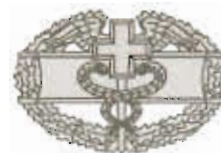


# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

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



June, 2009



Cover Page

## FROM THE TC HATCH

Jimmy Segars, President

It is with much anticipation that I write this newsletter column. On June 19<sup>th</sup>, my wife and I will be attending the Grand Opening of the Infantry Museum at Ft. Benning. Please note that anyone in our association is welcome to attend. I am most excited about our upcoming reunion. Jim Sheppard says that several families of our KIA's will attend the Memorial Ceremony. Some may also be attending other reunion functions. Be sure to make them all feel right at home. All of you are especially good at that.

I am also asking that each of you bring a short, typed biography of you and your family with two accompanying photographs with an anecdote about your time in the 1/50<sup>th</sup>, especially while deployed in Vietnam or in a current combat assignment. This story is to be a human-interest episode of one of your experiences in the military. Please include with it a recipe that is reminiscent of an "interesting" cooking in the field escapade or simply a family favorite. We're trying to put together a cookbook with a lighter touch. We will each get to know one another better if we write down some memory that contributed to the life of our battalion. Please type these in New Times Roman font, with 1 and ½ inches on the left margin and 1 inch on the right, and double-spaced. Please include your name, address, phone number, family member names, and e-mail address. The photos are preferably to be from your military days. Thanks.

I hope all of you have a great summer. When you celebrate Independence Day, remember our troops deployed around the world and especially those in combat areas. Also, remember the history behind Independence Day, stay informed, promote our country's values, and continue to pray that God will bless America as He has in the past. May God bless each of you as well.

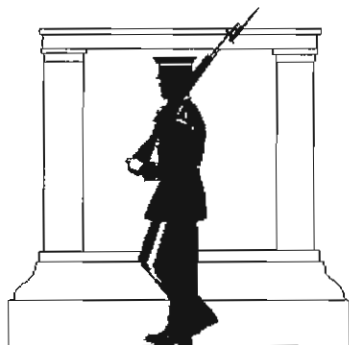
## CHAPLAIN'S

Parker Pierce, Chaplain

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Hello to all the 1/50<sup>th</sup> vets and their family members. I pray as our June newsletter goes out that each of you are in good health. In our last newsletter I shared about my first cousin and his strong faith and trust in God as he dealt with cancer. He stayed in the hospital for several weeks undergoing many different tests and treatments. Thanks be to God, which he has said himself, and since that time he has been sent home and is doing much better. He is far from being completely healed, but he is improving day by day. His improvement is definitely a result of answered prayers from many people around the country.

Also, since our last newsletter two people in the company I have worked for going on nineteen years have passed away. Our warehouse manager died in early February. He was in his early sixties, and the founder and owner of our company, he was sixty-one! Both of these men had cancer and were gone within less than three months from their diagnosis! Both men professed to be Christians (having accepted Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord!). Our owner was very dynamic and open about his faith in Jesus, and exemplified it in actions and deeds! The Bible states, in Hebrews 9:27, that each of us has an appointment with eternity. Only God knows when that day will come for each of us, so it is critically important that we be ready for that day! It's hard to believe that two years have gone by, so I'm looking forward to August and our next reunion! Let's continue to pray for our president, our country, our troops, and each other.



**NEVER FORGET**

### IN THIS ISSUE

John Topper, Editor

Billie McGregor, Editorial Assistant

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**WORD FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT**

Ron Leraas, Vice-President

So, have you spent your stimulus check yet?

The letter that I received, announcing the impending arrival of mine, contained a dire warning that I had to spend it within nine months, or the IRS would impose a tax on it. So, since I'm already in disfavor with the current government bureaucracy because I (gasp) own and use a firearm, I guess I'd better hurry up and buy something trivial (as opposed to putting it in savings or paying down debt).

I have to finally admit that my family is right – I now realize that I've become increasingly curmudgeonly in my old age. And, honestly, most of it is because of the incessant political correctness attitudes that are floating around with the force of law. In Richard Nixon's last book, he made the general statement that "the Constitution ... guarantees equal rights – NOT equal results". Unfortunately, the tone of this country has been to create conditions where everyone becomes mediocre. I cite examples as the overall dumbing-down of our school curriculum, the great Global Warming debate, and the disposition of the press (written and electronic) to present only sound bites – put their twist on them – and call it factual news.

