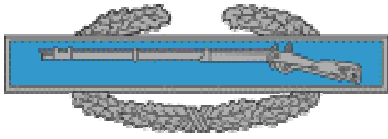


# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Association



June, 2008

Cover Page

## FROM THE EDITOR

John Topper

Early Sunday morning June 1<sup>st</sup> found me awaiting the arrival at my front door of Randy Smith and Toby Milroy. We would be traveling together to Fort Benning for a quick gathering of several members of the Association to participate in three ceremonies during the ensuing days. After a pleasant drive that found us reliving experiences that ranged from one end of the emotional spectrum to the other, we arrived in Columbus late that evening. After checking in at the hotel, we ducked out for a quick bite and sweet tea before turning in for some needed rest prior to the arrival of the rest of the troops the following day.

Monday morning broke with the promise of a hot, steamy day; it did not disappoint. Following breakfast, we headed to Fort Benning to look around – checked out the new Infantry Museum, which is coming along nicely. It is going to be an imposing structure with an awesome view. I look forward to seeing it completed. We then drove to Sand Hill and checked out the 1/50 shirts, caps and other stuff at the PX.

On the way back to the hotel, we stopped and made reservations for that evening at Thornton's BBQ, as requested by the Left Coast crowd who are denied some of the finer dining pleasures commonly found throughout the South. We estimated there would be 25 of us in attendance that night. We then returned to the hotel to find Jay Copely, Toby and Brenda Jordan and Gary and Kay Quint awaiting us. It wasn't long before Thurman Pike showed up and the cigars (thanks to Gary) magically appeared along with him. By 1800 Bob Gold, Denny Driscoll, Jim Sheppard, Tom Knepp, Jim Wonsick, Jim and Loretta Segars, Darrell Sourwine and Dick and Cynthia Guthrie and others, were ready to eat. Turns out exactly 25 of us showed up for the barbecue. Braving the heat and humidity after dinner, we established a CP outside the front entrance of the hotel, found an ice chest that was soon filled with beer and soda. We then proceeded to pick up the story(s) dangling in the air from a year ago. It seemed as though little had changed in that intervening period.

Tuesday morning we all departed for Sand Hill where we witnessed a stirring ceremony that invested Dick and Jay as the Honorary Colonel and Sergeant Major, respectively, of the Regiment. After speeches by Dick, Jay and the outgoing HSMOR, SGM Adams, we went inside for refreshments and mingling with the cadre of 1/50. Bob Gold, wandering around outside, began talking with a trainee who identified himself as Ed Fischer's grandson. Never one to stand on ceremony, Bob grabbed the young Fischer's company commander (with PVT Fischer in tow) and explained why he needed to take his soldier AWOL from the work detail and bring him inside to meet the rest of us. The A Company Commander, Captain Jason Wenger was most accommodating and enjoyed meeting everyone as did PVT Fischer, who appreciated getting to spend some time in the air conditioning no doubt.

While visiting with the battalion, I spent some time with the S3 shop and outlined the schedule for next year's reunion. Since none of the details have been worked out and the Association officer's have yet to see or approve anything, I won't go into particulars at this time, other than to say we are looking at dates some time during the first two weeks of May 2009. The new CO, LTC Tony Benitez is most supportive of the Association with a "whatever you want, we will do our best to make it work" attitude. He is going to be a good commander, good friend and someone I am personally looking forward to working with.

Tuesday afternoon Gary and I re-conned the AO and found a couple hotels that hold great promise for next year's reunion. In the process, we policed up our old friend, Michelle Spivey and invited her to dinner with about 10 others at Hunters Pub that evening. If you've eaten at Hunters Pub no explanation is needed with respect to our dining experience. If you haven't been there, it's only fair to say that you have missed eating the best steak in that part of the country.

Wednesday morning found us on Kannel Field, Sand Hill for a change of command ceremony with Paul Humphreys relinquishing command to Tony Benitez, Colonel Casey Haskins, Commander 198<sup>th</sup> Infantry Brigade presiding. We witnessed yet another great ceremony with good-looking Infantry formations and martial music making us all proud to have been soldiers. Just prior to the change of command, Paul was awarded another Meritorious Service Medal and Tammy received the Commanders Award for Public Service.

Following the festivities at Kannel Field, we adjourned to the Officer's Club at 1130 for a promotion ceremony. Paul Humphreys is now a full colonel! Well-deserved and certainly earned, it was a pleasure to be there to see his conscientious and dedicated service recognized. Tammy was of course on hand and the Association took advantage of the opportunity to present her with a token of our appreciation for all she did during their command tenure: and to Paul we presented a statuette of the memorial that resides outside the battalion headquarters.

