

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1st Battalion 50th Infantry Association



September 2003

Cover Page

Here it is September already and the summer has all but gone. It seems the older we get, the faster time flies. This year has been a great year as well as a sad year for me in addition to some of the other members. For those of you who missed the notice on the web page, I am sorry to report the passing of one of our beloved members. Bernie Bierman passed away in June of 2003 and will be missed by all who knew him. Bernie was a boat person who I had known throughout our training at Ft. Hood. He was in (B) Co. , then H Q. Co. mortar Plt. Upon arriving in Viet Nam, we were assigned to (Delta Co.) mortar Plt. In July of 2002 I had the pleasure of seeing Bernie and meeting his wife Joyce at the get together here at our house. This was the first time I had seen him since V N. All who knew him enjoyed his company. It was during that time that Bernie became one of our life members. Our condolences go out to his wife Joyce and their family. May God bless him and his loved ones.

It has been almost four months since we had the reunion and what a time that was. Everybody I know keeps talking about it and are all set for another one. I recall that one of the highlights of the reunion was the way everyone greeted each other. As I said before, there were tears and smiles - BIG SMILES. It was apparent at this reunion that we had established a closer bond with one other. I observed that all the members were talking to others from various other companies, and were sharing their experiences. I know that I was asking a lot of questions to the people I met and I'm sure I met them all.

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EDITOR



BOB GOLD

It was very interesting talking to them and asking what they did and the battles they were in, and what they are doing in civilian life now. The wives seemed to get along very well and had a lot to talk about too. The closeness that we have for each other is so difficult to explain to someone that has never gone through the hardships that we endured. People have asked me what it was like and why we have such profound feelings toward each other.

Sometimes it is tough for them to understand. They were never in a state of affairs where the ground boils with bullets, grenades explode around you, or you are being shelled. I explain to them that the most horrifying thing that could happen is when you see one of your buddies get wounded or killed. This creates a bond between you and the other guy that is closer than brother ship - a bond that is never forgotten or lost.

I spoke with John Topper recently and he said that most of the replicas were finished and were being shipped. By the time this letter gets out most of you will have received yours. For those of you who have not yet ordered, there is still time for you to do so.

In closing, I wish you all a great fall season. Until the next newsletter, may God bless each of you.

VIEW FROM THE TC HATCH**John Topper**

Some random thoughts on this sunny September morn.

There are a couple of issues working in the defense arena that we all may not be familiar with. The first is something called "concurrent receipt". It is also known as the "disabled veterans tax" and other names. It stems from a law passed shortly after the Civil War, and simply stated requires that any military retiree who is eligible for disability pay from the VA must fund it from his military retirement pay. That's correct – the amount of pay received from VA is taken from the retirement check.

This inequity is unique only to the military retiree. Two examples: A postal retiree receives a \$2000 monthly pension from the postal service and; as a 30% disabled vet, he receives \$310 from the VA, or a total of \$2310 monthly. A military retiree receives a \$2000 monthly retirement check from the defense department; and as a 30% disabled vet, he receives \$310 from the VA. So they both have total monthly retirement income of \$2310, right? Wrong. The military retiree receives only \$2000, because the defense department reduces his retired pay by \$310. The only advantage he has is the \$310 from VA is not taxable, while his retired pay is.

Former US Senator Bob Dole receives both his government pension and VA disability. Had he remained on active duty for 20 years instead of going into politics, he would forfeit the amount he receives for his disability from his military retired pay.

Is something wrong with this picture? Indeed there is. This antiquated law was put into play by a US Senator from Mississippi in the 19th century because disabled soldiers who fought on the Union side during the Civil War were receiving compensation, while those who fought for the Confederacy were not.

The law has far outlived its usefulness (if it was ever useful) and needs to be fixed. Congress has made some half-hearted attempts at rescinding the law over the past few years, but the administration – at the urging of the Department of Defense – has threatened to veto it and, consequently, it has been tabled in committee each time.

