picked to serve as the senior-most ranking, non-commissioned officer (NCO) atop Hill 270 and LZ Linda and he dutifully served as both the Operations NCO and the field first sergeant, despite the absence of a third rocker and a diamond in the center of the stripes on his sleeves. This low-key and highly competent senior sergeant was the perfect soldier for the position.

Being a man of spartan needs he functioned out of a small sandbagged storage shelter that butted up against the exterior of the heavily barricaded BnTOC. In the tightly confined space he protectively stored gear, rations and other items for unit distribution.

At the back of the shelter was a ledge which held his few but always at the ready possessions: rifle, bandoleer, flak vest,

helmet and his esteemed canteen cup and coffee making ingredients. That cup had never been rinsed out and would most certainly have produced coffee by merely adding hot water. Beneath the ledge he somehow devised a constrained sleeping configuration and when intent on catching a few uninterrupted winks of needed rest he simply suspended a poncho liner much like a sleeping curtain. There was absolutely no free space in this cramped, one-man burrow which required a bend and twist to negotiate and was appropriately referred to as "The Squeeze Inn."

He was a field soldier by trade. One of a very few who, without pretense, exuded the courage and intestinal fortitude of a respected and valued leader. He interacted with all ranks equally, effectively, and in a personal way, which engendered a special respect and trust in him. He was a rare commodity indeed, making him a soldier's soldier. His strength of character was profound and the impact on us was manifold.

You found yourself naturally drawn to this experienced infantryman who knew firsthand the raw hardships and sacrifices of war. You just felt a tad safer with his physical presence.

His charismatic below the radar approach to the lower enlisted men was cause for him to be viewed as a father figure or that of a favored and respected uncle. He referred to his young soldiers as "heroes", and coming from him, as if by divine ancestry, made us heroes in our minds. As a complimentary badge-of-honor the junior enlisted grunts referred to him as "Sergeant Rock."

He was respected for his unmatched "under the radar" leadership skills and the officers fondly referred to him as "Old Man Davis." He was insightful, possessed tactical knowledge, and was acknowledged as the trusted "go-to" guy for advice on all matters involving soldiers. Wisdom and maturity were aptly descriptive words for this highly regarded soldier who preferred to lead from the field.

Two of his trademark expressions were: "Hard but fair", (when referring to his dealings with standards of discipline and the basic essentials of right and wrong), and the other saying was, "I ain't been fraggd, but... the day ain't over yet!"

Davis was the complete opposite of those referred to as the "charmed princes of Hollywood" who romped around in the rear adorned in crisply starched fatigues. Their attempt to impress with spit and polish had no purpose or utility in the jungle.

With firm but fair guidance and an uncanny knack for working with soldiers, mission discipline and order were effectively maintained, to such a degree that things simply seemed to just fall into place and function well. There was self-discipline and harmony amid the chaos of war on this isolated and towering outpost.

It seems he had been recommended for a position at the safe and secure division headquarters. Despite his current spartan dirt floor lifestyle he declined the comfortable offer of a rear job stating that he "couldn't accept it because he was an ordained field soldier and independent of authority figures." He spoke in a language that did not mask the truth. So... what was there not to love about this guy?

SFC Davis went before a selection board and it was noted that he was not wearing the V device for valor on what he



SFT Paul E. Davis

considered a minimal service ribbon. He just laughed and shrugged it off.

He was a crusty, battle-hardened field soldier who continued to work alongside others in the jungle. This highly competent yet low key professional was a rare breed and admired as such.

With scars and the shrapnel of an AK-47 round embedded in his body, his endurance through difficulties is a reminder that diamonds are made under pressure and oaks grow strong in contrary winds.

Many years after the war and fully into his well-deserved retirement, he would set up camp each September, with his olive drab painted trailer, at the annual Kokomo, Indiana veterans gathering. His trailer served as the collective gathering point for former members of the 196th Light Infantry Brigade. Beneath the canopy he would be seen sipping coffee from his well-worn, metal canteen cup with its distinctively tainted exterior, discolored from years of exposure to heat tab use.

SFC Paul E. Davis is remembered as the venerable patriarch of Hill 270 and LZ Linda. He will forever be revered as the guardian of freshly minted heroes.

Illustrated by Edward C. Gittens, A/1/46, 1970-71.

[Editor's Postscript: The author give a great description and tribute to SFC Paul Davis which I wish to second. On March 27, 1971, I moved from FSB Mary Ann to LZ Mildred to help open a new BnTOC. A few hours later Mary Ann suffered a devastating blow from an intense sapper attack. LZ Mildred

was about five kilometers from Mary Ann and we maintained contact with all elements of the 1/46th Infantry as well as with brigade headquarters at Hawk Hill. Mildred quickly became a hub of activity supporting the recovery of Mary Ann.

Our working area was housed in an 8 by 8 former Conex. We filled it with maps, radios, and a counter with three chairs. For the better part of the next three days, 1LT Tom Schmitz, SFC Paul Davis, and I, in my first week as a sergeant, worked out of this improvised bunker. This is where I got to know the many qualities of Paul Davis as described by the author.

