



173<sup>RD</sup> AIRBORNE  
BRIGADE



1<sup>ST</sup> BATTALION  
50<sup>TH</sup> INFANTRY



"C" COMPANY



SPECIALIST  
4<sup>TH</sup> CLASS



INFANTRYMAN

## BRUCE RICHARD BACKES

3<sup>rd</sup> Platoon, "C" Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion (Mechanized), 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry  
Specialist 4th Class, E4, US52687765, MOS 11B20

Home of Record: Titusville, NJ

Date of Birth: November 8, 1946, Age at time of loss: 21, Single  
173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam  
Start of Tour: September 1, 1967, Date of Casualty: May 5, 1968, Days in Country: 247  
Casualty Type A1, Gun, small arms fire, Panel 54E - Row 042

Bruce Backes was the Radio Telephone Operator (RTO) for the Platoon Leader, Lt. Harry Wilson, during the Battle of An Boa in Binh Dinh Province (May 5-7 1968).

At noon, on May 5, 1/50th "A" Company forces were attacked and outnumbered 10 to 1 by a regiment of the North Vietnamese Army. "A" Company forces were overrun and took heavy casualties when Charlie Company was called in to reinforce the besieged Alpha Company. Upon arrival, the enemy, who had fallen silent to allow the "C" Company troops to enter the ambush zone, opened fire with an intense and sustained barrage of small arms, automatic weapons and B40 Rocket fire from three sides. Bruce was mortally wounded in the neck while keeping pace with the Platoon Leader as he positioned the third platoon troops for battle.



Fierce fighting ensued on both 1/50th Companies and additional reinforcements from "B" Company, 1/50th Infantry and "B" Company, 1/69th Armor were called in to battle the huge enemy force.

Battle of An Bao, Condensed:

<http://www.ichiban1.org/pdf/Memorial/AnBaoCondensed.pdf>

Declassified An Bao After Action Report, Daily Staff Journal and Air Report:

<http://www.ichiban1.org/pdf/Memorial/AnBaoExpanded.pdf>

A map of the location of the Battle of An Bao in Binh Dinh Province is shown below:



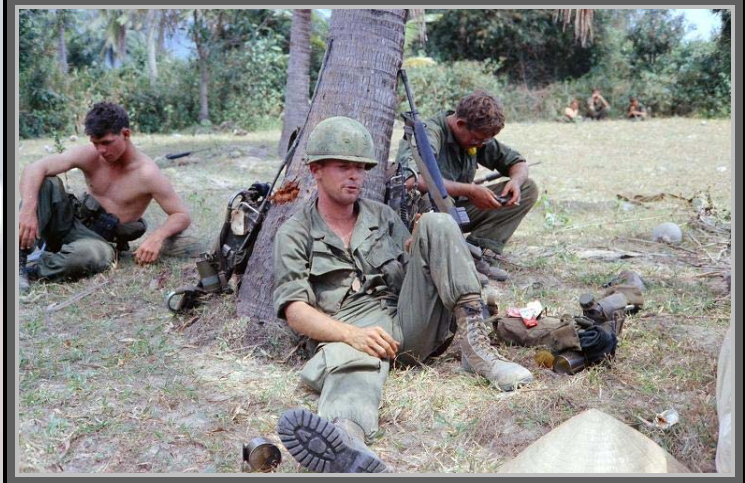
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Below(Left) is a photo of Bruce Backes taken at the "Gasthaus"....Enlisted Men's Club at Fort Hood, Texas during Training sometime during 1967. Bruce is second from the right with the "signature" glasses he always wore! Below on the right was taken on R&R . Second from the left (Seated) is Rich Vanderloop and Bruce is also seated on the far right.



Below are several photos of Bruce contributed by Harry Wilson.



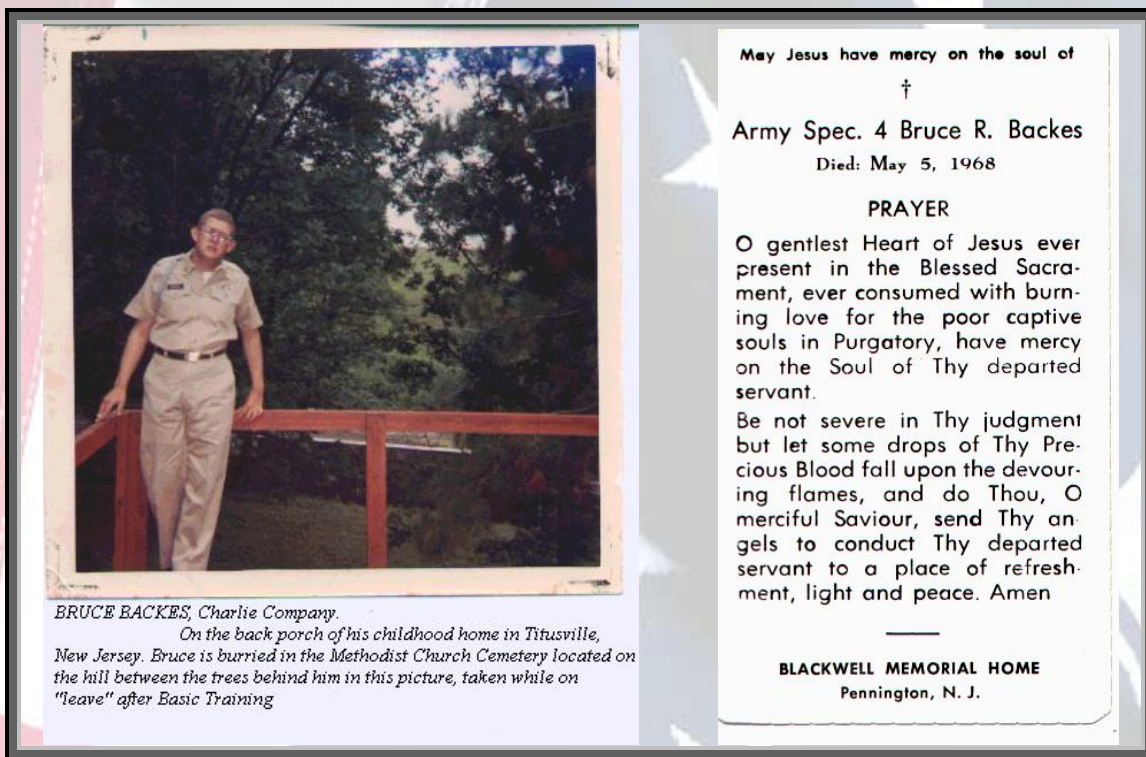
Bruce is pictured on the right in both photos above. Below(Left), Bruce is on the left...sitting on his (Helmet). The photo Below (right) is of (Clockwise from the kneeling left position): Bruce Backes, [Ron Heinecke](#), [Norm Poage](#), Mat Morrison and Tim Voncina.