If you are interested in learning more about this issue, please go to www.vfvc.net or give me a call at 307-856-0178 or email: jt@wyoming.com. If you wish to lend your voice to the fray, contact your congressional delegation and let them know your feelings.

The other issue is also political and has to do with the end strength of the Army. We have a new Chief of Staff, General Pete Schoomaker, brought out of retirement by Secretary of Defense, Donald Rumsfeld. General Schoomaker is saying we probably need an increase in the number of active duty soldiers and a reorganization of the Reserve and National Guard. Right now, soldiers, both active and reserve, are going from one deployment to another with little time being spent with their families. This is a tough situation to sustain over a long period of time and it is having an adverse effect on the mid-grade soldier who has reenlisted once, but hasn't made a commitment for 20 years yet. They are getting out and we are losing a lot of experience and money that has been invested in their training. There is an excellent article by General Frederick Kroesen in the current edition of ARMY magazine that can be accessed at www.ausa.org. Again, after reading the article, if you want to do something about it, contact your congressional delegation and tell them what you think.

Those of you who ordered the miniature bronzes should have received them by the time this is published. If you haven't, phone me. Anyone wanting a bronze statuette please let me know and I will be pleased to order it or put you in touch with the artist.

I have been discussing with some of the other Board members the possibility of having annual reunions. Currently, we hold them every two years and last year (and perhaps next) Bob and Sherri Gold hosted an unofficial reunion (pig roast) that attracted a fair number. Would like to hear from anyone who has thoughts on the feasibility of holding annual "official" reunions.

Finally, anyone interested in providing an article for the newsletter is encouraged to do so. This is a forum in which you can provide your insights, opinions and otherwise let everyone know what is going on in your life. Please take advantage of it. Next newsletter is scheduled for publication in December – get your articles to Bob and Billie before the end of November.

Until then, Play the Game and enjoy the upcoming autumn and Thanksgiving celebration.

From The Desk of the Historian

Jim Sheppard



Our reunion at Fort Benning offered me my first opportunity to “show off” the fruits of a dozen trips to the National Archives. I had files set up covering almost our entire tour. I also had my computer and scanner with me, which turned out to be very useful. One of the best contributions for the archives was the following photo of General Westmoreland’s visit at Quin Nhon in September of 1967:

This visit was quite a thrill for us, to be sure. My thanks to Thurman Olan Pike for supplying the Westmoreland photo! I’ll be getting this enlarged and framed for our archives. Also, I have been informed that the young blonde fellow with the helmet under his arm and cigarette in hand to the left of the jeep is non other than our own Bob Gold! (Although I personally do not believe he was ever that young!)

Easels were set up with maps of the Phu My and Bong Song area, and I had a TV with VCR to plan a video created by one of our members

complete with photos and music from the sixties. Document CD sales were brisk with a total of 20 CDs sold during the event. These funds offset the expense of the research and documentation I have been involved in as your historian and will reap benefits for years to come. Our archives are fast gaining notoriety as being some of the most complete of any Battalion sized unit in the entire conflict!

My room was a “Must Visit” spot for the reunion, and everyone passed through at least once! I look forward to continuing this tradition and will enjoy expanding what I have on display each time. I managed to pick up some interesting documentation that is to be scanned and filed for our Document CDs and Archives.

Although I have been taking a “break” from the heavy workload that can come with my archival efforts, I plan to get back “into it” in the fall. Next on my list will be obtaining the remaining documentation from our tour in Vietnam. Basically, I have 1970’s documents to copy, and will then also copy some files on “E” and “F” companies. Although these units were not a contiguous part of our Battalion, they were 50th Infantry and wore the same unit crest. We’ve gotten enough inquiry and information to warrant having documentation kept on these units. Ray Sarlin has done a nice job sorting out the confusion with these entities, both of who served in two separate situations in Vietnam. Visit the appropriate pages on our website for detailed information.