Randy, Toby and I then pulled pitch and returned to Indiana, relishing the time we had with comrades of another time; still friends after all these years, new friends and memories of those who have gone on. A bit of a whirlwind trip, but totally enjoyable. Looking forward to next year when we will do it again – only bigger.

**PLAY THE GAME!**

### IN THIS ISSUE

John Topper, Editor

Billie McGregor, Editorial Assistant

From the Editor	cover
Harry B. Wilson	2
Honorary Colonel of the Regiment, Dick Guthrie	3
Vice-President	4
Military Honors	4
Association Member, Noel Allen	6
Critics Debate Choice of Bullets	7

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**HARRY B. WILSON**

*A report on both memories and a return in September 2007 to Dinh Binh Province, and some battlefields there; including An Bao (5 May 68), Thuan Dao (2 Mar 68), and 18 Jan 68.*

Many thanks to Harry for his submission to the newsletter. However, due to the length of his interesting narrative, it will be necessary to divide his report into several parts that will be included in future newsletters. Harry submitted photos with the text, but we don't have space to accommodate them in this newsletter format. If you want to see them, go to our website where they can be found posted with the account. (*Editor*)

*Continued from the March 2008 issue.....*

The incredible incoming fire continued to be very intense until the tanks arrived about 20-30 minutes later, and then thereafter. At one point, amidst all this chaos and incoming fire and before the tanks arrived, CPT Copley was standing on the top of his track directing movement and fire – not in his track but on top of it. I was concerned with getting troopers other than the .50 gunners out of the tracks for their safety (the incoming barrage of RPGs which can cause multiple casualties with one hit on a track), and so they could more effectively return fire. A and C troopers were outstanding in returning this fire at this point in what became essentially a battle rage. A rage it was. We continued to take serious casualties. I remember a lot of my guys getting hit. Bruce Backes, my RTO was hit in the first few moments (my radio taken out also). The incoming did not back down at all, as I remember it, for a long period.

My memories of this period are blurred by time and by the absolute chaos of the fight, but I have some clear pictures in memories. When B 1/69<sup>th</sup> tanks arrived about 20-30 minutes after C Company, about 1300-1310 or so, the in-coming fire remained heavy for a while, long enough for all of the tanks to get into position and fire repeatedly. Only after repeated canister rounds from the tank cannons, our small arms fire, and many air strikes, artillery and gunship runs did the incoming slow down. The firing was so hot that even the tanks expended most of their ammo. So did we. In my memory, I can't tell you of the relief to hear those 90mm cannons firing canister rounds. Part of A Company had been overrun in the original position, the remainder had been virtually overrun when we arrived, and we in C were in danger until the tanks arrived. Gary Quint remembers tree snipers. I didn't see them, but I remember NVA uniforms almost on top of us.

Artillery and air strikes were coming in constantly throughout, along with gunship support. I had never had very close support from the ARVN Air Force with napalm until that day. They were flying Korean War propeller driven fighter bombers, A-1 Skyraiders I think. At one point I had to hide my head into a wallow hole to avoid the heat from the napalm. Incoming and outgoing fire continued to be heavy enough that battalion command could not get Medevac or ammo resupply choppers in until 1600 or so, over 4 hours after the battle started. They simply wouldn't fly in there from what I read in the After Action report and Daily Log, and my experience had been that Medevacs flew into fire a lot. They were very brave guys, as were our medics (my platoon lost two).

At one point in all of this, I don't remember when, one of the gunships that did fly exploded in a fireball in the air at about 30 meters up. Many soldiers in C Company were badly wounded, to say nothing of the A Company survivors who were all wounded. (G.I. humor in extremis is always excellent. I think it was Bob Bihari who told me that when he went to help load the badly wounded CPT Copley on a Medevac chopper from the 301 track, Jay, with a throat and sucking chest wound and the firing turning quiet at that point, offered him a beer.) But that's another account.

Other accounts say there were either 2 NVA regiments there, or 2 NVA battalions and 1 VC battalion, specially armed with RPGs (B-40s and 70s) and recoilless to attack us. From the number of RPG and/or recoilless trails I saw in the air, the incoming RPG fire was extraordinary, as was the small arms fire and Chicom 12.6mm or .50 cal fire. Our air support was also extraordinary. The Brigade Air Activity report for 1-7 May 68 states that 62 tactical aircraft flew in support of us on 5-6 May, and dropped over 80 tons of ordinance, to say nothing of the strafing with .50 cal and 20 mm cannon. That is a lot of air support. I don't have the statistics on the artillery or gunship support, but I know it was massive.