The attack on Mary Ann created an increased sense of dread to soldiers in the field all over Vietnam. Was this just the beginning of a new spring offensive by the enemy that would be carried out across the total of South Vietnam. We did not know. I continued my duties but kept closely tuned to the sound of the first incoming enemy mortar round. Some of the time Davis sat in one of the chairs on either side of me. As the author says, You just felt a tad safer with his physical presence."

Although I did not know the author in Vietnam I did know the people in the BnTOC that he mentions in his story. I left Vietnam just before the move to the Da Nang area. I do not know the status of Paul Davis. If anyone has current information on him please let me know. I may be reached at [redacted].



Don Counter



The Men Behind the Scarf

By Peggy Krause

Co. C, 1/52 Inf, 198 LIB, engaged in a battle in March 1969 on Hill 283, AKA Chop Vum. The Men Behind the Scarf tells their story. The novel follows the third and fourth platoons as they proceed through the battle of Chop Vum.

My husband, Philip, served in Vietnam from November 1968 to June 1969. His tour ended when he was wounded. In 2002, one of his Army buddies from Texas called him. He hadn't heard from him in over 30 years. They were having a C Co. reunion. He wanted Philip to go. I encouraged him, and reluctantly he went. He came back a new man. The next year I went with him. I have gone with him all but one year since then – not because he wanted me to go. Because I wanted to go. It changed my life forever.

Attending this reunion gave me a rare opportunity to hear different viewpoints of the battle that took place in March 1969. I learned that most veterans talk about Vietnam, if asked. However, they generally don't really open up. But in this setting, where the men who wore the scarf were reunited, all holds were barred.

I was honored to be included in this. Not only did the men talk freely with each other, but they were willing to take me in as one of their own. As they shared their stories with me, I felt their fear, their pain, and their strength. I could not believe what I heard, and I could not help becoming obsessed with learning more. These men of Charlie Company touched me in a way that I had never experienced before.

I began video-recording two or three men each year. I transcribed their accounts. I used their stories and pictures to make a scrapbook. I became obsessed in learning about the Vietnam war; I have special interest the battle that took place on Hill 283.

The men were glad that someone cared enough to record their stories. But that was not enough for me. I thought others should have an opportunity to know what these men had experienced in Vietnam. I decided I needed to write a book about this battle.

Writing about the war meant doing much research about Vietnam and the Vietnam War. It meant studying maps and learning to read the Daily Staff Journals. At the reunions I began carrying a small notebook in my pocket. I jotted down anything I heard that was pertinent. This included things about the battle and things about everyday life as a soldier in Vietnam.

The story begins the evening before they were dropped into a hot LZ. The events of the week-long battle are almost unbelievable.

Several battalions of NVA surrounded C Co. After being pinned down for several days, and despite knowing they would almost certainly walk into an ambush, they followed orders to go up a hill to attempt to meet up with Co. A.

The following is a sample of the story: "The men were strung out in a jagged line as they began their ascent up the hill. The hill wasn't very steep. Climbing the hill wasn't the problem. The problem was what was on the other side of the hill.

The third platoon, being on the right, passed a few old foxholes. Fabe was the last man on the right side of the company. He loosened his grip on his rifle. He'd been holding on so tight that his knuckles were white. Trying to keep calm, he took a deep breath. Brian was walking to his left. His lips were moving, and he looked like he was in another world. Fabe knew he was talking to God. Maybe praying. Maybe pleading. Maybe making God a deal if he spares his life.

Fabe looked beyond Brian to where Lil' Bro was keeping pace with Merdis. They were slightly ahead of the group. Lil' Bro swept his left hand across his face to get rid of the sweat running down. Fabe forced his shaking legs to keep moving. Since he was at the end of the line, he scanned the brush and grass which cropped up about twenty meters to his right. He felt eyes watching him. He couldn't see movement or any sign of NVA in the scrub brush. He looked behind - there was nothing there. He wanted to run or hide. There was no place to go. Nowhere to run to. Nothing to hide behind. His fear mounted with every step."

Although I will not tell the full story here, I will tell you that none of the men should have survived. Of course, there would not be a story to tell if some of them hadn't survived.

The companion book, Hill 283, Chop Vum, has the actual interviews of the veterans involved in the battle. It also has the photos I collected. This includes the story of the scarf that these men wore, as told by Captain Hall.

An excerpt from Jay Flanagan: "As we went up on the hill, we heard the "thunk", which was the mortar. And being in the mortar platoon, I could tell it was coming our way. There was a bomb crater off to my right and I ran towards it and I could tell that the mortar was going to hit before I got there, so I hit the ground just before I got to the bomb crater and the mortar went in the bomb crater..."

While the novel itself is fiction, the battle and the things that took place are true. The men in the story are made up, but the things that happen to them are not. The men that were there have reassured me that I have correctly portrayed the setting as well as the thoughts and actions of the men.

The books are available from New Forums Press and Amazon.



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Eligibility includes those who served with Task Force 6814 (WWII) and Task Force Oregon (Vietnam). Branch of service is immaterial.



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