Finally, I want to thank all who have supported us with their prayers as our Son, Sgt. Robert Sheppard (Affectionately know to the family as “Baghdad Bob”) has been serving with the 2nd Armored Cavalry Regiment with the Combat Engineers since late spring. Bob will be returning to Fort Polk, Louisiana on August 14th.

**WELCOME HOME
SGT. ROBERT SHEPPARD**

Something Worth Remembering!

Even modest amounts of physical activity can help keep your blood pressure under control.

In a study of sedentary people who began an exercise program to control their high blood pressure, all of the people experienced significant improvements in their blood pressure readings regardless of how much they exercised. The minimum exercise duration in the study was 30 minutes per week.

VICE PRESIDENTS COLUMN

Randy “Doc” Smith

This column starts on a sad note this time. We have lost another of our own. Bernie Bierman who some will remember from Texas, Viet Nam, and Bob Gold’s hog roast in Ohio, has passed away. I still have an Army photo of Bernie in uniform that he gave me at Fort Hood some 36 years ago. He was a man who made friends easily and will be missed. Thanks for all you did for company and country Bernie.

Last week V. J. Day (Victory over Japan) came and went. In many parts of this country it was hardly noticed, but not so in Seymour, Indiana, my hometown. The VFW (Veterans of Foreign Wars) club here sponsored and held the annual V.J. Day parade. It was the 58th such parade and the only continuous parade for V.J. Day since WWII in the country. It is a source of pride to the WWII veterans and others that lined the streets or marched in the parade. It is a source of political embarrassment to some others. There have been attempts by mayoral administrations to change the name of the parade to Peace Day parade or some thing less offensive to the Japanese industry locating in Seymour, but the VFW club has held firm in maintaining tradition and keeping the name V.J.Day parade.

My youngest son, following in his father’s footsteps, is a Boy Scout leader in a local troop and marched in the parade with his troop last week. Yes he was there along with the floats, bands, antique autos, and groups of others making up the body of the parade that passed under a gigantic American flag supported by a huge crane. Sure makes a dad feel proud.

ROBIN WILLIAMS FOR PRESIDENT 2004

Leave it to Robin Williams to come up with the perfect plan... what we need now is for our UN Ambassador to stand up and repeat this message. Robin Williams' plan...(Hard to argue with this logic!) I see a lot of people yelling for peace but I have not heard of a plan for peace. So, here's one plan:

1. The US will apologize to the world for our "interference" in their affairs, past & present. You know, Hitler, Mussolini, Tojo, Noriega, Milosovich and the rest of those 'good ole boys.' We will never "interfere" again.
2. We will withdraw our troops from all over the world, starting with Germany, South Korea and the Philippines. They don't want us there. We would station troops at our borders. No one sneaking through holes in the fence.
3. All illegal aliens have 90 days to get their affairs together and leave. We'll give them a free trip home. After 90 days the remainder will be gathered up and deported immediately, regardless of who or where they are. France would welcome them.
4. All future visitors will be thoroughly checked and limited to 90 days unless given a special permit. No one from a terrorist nation would be allowed in. If you don't like it there, change it yourself and don't hide here. Asylum would never be available to anyone. We don't need any more cab drivers or 7-11 cashiers.
5. No "students" over age 21. The older ones are the bombers. If they don't attend classes, they get a "D" and it's back home, baby.
6. The US will make a strong effort to become self-sufficient energy wise. This will include developing non-polluting sources of energy but will require a temporary drilling of oil in the Alaskan wilderness. The caribou will have to cope for a while.
7. Offer Saudi Arabia and other oil producing countries \$10 a barrel for their oil. If they don't like it, we go some place else. They can go somewhere else to sell their production. (About a week of the wells filling up the storage sites would be enough.)
8. If there is a famine or other natural catastrophe in the world, we will not "interfere." They can pray to Allah or whomever, for seeds, rain, cement or whatever they need. Besides most of what we give them is stolen or given to the army. The people who need it most get very little, if anything.
9. Ship the UN Headquarters to an isolated island some place. We don't need the spies and fair weather friends here. Besides, the building would make a good homeless shelter or lockup for illegal aliens.
10. All Americans must go to charm and beauty school. That way, no one can call us "Ugly Americans" any longer. There Now, ain't that a winner of a plan.
11. "The Statue of Liberty is no longer saying 'Give me your poor, your tired, your huddled masses.' She's got a baseball bat and she's yelling, 'You want a piece of me?'"
12. If you agree with the above forward it to friends. The Language we speak is **ENGLISH.....learn it...or LEAVE...**