Back to 2007. Moving further down the road to VP2, Pics 188 and 195 look south to Hill 274 and where the battle site had moved east after the initial hit on A Company (which I have marked area B). I recall that part of the actual site was a little west of the hamlet line you can see to the right in the distance. I could not find a trail to go back into that part of the site and I did not want to wander through yards and houses uninvited (unlike 40 years ago). I can say that the hamlet, which is called An Thuong on the map, seems to have expanded, as I could see houses that appeared to be of fairly recent construction. The area I have marked "A" is visible in these photos and is at least part of the battle site on the early afternoon of 5 May 68. From the Daily Log, it appears that C Company arrived at 1245 or so. Just south of that area is where A Company made initial sightings before they moved west and broke for lunch.

VP2 also appears to be where B Company, 1/69<sup>th</sup> Armor came into the action a little after 1300 on 5 May 68, moving southwest. There is a point between VP4 and VP5 on my edited map that also looks to the eye now a lot like where the tanks came in, and when I first saw that area it sure brought back clear pictures in memory. I could almost see those tanks again on that spot and hear that enormous boom of the 90 mm cannon. But VP2 is more consistent with the logic of the area and Dick Guthrie's After Action Report.

Returning to the year 2007, we moved past VP3 and took a small trail south to VP4 on the western edge of An Thuong. Here, looking back Southeast I could see the area where A Company was originally hit, if the coordinates on the Daily Log and in Gary Quint's memory are correct. Gary confirmed his visual recollection when we met a few weeks ago. I have marked this Area "B". Pics 183, 184, 185, and 120 show this area from somewhat different perspectives. Keep in mind that the camera at this point is looking southeast, and at least C Company was not at this spot on 5 May 68, although we were here on 6 May 68.

Moving South of VP4, I came upon the slightly elevated ground to the west and south of both the original attack on A Company and the counterattack in the late afternoon of 5 May 68. Pics 189 and 190. I recall this ground as being wooded and not populated back in 1968. I also recall taking a lot of fire from this area during the counterattack, including either Chicom 12.6 mm or .50 cal fire. Gary Quint also recalls this area as the origin of the first recoilless round fired at A Company at 1145 on 5 May 68.

(Continued on page 5)

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Editors Note: *These are the prepared remarks of Dick Guthrie at the ceremony where he was invested as the Honorary Colonel of the Regiment and Jay Copely became the Honorary Sergeant Major of the Regiment.*

Thanks, Colonel Humphreys and members of the cadre of the 1/50<sup>th</sup> Infantry. You all look so sharp in formation that it almost makes me wish I could have been a trainee in the barracks, being awakened early this morning by the sweet encouraging tones of my Drill Sergeant urging me to rise, and to shine and to greet another day in which to excel... well, I *almost* wish it.

Thanks also to everyone else here at this ceremony, especially my old comrades-in-arms. I'd like to ask the members of Company B in 1967-68 to please stand. Ladies and gentlemen, if it weren't for the hard soldiering by the men you see there, my service record never would have *supported* a nomination to be Honorary Colonel. In fact, I doubt I'd even be alive to be here if it weren't for their bravery. Thank you each - your being here today honors me.

To all of you, I pledge to do everything in my power to uphold my new responsibilities. And what *is* expected of the Honorary Colonel of the Regiment? Even after spending 34 years in uniform, I wasn't sure; so I went to the Army Regs to find out. AR 670-1 says my MISSION is to "Perpetuate the History and Traditions of the Regiment." Now, I confess that learning the Regiment's history by reading the official Lineage of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry can be a little confusing -- at least to me. But I *am* pretty familiar, up close, with some of our background.

The piece of our history I know best started on a blistering hot, Fort Hood, Texas afternoon in 1967 when I reported in to the Battalion commander for the first time. LTC Albert Hutson was a crusty old soldier who didn't shy away from using profanity if he thought it would help emphasize his point. He'd earned a CIB in both WWII and Korea and he liked to brag that during his time, he'd held every officer position in the TO&E of a Mechanized Infantry Battalion. He loved soldiers and he thought the best thing he could do for them was to make sure they were trained.

COL Hutson knew that Vietnam was a tough environment for kids from our modern society. The enemy was said to be badly trained and poorly equipped, yet he was wily and deadly effective much too often. Meanwhile, the American public was conflicted about our country's participation in that war, and our citizens didn't hesitate to take out their anger on the soldiers. COL Hutson never got into that debate. He never tried to change what he couldn't change; instead, he drove us relentlessly to train the men night and day. His was a tough love, and he didn't much worry about how hard he pushed the leaders. Training became our *sacred duty*. We even trained hard aboard ship going over to Vietnam.