Then, there's the now-infamous (in my mind, at least) directive from Homeland Security that tells law enforcement agencies that veterans returning from Iraq / Afghanistan are disgruntled, dangerous, and likely to be recruited by right-wing extremist groups. If you add in a couple other red flags identified in this memo (unhappy with current lax immigration laws and enforcement, bemoan the status of the US in the world, unhappy with the current administration, among others), there are a tremendous amount of potential extremist recruits available. Makes one wonder why anyone would volunteer for the military today, knowing that the same government that is sending you into battle views you as a terrorist when you return home. I guess we were luckier than we might have thought possible, because we were just drug-crazed baby killers who would snap without provocation – no-one at that time thought to identify us as potential terrorists.

But, to finish with my opening thought – if you haven't spent your stimulus check (and Big Brother truly is watching) – how about using it for your registration fees for the reunion? You'll even have \$50 left over to buy me a couple tall, cold adult beverages.

Hope to see you then.

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**MILITARY STRATEGY**

Conversation with Colonel Harry G. Summers, Jr.  
By Harry Kreisler with Thomas G. Barnes\*March 16, 1996

**Editors Note:** This is one part of a series of interviews with Harry Summers, one of the Army's great strategic thinkers and authors on Vietnam.

**Lessons of Vietnam**

(Barnes) I have been reading Bui Tin's memoirs. He was a North Vietnamese colonel; you may have met him at one time. He writes, "Nor did we learn from the military failures of the Tet Offensive, 1968. Instead, although we had lost the element of surprise, we went on to mount further major attacks in May and September '68 and suffered even heavier losses. This too has continued to be a subject of controversy in Hanoi. Our side also suffered seriously from the social pacification plans dreamed up by the Americans, such as Operation Phoenix, and the Chieu Hoi campaign, which was designed to induce our troops and supporters to defect. Yet, it has to be acknowledged that in the North, although we were constantly counterattacked and suffered heavy destruction from 5 million tons of bombs, we stood surprisingly firm in contending with the bombers of the Rolling Thunder Operations." I'm interested in your comments on the sentence about not having learned our lessons. What are the lessons of Vietnam?

I guess the overwhelming lesson, which is not of particular value, is, never get involved in a civil war in a former French colony in Indochina.

(Barnes) That's rather precise.

I don't see what the utility is, but that's certainly true. Because we lacked objectives, we had no accurate measurement. You know, Morley Safer, who is certainly not a pro-military guy, went back to Vietnam and interviewed the former heads of the National Liberation Front. He found them even more disgruntled than the Americans. They say they've been sold out by the North, they've been had, they've been deceived all the way along. One of the comments is that the Phoenix program was the most destructive program that we had ever mounted. Yet in this country it was seen as an assassination scheme and generally denigrated by the government. (Continued on page 7)

## THE THINGS THEY CARRIED

Submitted by "Frenchy" Lagimoniere

They carried P-38 can openers and heat tabs, watches, dog tags, insect repellent, gum, cigarettes, Zippo lighters, salt tablets, compress bandages, ponchos, Kool-Aid, canteens, iodine tablets, sterno, LRRP rations, and C-rations.

They carried fatigues, jungle boots, bush hats, flak jackets and steel pots.

They carried the M-16 assault rifle.

They carried trip flares and Claymore mines, M-60 machine guns, M-79 grenade launchers, M-14's, CAR-15's, Laws, shotguns and .45 caliber pistols.

They carried C-4, hand grenades, PRC-25 radios, knives and machetes.

They carried malaria, dysentery, ringworms and leaches.

They carried the land itself as it hardened on their boots.

They carried stationery, pencils, and pictures of their loved ones.

They carried love for people back in the real world and love for one another.

They carried themselves with poise and a kind of dignity.

Sometimes panic set in and they fired their weapons blindly and begged for the noise to stop while making crazy promises to themselves and God.

They carried the traditions of the United States military, and memories and images of those who served before them.

They carried the soldier's greatest fear: the embarrassment of dishonor.

They crawled into tunnels, walked point, and advanced under fire.

They were afraid of dying, but more afraid of showing that fear.

They carried the emotional baggage of men who might die at any moment.

They carried the weight of the world.

They carried each other.