WEBSITE INFORMATION By Ray Sarlin

The Association of the 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry maintains one of the Internet's largest websites as a service to everyone who served in the 50th Infantry in Vietnam, and to their family and friends. It is found at <http://www.ichiban1.org>. Our website has hundreds of photographs of our battalion in Vietnam, dozens of war stories, and heaps of other features, not to mention one of the biggest military joke books to be found on the internet.

Still, statistics suggest that only about 40% of people our age use the internet regularly, even email, while many of the people who do reach our website didn't serve in the battalion but may be family or friends or fellow Veterans. In order to make the website of more service to our members, it has been suggested that we add a "Members only" portion of the website. If we elect to proceed with this idea, the main issue to be decided is what content should be included in the "public" area and what should be restricted to "members" only.

The basic starting point is that what is presently available to the general public would pretty much remain intact, while the members area would be new. For example, a major feature of the member area might be an up-to-date members roster with addresses and contact details (leaving the current email members list and list of Life Members public). Other meaningful member only services on the Internet might include:

1. Official notices and minutes of officer's meetings.
2. Dues notices and an online payment option.
3. Referendum-style voting on issues of the day.
4. A list of Official Unit records available from Unit Historian Jim Sheppard.
5. Possibly the newsletter archives.
6. Nomination procedures and forms for Association awards.
7. Special offers to members (e.g., special offers on the statuette, framed prints, paraphernalia, travel trips or tours, etc.)
8. Discount coupons arranged by the Association.

There hasn't yet been a decision to proceed with the private member area. What do you think? Should we add a new member's only section to the website? If so, what would you like to see in it?

If you haven't yet visited our website, here's a personal invitation! If you are a regular, please drop me a line from time to time to let me know what can be improved. After all, the website is our history... and belongs to us all.

Lights, Camera, Action – maybe!



You may have noticed a banner on the 1st Battalion, 50th Infantry website reading, "No promises, but seeking stories, ideas, funding and expressions of interest for possible movie about 1/50 (M) Infantry!" Well, here's the brief background.

Several of us are looking at putting together a "popular" film (not a documentary or docudrama) that features the 1/50(M) in Vietnam. I'm still at the early stages of working out the exact plot and nature of the movie and putting it down on paper. The basic idea is to have a current day realistic action plot with flashbacks to Vietnam (both combat and non-combat). We'll all just have to wait and see how the script turns out. I have an appointment in October to talk about the film with a director from Hollywood I've worked with before, and I hope to have tied up a few loose ends and done a first treatment (up to 25 pages outlining the film) of the script by then.

I don't want to get anyone's hopes up about this project. It might never go anywhere. However, if you're working on something similar or if you would like to be involved in some way, please get in touch with me by email at rws@173rdAirborne.com, especially if you have a million dollars to invest. I am open to any suggestions about small unit actions, methods, jokes, highlights, lowlights, and so on. Things like organization for a patrol, what was carried, basic load of .552 ball, M60, grenades, smoke, LAWs, number of canteens, and even water purification tabs would be useful.

I intend to keep anyone who indicates an interest informed over the coming year or so that it will take to bring this project together. I've heard that some of our Association members have experience on films like Don Johnson's "Cease Fire" (1985). Others have contacts that might be able to help. Still others have nominated themselves for romantic leading roles (don't worry, COL Woodall, I won't tell). It's a bit like Vietnam in a sense... if we pull together we just might make it!