Soon after we disembarked in Binh Dinh Province we had our baptism by fire and the men performed magnificently. In the best tradition of the Infantry, they soldiered as they had trained. We did so well that soon we were at the top of everyone's wish list. When a Cav unit would pick a fight, the first place they went for reinforcements was to the 1/50<sup>th</sup> because they knew we'd do the job.

You might say that we made *success* one of our traditions. Sadly, success in combat is not without cost, and to this day we honor the sacred sacrifice made by those men named on that monument here in front of Battalion Headquarters.

It takes little imagination to *Fast-Forward* 41 years: It'll be a drier heat sapping the strength of today's Infantrymen. Rather than jungle muck and flooded paddy mud pulling at their feet, today's soldiers will patrol in desert hard pack and rocks. Instead of monsoon rain blown at them horizontal, they'll be sandblasted by swirling dust storms of the Middle East. Either way, it's still going to be nasty and they'll still curse their inability to distinguish the combatants from the innocents who've been swept helplessly into the brutality of the fight. And lastly, it's no secret that the American people are again conflicted and confused about whether we should even be involved in this war...

About that, let me relate to you a scene that unfolded just day before yesterday: First Sergeant Cynthia had set our LD time early enough so that we were able to get to our departure gate at the San Jose airport with about an hour and a half to spare. I was there reading the Sunday paper when a plane came in, and the first passengers to come down the jet-way were soldiers in battle dress uniform. Someone in the vast waiting room started to clap, and soon everyone was on their feet applauding for all they were worth. It continued until the platoon or so of soldiers had cleared our waiting room, and then the applause echoed through the terminal, following them all the way to baggage claim. The lump in my throat was so tight I couldn't talk for a good fifteen minutes.

The good news I bring you from the Left Coast is that even though our population may *still* be confused and conflicted about this fight, they're clear this time about the troops and they *honor* the sacrifice of the men and women our nation's leaders have put in harm's way. And that's *as it should be!*

To the cadre gathered here, I ask you to continue to discharge your *sacred duty* with more tough love. Do what it takes to *train* the troops night and day, to prepare them for what's coming. Mold them to be the guardians of our Regiment's honor, to be the future of our Army. We, living witnesses of the past, and the 202 ghosts named on that monument, are counting on you to *train* and make them even better soldiers than we were.

- ❖ *Train them* also to keep faith in their country... in their unit... in their buddies left and right.
- ❖ *Train them* to uphold the traditions set long ago.
- ❖ *Train them* to honor the sacrifices of those who went before... just as their own sacrifices will be honored by those who fill the ranks after them.

Thank you again for the honor you do me today. I salute you.

**FIX BAYONETS!!**

*I'd like to reiterate my appreciation to those who traveled so far to be with Jay and me at the ceremony. You honored our past and brought credit to our Association. Thanks again.*

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## Vice Presidents Column

Ron Leraas

Recognizing that I'm a military history nut, one of my sons got me a book for father's day titled "Courage and Culture" by Victor Davis Hanson. It analyzes eight major battles from history, utilizing the thesis that people of Western culture and values have consistently been the most lethal and effective of any fighting forces. He defines Western culture and values as a tradition of dissent, the importance placed on inventiveness and adaptation, and the concept of citizenship; representatives of Western cultures include the Greeks, Macedonians, Romans, Spaniards, British, and, of course, the United States, with the United States representations being the Battle of Midway (1942) and our own Tet 68. I think I'll resist the urge to go to that section first, and will instead start at the beginning, anxious to see how he'll defend his thesis.

Many thanks to the Association members who represented us at the recent Change of Command ceremony, and congratulations to Dick Guthrie and Jay Copley for their recognition.

Only eighty-four days until retirement; it will be a major shock on the Monday after I retire, as I'm sure I'll be awake at 4:30, expecting to go to work, as I have almost every day of my adult life. I found a short-timers calendar on the internet and I've been dutifully filling in the blanks each day, to the wonderment of my co-workers, who have no clue to its meaning or roots. I just sit there with a smug grin.

The next reunion is less than a year away -- hope to see everyone there.

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## MILITARY HONORS

Origin and significance of military gun salutes - The use of the gun salutes for military occasions is traced to early warriors who demonstrated their peaceful intentions by placing their weapons in a position that rendered them ineffective. The tradition of rendering a salute by cannon originated in the 14th Century in the British Navy. Since discharging the cannon rendered it ineffective, by custom, warships fired seven-gun salutes while shore batteries, which had a greater supply of gunpowder and were able to fire three guns for every shot fired afloat, fired a 21 salute. In 1842 the U. S. established the Presidential salute at 21 guns while in 1890 it was established as the National salute. Today, the 21-gun salute is fired in honor of the President while guns salutes of less numbers are rendered to other military and civilian leaders based on their protocol rank (Ref: USA Fact Sheet, dated 05/69).

