

# From "On The Right Track", June, 2010, by: John Topper

Last Monday night found Jimmie and Loretta Segars, Jim Sheppard, Jay Copley and I at the Holiday Inn Express in Columbus, Georgia to attend the change of command ceremony the following morning at Fort Benning. Jay treated us to Country Barbecue, which was delicious and very much appreciated. Upon returning to the hotel, we were greeted by Toby Jordan and his two traveling companions and Dick Guthrie rolling in from his earlier flight into Atlanta. Since we had already eaten and they hadn't, Jimmie and I accompanied them to Texas Roadhouse. After a couple beers and fine steaks we called it a night and walked back to the hotel for an early morning trip to Sand Hill.



Pictured above, Left to Right: Toby Jordan, Jimmie Segars, LTC Benitez & his wife, Jay Copley, Dick Guthrie, John Topper & Jim Sheppard

We all gathered, joined by Jay's granddaughter, Lauren, at Kannell Field, Jimmie presented Tony Benitez with a statuette in appreciation for his support and service to the Association. Tony then relinquished command to Mike Hastings during a stirring ceremony, highlighted by Tony's poignant speech. The general consensus of the Association members present is that we have been blessed with another fine commander in Mike who is now at the helm of "our" battalion. As Dick Guthrie said, "we need to be re-blued from time to time", and that happened. It's difficult to watch a parade with a band and not feel blessed to be a small part of the infantry's traditions.

Following the ceremony, we drove to the new battalion "starship" – more like Battlestar Galactic. It is an imposing site – the majority of it sits atop a substantial hill with buildings strewn over about 3/8 mile from the battalion mess to Fox Company. Outside the battalion headquarters is a flagpole and the Association memorial. The landscaping around the memorial is very well done and impressive to visitors coming into the area. Getting to the top is somewhat of a challenge, I believe I counted 94 steps leading up to level ground from the parking lot when I climbed it on Monday. Fortunately, we got an escort on Tuesday and were able to drive to the top.

Mike McCardell took us on a guided tour of the site and we were suitably impressed with everything we saw. It is bigger than huge – the dining facility alone can seat 1000 troops. McCardell says it is the largest in the Army and I have no reason to think otherwise. The barracks (it was difficult for me to imagine them as barracks) are very modern and spacious. Complete with the normal equipment of bunks and lockers, there is a mega laundry room complete with several commercial washers and driers and really well-lit shower and bathroom facilities. The bunk mattresses are some sort of composite material that is probably a foot thick and most comfortable.

Later that day, Dick, Jim and I checked out the National Infantry Museum where we found their pavers and also that of the Association, which we bought at the last reunion. The 173d Airborne Brigade had just dedicated a monument to commemorate its wartime service. It is located adjacent to the bleachers on the new parade field. We checked it out and were pleased to note that it shows the service of 1/50 in Vietnam.

That evening we invited Michelle Spivey, Sales VP for Magnolia Properties that provides us the housing for our reunions in Columbus to dinner at Hunter's Pub. Delightful. Negotiations have begun for next year's reunion, but much is yet to be done toward that and it will be one of the subjects for the September newsletter.