Wars may be fought with weapons, but they are won by men. It is the spirit of men who follow and of the man who leads that gains the victory.

George S. Patton (1885 - 1945)

SURFING THE NET FOR VETS

Many thanks to Ray Sarlin for his input in this issue of the newsletter.

The 173rd Airborne Brigade is organized to give the U.S. European Command a forward deployed forced entry capability. The brigade can deploy an immediate ready company within 24 hours of notification, and major portions of an airborne infantry battalion within 36 hours of notification. The 173rd Airborne Brigade has an exceptional tooth to tail ratio. As it is presently deployed in Iraq, it's Official Webpage <http://www.173abnbde.setaf.army.mil/> is not publicly available at this time.

<http://www.skysoldier.org>

**The International Society of the 173D Airborne Brigade (SEP)
P.O. Box 42331
Fayetteville, NC 28309-2331**

The Homepage of the International Society of the 173D Airborne Brigade is a historical site to preserve the History of the 173D Airborne Brigade which was formed in Okinawa and sent to the Republic of South Vietnam as the first American Army Unit deployed to the War Zone. We have a membership of over 5,600 former Skysoldiers and have established a Scholarship fund for the children and grandchildren of all those who served in the 173D Airborne.

<http://www.173rdairborne.com>

This site is in no way affiliated with the 173d Airborne Bde in Vicenza, Italy or the Society of the 173d Airborne Bde. It is however just what it says... dedicated to all Sky Soldiers Past and Present by "Honoring the past, Supporting the present and Encouraging the future". All are welcome to drop in!!

http://www.sfahq.com/Airborne/173rd_Airborne_Bngrade. Although they can't spell (and who can?), the Special Forces Search Engine has links to 10856 Military and Government Web Sites to choose from. This is a Not-For-Profit-Project brought to you by FOGs and Sneaky Petes, all former Special Forces A-Team Members and current members of the SFA.

<http://www.vietnamvetcontacts.com/gpage16.html>

The Vietnam Vets Contacts group has another massive links page for the 173d Airborne.

http://www.uso.org/pubs/arnold2001/15_524_2096.cfm

The Dallas Cowboys Cheerleaders shake it for the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Italy.

IN MEMORY

Bernie Bierman



SOMETHING BEAUTIFUL TO MAKE YOU AND I PROUD

The Third Infantry Regiment at Fort Myer has the responsibility for providing ceremonial units and honor guards for state occasions, White House social functions, public celebrations and interments at Arlington National Cemetery and standing a very formal sentry watch at the Tombs of the Unknowns. The public is familiar with the precision of what is called "walking post" at the Tombs. There are roped off galleries where visitors can form to observe the troopers and their measured step and almost mechanical silent rifle shoulder changes. They are relieved every hour in a very formal drill that has to be seen to believe. Some people think that when the Cemetery is closed to the public in the evening that this show stops. First, to the men who are dedicated to this work...it is no show...it is a "charge of honor". The formality and precision continues uninterrupted all night. During the nighttime, the drill of relief and the measured step of the on duty sentry remain unchanged from the daylight hours. To these men...these special men, the continuity of this post is the key to the honor and respect shown to these honored dead, symbolic of all American unaccounted for American combat dead. The steady rhythmic step in rain, sleet, snow, hail, hot, cold...bitter cold...uninterrupted...uninterrupted is the important part of the honor shown. Last night, while you were sleeping, the teeth of hurricane Isabel came through this area and tore hell out of everything... We have thousands of trees down...power outages...traffic signals out...roads filled with down limbs and "gear adrift" debris...We have flooding...and the place looks like it has been the impact area of an off shore bombardment. The Regimental Commander of the U.S. Third Infantry sent word to the nighttime Sentry Detail to secure the post and seek shelter from the high winds, to ensure their personal safety. **THEY DISOBEYED THE ORDER...** During winds that turned over vehicles and turned debris into projectiles...the measured step continued. One fellow said "I've got buddies getting shot at in Iraq who would kick my butt if word got to them that we let them down...I'm sure as hell have no intention of spending my Army career being known as the idiot who couldn't stand a little light breeze and shirked his duty." Then he said something in response to a female reporter's question regarding silly purposeless personal risk...."I wouldn't expect you to understand. It's an enlisted man's thing." God Bless the rascal...In a time in our nation's history when spin and total bullshit seems to have become the accepted coin-of-the-realm, there beat hearts...the enlisted hearts we all knew and were so damn proud to be a part of - that fully understand that devotion to duty is not a part-time occupation. While we slept, we were represented by some fine men who fully understood their post orders and proudly went about their assigned responsibilities unseen, unrecognized and in the finest tradition of the American Enlisted Man. Folks there's hope. The gene that George S. Patton...Arleigh Burke and Jimmy Doolittle left us...survives. ...More....