Origin and significance of the military custom of firing rifle volleys at funerals - During the funeral rites of the Roman Army the casting of the earth THREE times upon the coffin constituted "the burial." It was customary among the Romans to call the dead THREE times by name, which ended the funeral ceremony. As friends and relatives of the deceased departed they said "Vale", or farewell, THREE times. Over time when firearms were introduced on the battlefield the custom of practice of firing volleys was established to halt the fighting to remove the dead from the battlefield. Once each army had cleared its dead it would fire THREE volleys to indicate that the dead had been cared for and that they were ready to go back to the fight. Today, when a squad of soldiers fires THREE volleys over a grave, they are, in accordance with this old Roman custom, bidding their dead comrade farewell. After the last rifle volley, the bugler then sounds TAPS. The fact that the firing party consists of seven riflemen, firing three volleys does not constitute a 21-gun salute. (Ref: Mil Customs dated 1917).



A 21-gun salute is given during the arrival of the casket of former President Gerald R. Ford at Andrews Air Force Base in Maryland, Saturday, December 30, 2006.

White House photo by David Bohrer

(Continued from page 2) The counterattack on the late afternoon of 5 May 68 included maybe a handful of remaining troopers of A Company, C Company now at full (so to speak) strength, B Company, and the remaining tanks of B, 1/69<sup>th</sup>. CPT Timothy Grogan of B 1/69<sup>th</sup> was in overall charge on the ground. CPT Copley had been by then Medevaced out, along with many other troopers of A and C Companies. CPT Grogan launched this counterattack, and then after a while pulled it back after the dismounted infantry of B and C Companies incurred heavy casualties from small arms fire. This was maybe an hour or so later. Dark was also approaching. But we did put a lot of lead into the NVA positions. And the massive air support continued to pour it on. To give you an idea of how heavy the fire was then, I recall that the M-60 gunners on our tracks were firing so intensely -- from mini-gun cans of 1000 plus linked rounds -- that the barrels of the M-60s grew red hot and spewed out hot melted metal from the barrels themselves along with the bullets. So the gunners were pouring motor oil over the breaches to keep the constant rate of fire, and then swapping barrels often. It was the first time I ever saw multiple 100+ round bursts from an M-60. But the return fire was fierce, too, including 12.6mm machine gun fire mentioned above, and we were taking casualties. So, ammo usage may have been wasteful, but go there with us to argue.

The slightly elevated area of the west of VP4 and 5 is now quite heavily populated. As you can tell from the house shown in Pic 190, it was built in 1997. All other houses back there are also new, and new houses were going up as I walked through there.

What I have marked as area "D" is partially shown in Pic 113, and is where A, B and C Companies, 1/50<sup>th</sup>, and B Company 1/69<sup>th</sup>, went on 6 May 68, the next day. It was covered with a lot of brush then, and now. Back then, I recall a lot of bomb craters back there, along with NVA KIAs. I also remember looking at the wallet of one of the NVA dead. It had a picture of his family. Grim. In 2007, I did not go too far back because the trail withered out into what appeared to be yards of houses.

Coming back to VP3, Pic 107 shows the West side of the 5-6 May 68 night laager site, which I have roughly marked area "C" on the map. Moving back towards VP2, Pic 200 shows the same night laager site, where B and C, 1/50<sup>th</sup> and B, 1/69<sup>th</sup>, set up night laager. That was a difficult laager because we pulled in late and we had had more wounded. We were very low on ammo, and we did not start to get loads from Hooks (Chinooks) until around midnight. I recall diesel blivets also coming in the dark or maybe the next morning. Our artillery was still firing, as I recall, and we had Spooky support in the air for a while.

Then, at 0330 on 6 May 68, the NVA attacked again. It was more hell, and more casualties and KIAs. Adding to the merriment that night was that some of our resupplied ammo was hit by a mortar and was burning. Also, the Hook chopper pilots did not want to fly ammo and fuel to us because the area was too hot. Guys like CPTs Guthrie and Topper worked and screamed and yelled to make it happen. Thanks to them. This attack finally died down between 0430 and 0500. There was no sleep for anybody that night.