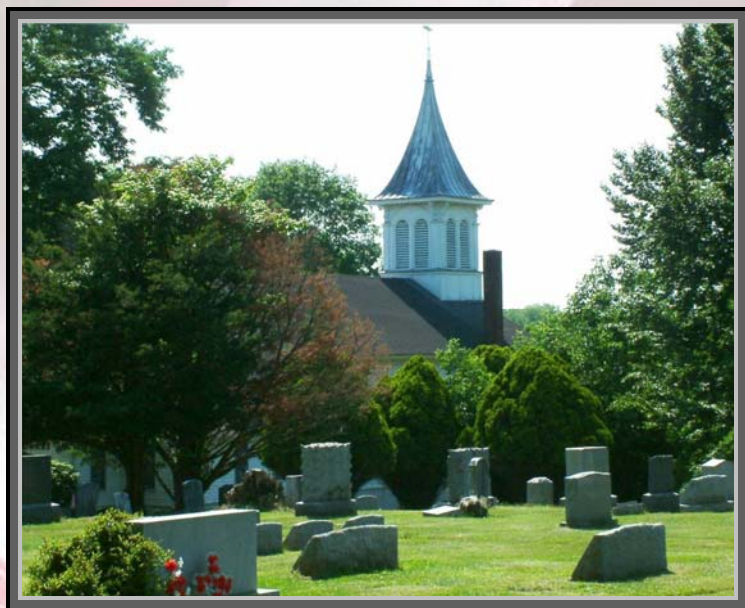
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The photo and Funeral Card pictured below were donated by Bruce's Sister.



Bruce is buried at the Titusville Methodist Cemetery near his childhood home in Titusville, New Jersey...on the banks of the Delaware River....not much more than a few miles from where George Washington crossed the river in the Revolutionary War and surprised the German Mercenaries at their barracks in Trenton on Christmas Morning.



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## BRUCE BACKES'S AWARDS AND DECORATIONS:



Combat Infantry Badge



### THE BRONZE STAR MEDAL FOR MERITORIOUS SERVICE

HQ 173RD AIRBORNE BRIGADE

GENERAL ORDERS NUMBER 1549

5 JUNE 1968

FOR DISTINGUISHING HIMSELF BY OUTSTANDING MERITORIOUS SERVICE IN CONNECTION WITH GROUND OPERATIONS AGAINST A HOSTILE FORCE IN THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM DURING THE PERIOD 1 SEPTEMBER 1967 TO 5 MAY 1968. THROUGH HIS UNTIRING EFFORTS AND PROFESSIONAL ABILITY, HE CONSISTENTLY OBTAINED OUTSTANDING RESULTS. HE WAS QUICK TO GRASP THE IMPLICATIONS OF NEW PROBLEMS WITH WHICH HE WAS FACED AS A RESULT OF THE EVER-CHANGING SITUATIONS INHERENT IN THE COUNTERINSURGENCY OPERATION AND TO FIND WAYS AND MEANS TO SOLVE THOSE PROBLEMS. THE ENERGETIC APPLICATION OF THIS EXTENSIVE KNOWLEDGE HAS MATERIALLY CONTRIBUTED TO THE EFFORTS OF THE UNITED STATES MISSION TO THE REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM TO ASSIST THAT COUNTRY IN RIDDING ITSELF OF THE COMMUNIST THREAT TO ITS FREEDOM. HIS INITIATIVE, ZEAL, SOUND JUDGMENT AND DEVOTION TO DUTY HAVE BEEN IN THE HIGHEST TRADITION OF THE UNITED STATES ARMY AND REFLECT GREAT CREDIT ON HIM AND ON THE MILITARY SERVICE.



Bronze  
Star  
For  
Valor\*



Air  
Medal



Purple  
Heart



Good  
Conduct



National  
Defense



Vietnam  
Service



Vietnam  
Campaign

\*The Citation shown is for Bruce's second Bronze Star for Meritorious Service. We do not have a copy of the citation for the 1st award of a Valorous Bronze Star, but it is clearly indicated on his government issued grave stone.