On the ABC evening news, it was reported tonight that, because of the dangers from Hurricane Isabel approaching Washington DC, the military members assigned the duty of guarding the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier were given permission to suspend the assignment. They refused. "No way, Sir!" Soaked to the skin, marching in the pelting rain of a tropical storm, they said that guarding the Tomb was not just an assignment; it was the highest honor that can be afforded to a service person.

The tomb has been patrolled continuously, 24/7, since 1930.

This is a response made by Staff Sergeant Jason Edwards, son of Jim Edwards, when asked by a person that very much DOES NOT believe in our country, or that we need a military, why he is in the military.

Well, since you asked.

Ten and a half years ago I made a commitment to my country yet had no idea how serious a commitment it really was. I needed a way to get out of my parents' house. That was the bottom line. Since then, I went back and forth on should I stay or get out. Do I love it or do I hate it? Our country was on the verge of war in 1998 and I was sent to Bahrain for reasons I didn't understand or believe in. We sat in that desert for three months and didn't do a damn thing. We were told that our presence helped avoid a war. I still didn't understand. I went on with my life and I hoped I wouldn't have to go through that again. I kept struggling with the stay in or get out issue. In August of 2001 I made a decision. This was my life. This was what I was put here to do. I had been in for nine years so I knew what I was getting into. I reenlisted with a newfound commitment. No more whining or complaining. This wasn't a 9 to 5 job and it wasn't summer camp. This is the United States Air Force. We are here for the sole purpose of defending our country from all enemies, foreign and domestic. We aren't here to make money. I will never be wealthy. I barely get by from one paycheck to the next. This is something I do because it needs to be done. I got orders to come to Hawaii for a second time. This time it wasn't just about living in Hawaii. I had volunteered to join the team that travels the world bringing home our fallen brothers from past wars. Finally I had a mission I understood and believed in. My dad was in Vietnam so this was something that I had to do. I was supposed to get on a plane late in September. Then September 11th came. Everything changed. The day of my flight came but I didn't get on a plane to Hawaii. Instead, I got on a plane headed for Southwest Asia. Hawaii was on hold, maybe cancelled for good. I had no idea how long I would be gone. I slept in my tent at night and dreamed of seeing the twin towers fall over and over. I was mad and I knew why I was there. I got letters telling me how scared my little nephew was that bad men would come and hurt us and take over our country. It struck me how that was something that NEVER crossed my mind as a child. I never worried about it because of the sacrifice that my dad and so many others made before me. My son was one year old at the time. I hated the thought of him growing up in fear. I wanted to give him and my nephew the same security that I always took for granted. That is why I do it. That is why many do it. We are not a corporation. We are not here to make money. We don't want praise and we don't want recognition. We simply love our country and want to protect our way of life.

We, the staff of the 1/50th newsletter, encourage all to share stories you think would be of interest to our members. Email Bob Gold with them: robertjrrjunkie@aol.com