At morning light on 6 May 68, we resupplied again with no rest. B and C, 1/50<sup>th</sup> and B, 1/69<sup>th</sup> moved down into the area I have marked area D, and then west into the crescent west of An Thuong. Some A Company survivors joined us. We retrieved the dead and the burned out tracks of A Company. That was truly a truly horrendous sight that is burned in my memory and that I will never forget, ever. I recall little or no serious contact that day. We had a tense night again in the crescent west of An Thuong, with Spooky flying overhead, and a few in-coming mortar rounds. I had no problem getting guys to dig fox holes that night.

As I read the after action reports of May 68 in conjunction with being there in 2007, I get the clear sense that the battle of An Bao was a running battle that only started on 5-6 May 68. The first day and night were clearly momentous and critical. But after the day and night of 5-6 May, the banged up NVA units appear to have moved south into the notorious 506 valley. The 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne units operating in the hills of Miss America and the Crescent west of there would have constricted their movement elsewhere. The 1/50<sup>th</sup> and 1/69<sup>th</sup> continued to operate in the area, especially up the 506 Valley for the next several weeks. The 3 or more companies of the 503<sup>rd</sup> Airborne also operated up in the surrounding hills.

Five days after 5-6 May, B and C Companies (under 100 troopers total) were up in the 506 Valley and encountered the same NVA regiment(s) on 11-13 May 68 in several firefights, with huge fire support, including B 1/69<sup>th</sup>. The After Action Reports call this the battle of Trung Hoi. The NVA problem was that they were by then exposed, as is discussed below. We (B and C 1/50<sup>th</sup> and B 1/69<sup>th</sup>) hit them again on 25 May 68, in what was called the battle of Trinh Van. Both are in the southern 506 Valley. My memory of this period is not good. I have only dim memories of being up in the 506 and of firefights. I recall that most of us were pretty jumpy. I also recall that we were very short on troopers, very tired, and probably dazed by all of the firefights. Plus, everybody had lost friends. It was a tough three weeks to be Infantry. But we did have a lot of air support, as well as artillery and gunships. For these battles, our casualties were far lower, and the NVA casualties were far higher, in the range of 250 KIA, according to the After Action Reports.

As Dick Guthrie wondered in the After Action Report, how could the NVA sustain these casualties? Having been back as I was in 2007, they did. That NVA regiment or regiments either were battered badly or essentially wiped out. In 2007, I heard of many VC or NVA units that met the latter fate. If you go to the military graveyards on QL1, or in the north, you will see what I am talking about. The present government has spent a lot of effort in recovering their MIAs from distant battlefields and returning them for a proper military burial near the hometowns of the dead. In the one cemetery we did spend some time in, we found that the first row of tombs are for women who are called something like Victory Mothers. Our guide in Hoi An told us these were women who lost three or more sons in the American/Vietnam war. There were a lot of these graves. The guide also translated the inscriptions on many of the soldiers' tombs. Most bore a note in addition to name and rank that they were undercover. So, yes, our suspicions about many of the men we passed in 1968 were probably right.

All told, we lost 22 soldiers on 5-6 May 68, including the crew of the gunship that went down. 92 were wounded. My company, C Company, and my platoon, lost Bruce Backes, and had 30 wounded. A Company had staggering losses. B, 1/50<sup>th</sup> and B, 1/69<sup>th</sup> had significant losses. The After Action report lists 117 NVA KIA. On 11-13 and 25 May, the NVA KIA numbers were considerably higher. NVA wounded are unknown. As I indicated above, the real number of NVA casualties was probably far higher. If you doubt me, read "The Sorrow Of War" by Bao Ninh, an NVA infantryman who served in the South from 1966 to 1975. It's available on Amazon in English translation. He fought the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, among others. Is accounts of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav battles near the beginning of the book are significant. It is a highly autobiographical novel that was suppressed until the mid 90s.

(Continued on page 7)



*The following is a letter of appreciation from Association member, Noel Allen.*

I was awarded a Purple Heart on 7 May 2008 for wounds I received while serving with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry on 19 October 1967. I was never awarded the medal because of administrative glitches. Then during the first reunion at Fort Benning we were talking about it and Dennis Driscoll and Randy (Doc) Smith decided they were going to make it happen.

Thanks to their combined efforts in dealing with the Army, it was finally approved. I owe Randy a debt of gratitude for his medical care in 1967 and for writing a supporting letter of documentation of the wounds. I also owe Dennis for his efforts in gathering all the information needed and his supporting statement as my platoon leader. He spent countless hours over a six-year period and numerous appeals to the Department of the Army and the Board of Corrections for Military Records in order to get the award approved.

The members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry in Vietnam were a close-knit group that took care of each other. That hasn't changed after forty years – we are still looking out for one another. We stuck together then and continue to do so today. They are all men of great character and Winnie joins me in wishing them the very best. God bless you all.

**HARRY WILSON (Continued from page 5)** It's now common in Hanoi bookstores, and is available on Amazon for about a buck. On this same subject, our tour guide when we were in the Hanoi area told us that his father was a former NVA battalion commander who went down the Trail with his battalion to fight the Americans. The father returned, but told his son that almost all of the soldiers in his battalion did not. I also recommend doing to search for "Vietnam War Casualties" on Wikipedia. The Hanoi government deliberately suppressed casualty reports until around 1995.

Looking back on An Bao 39 years later, my trip and research lead me to the thesis that the NVA made a serious mistake in 1968 at An Bao. They chose the opportunity for a quick and deadly effective ambush on a Mechanized Infantry unit, but at the same time exposed the location of their very large unit. That happened rarely in Vietnam. Our reaction was very rapid and massive, which we could do. The result was that an NVA unit larger than us by several times suffered massive casualties and was rendered ineffective during that day, night, and the ensuing three weeks.

There is another point to add that might bear on this thought, but only might. I interviewed COL Binh Ba Loc the day before going up to An Bao in 2007 (described more fully below). He was the second in command of what we called the Viet Cong in Binh Dinh in 1968. I asked him through an interpreter about An Bao. He replied that he knew about it but was not there (yet the importance of An Bao was the reason he agreed to the interview; see below). I asked him further about the NVA role at An Bao. Keep in mind that he is a Binh Dinh native, a Southerner. He only replied that the NVA came into Binh Dinh to help with the Tet Offensive. He seemed uninterested in further discussion of the NVA, although he described himself quite vividly as a Ho Chi Minh loyalist and confidant.

Newly installed Honorary Sergeant Major of the 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Regiment, Jay Copley, receives the regimental colors from the newly installed Honorary Colonel of the Regiment, Dick Guthrie. The ceremony took place in front of the 1/50 Battalion headquarters at Ft. Benning on 3 June 2008. →



1st Battalion 50th Infantry change of command ceremony on 4 June 2008, Fort Benning. LTC Paul Humphreys relinquishes command to LTC Tony Benitez - Colonel Casey Haskins, Commander 198th Infantry Brigade presiding.

**Army, Critics Debate Choice of Bullets  
May 26, 2008.....Associated Press**

rifles that most Soldiers carry. "Having a heavy cartridge in an urban environment like that was definitely a good choice," says Higgins, who did two tours in Iraq and left the service last year. "It just has more stopping power."

Strange as it sounds, nearly seven years into the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, bullets are a controversial subject for the U.S. The smaller, steel-penetrating M855 rounds continue to be a weak spot in the American arsenal. They are not lethal enough to bring down an enemy decisively, and that puts troops at risk, according to Associated Press interviews. Designed decades ago to puncture a Soviet soldier's helmet hundreds of yards away, the M855 rounds are being used for very different targets in Iraq and Afghanistan. Much of today's fighting takes place in close quarters; narrow streets, stairways and rooftops are today's battlefield. Legions of armor-clad Russians marching through the Fulda Gap in Germany have given way to insurgents and terrorists who hit and run. Fired at short range, the M855 round is prone to pass through a body like a needle through fabric. That does not mean being shot is a pain-free experience. But unless the bullet strikes a vital organ or the spine, the adrenaline-fueled enemy may have the strength to keep on fighting and even live to fight another day. In 2006, the Army asked a private research organization to survey 2,600 Soldiers who had served in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nearly one-fifth of those who used the M4 and M16 rifles wanted larger caliber bullets.

Yet the Army is not changing. The answer is better aim, not bigger bullets, officials say. "If you hit a guy in the right spot, it doesn't matter what you shoot him with," said Maj. Thomas Henthorn, chief of the small arms division at Fort Benning, Georgia, home to the Army's infantry school. At about 33 cents each, bullets do not get a lot of public attention in Washington, where the size of the debate is usually measured by how much a piece of equipment costs. But billions of M855 rounds have been produced, and Congress is preparing to pay for many more. The defense request for the budget year that begins Oct. 1 seeks \$88 million (euro56 million) for 267 million M855s, each one about the size of a AAA battery. None of the M855's shortcomings is surprising, said Don Alexander, a retired Army chief warrant officer with combat tours in Iraq, Afghanistan, Bosnia and Somalia. "The bullet does exactly what it was designed to do. It just doesn't do very well at close ranges against smaller-statured people that are lightly equipped and clothed," says Alexander, who spent most of his 26-year military career with the 5th Special Forces Group. Paul Howe was part of a U.S. military task force 15 years ago in Mogadishu, Somalia's slum-choked capital, when he saw a Somali fighter hit in the back from about a dozen feet away with an M855 round. "I saw it poof out the other side through his shirt," says Howe, a retired master sergeant and a former member of the Army's elite Delta Force. "The guy just spun around and looked at where the round came from. He got shot a couple more times, but the first round didn't faze him."

With the M855, troops have to hit their targets with more rounds, said Howe, who owns a combat shooting school in Texas. That can be tough to do under high-stress conditions when one shot is all a Soldier might get. "The bullet is just not big enough," he says. "If I'm going into a room against somebody that's determined to kill me, I want to put him down as fast as possible." Dr. Martin Fackler, a former combat surgeon and a leading authority on bullet injuries, said the problem is the gun, not the bullet. The M4 rifle has a 14.5-inch (36.8-centimeter) barrel - too short to create the velocity needed for an M855 bullet to do maximum damage to the body. "The faster a bullet hits the tissue, the more it's going to fragment," says Fackler. "Bullets that go faster cause more damage. It's that simple."

Rules of war limit the type of ammunition conventional military units can shoot. The Hague Convention of 1899 bars hollow point bullets that expand in the body and cause injuries that someone is less likely to survive. The United States was not a party to that agreement. Yet, as most countries do, it adheres to the treaty, according to the International Committee of the Red Cross.

The Hague restrictions do not apply to law enforcement agencies, however. Ballistics expert Gary Roberts said that is an inconsistency that needs to be remedied, particularly at a time when so many other types of destructive ordnance are allowed in combat. "It is time to update this antiquated idea and allow U.S. military personnel to use the same proven ammunition," Roberts says. In response to complaints from troops about the M855, the Army's Picatinny Arsenal in New Jersey assigned a team of Soldiers, scientists, doctors and engineers to examine the round's effectiveness. The team's findings, announced in May 2006, concluded there were no commercially available rounds of similar size better than the M855. But Anthony Milavic, a retired Marine Corps major, said the Army buried the study's most important conclusion: that larger-caliber bullets are more potent. "It was manipulated," says Milavic, a Vietnam veteran who manages an online military affairs forum called MILINET. "Everybody knows there are bullets out there that are better." Officials at Picatinny Arsenal declined to be interviewed. In an e-mailed response to questions, they called the M855 "an overall good performer." Studies are being conducted to see if it can be made more lethal without violating the Hague Convention, they said. Larger rounds are not necessarily better, they also said. Other factors such as the weather, the amount of light and the bullet's angle of entry also figure into how lethal a single shot may be. Heavier rounds also mean more weight for Soldiers to carry, as well as more recoil - the backward kick created when a round is fired. That long has been a serious issue for the military, which has troops of varied size and strength.

The M14 rifle used by Joe Higgins was once destined to be the weapon of choice for all U.S. military personnel. When switched to the automatic fire mode, the M14 could shoot several hundred rounds a minute. But most Soldiers could not control the gun, and in the mid-1960s it gave way to the M16 and its smaller cartridge. The few remaining M14s are used by snipers and marksman. U.S. Special Operations Command in Tampa, Florida, is buying a carbine called the SCAR Heavy for its commandos, and it shoots the same round as the M14. The regular Army, though, has invested heavily in M4 and M16 rifles and has no plans to get rid of them. A change in expectations is needed more than a change in gear, said Col. Robert Radcliffe, chief of combat developments at Fort Benning. Soldiers go through training believing that simply hitting a part of their target is enough to kill it. On a training range, getting close to the bulls-eye counts. But in actual combat, nicking the edges isn't enough. "Where you hit is essential to the equation," Radcliffe says. "I think the expectations are a little bit off in terms of combat performance against target range performance. And part of that is our fault for allowing that expectation to grow when it's really not there at all." The arguments over larger calibers, Radcliffe says, are normal in military circles where emotions over guns and bullets can run high. "One of the things I've discovered in guns is that damned near everyone is an expert," he says. "And they all have opinions."

***There ought to be one day-- just one-- when there is open season on senators.***

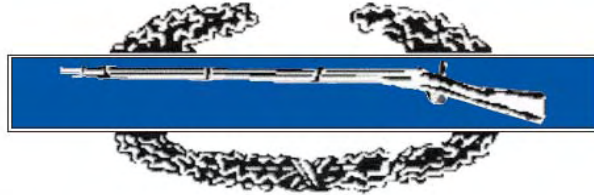
**Will Rogers, US humorist & showman  
(1879 - 1935)**

**Today's Poll Question: Which caliber would Will choose?**



Gary Quint  
438 Fairway Lane  
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## On The Right Track



1st Battalion 50th Infantry Mechanized

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