## REMEMBRANCE

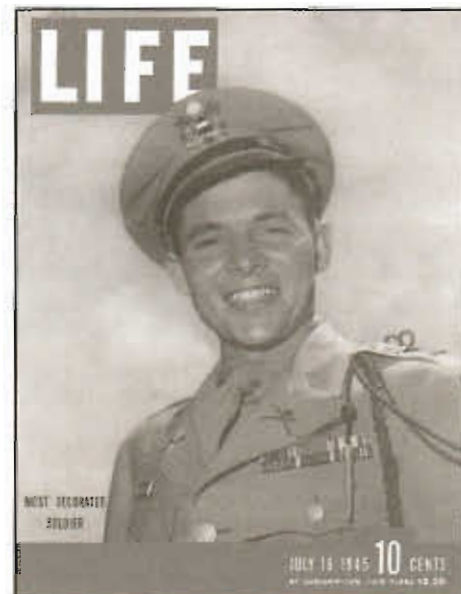
Major Michael Davis O'Donnell, USA

If you are able,  
save them a place  
inside of you  
and save one backward glance  
when you are leaving  
for the places they can  
no longer go.

Be not ashamed to say  
you loved them,  
though you may  
or may not have always

Take what they have left  
and what they have taught you  
with their dying  
and keep it with your own.

And in that time  
when men decide and feel safe  
to call the war insane,  
take one moment to embrace  
those gentle heroes  
you left behind.



**AUDIE LEON MURPHY**

**JUNE 20, 1924 – MAY 28, 1971**

**MOST DECORATED US COMBAT SOLDIER OF  
WWII, INCLUDING THE MEDAL OF HONOR.**

## THE MAN WITH THE RIFLE

Men may argue forever what wins their wars,  
And welter in cons and pros,  
And seek for their answer at history's doors,  
But the man with the rifle knows.

He must stand on the ground on his own two feet,  
And he's never in doubt when it's won,  
If it's won he's there, if he's not, it's defeat.  
That's his test, when the fighting is done.

When he carries the field, it's not with a roar  
Of armored wings spitting death.  
It's creep and crawl on the earthen floor,  
Bult down and holding his breath.

Saving his strength for the last low rush,  
Grenade thrown and bayonet thrust;  
And the whispered prayer, before he goes in,  
Of a man who does what he must.

And when he's attacked, he can't zoom away,  
When the shells fill the world with their sound,  
He stays where he is, loosens his spade,  
And digs his defense in the ground.

That ground isn't ours till he's there in the flesh,  
Not a gadget or bomb but a man,  
He's the answer to theories which start afresh,  
With each peace since war began.

So let the wild circle of argument rage  
On what wins, as war comes and goes.  
Many new theories may hold the stage  
But the man with the rifle knows.



## M-60 MACHINE GUN



The 7.62mm M60 general purpose machine-gun (GPMG) was employed in a light role on it's bipod (effective range 500 meters) or in a medium role on a tripod (effective range 1,100 meters) as well as being used as protective armament on vehicles and helicopters.

Gas operated, air cooled and belt fed, with a quick-change barrel to counter overheating during sustained firing, it has a practical rate of fire of 200 rpm (550 rpm max). In Vietnam it was the main firepower of the infantry rifle section. With bipod the M60 weighs 10.5 kg (23 pounds), which increases by 6.8kg (15 pounds) if a tripod is added (Total 38 pounds minus ammo).

## BROWNING .30 CALIBER MACHINE GUN



Before the end of World War I, the U.S. Ordnance Department recognized that water-cooled machine guns took up too much space inside a tank. Consequently, the water-cooled M1917 was converted to an air-cooled model by surrounding the barrel with a perforated metal jacket. As World War II approached, the Ordnance Department was committed to developing an air-cooled machine gun for infantry use. The result was the Browning .30 Caliber Machine Gun (M1919A4). At 41 lbs for gun and tripod, the Browning .30 Caliber Machine Gun was much lighter than the water-cooled M1917A1 (93 lbs for gun and tripod). On the other hand, the air-cooled weapon was unable to maintain the same level of sustained fire as the water-cooled M1917A1, and did not have the steadiness of accuracy as the heavier weapon.

But its light weight and ease of set-up made it much more useful as an offensive weapon than the water-cooled guns. In fixed defensive positions, however, the water-cooled M1917A1 saw much use in Korea. With anti-freeze in the water jacket, the heavy MG was more reliable in intense ~Chosin cold, as was particularly observed in the savage Reservoir battles. In any weather, the heavy was also more stable and, under intense attack, its greater sustained volume of fire was much appreciated. Moreover, the A4 was criticized for slowness of set-up and vulnerability of crew. To meet these weaknesses, the M1919A6 was developed, and saw use in WWII, Korea and Vietnam.

## Iraq: Learning the Lessons of Vietnam

**Editors Note:** I found this in a back issue of the magazine *Foreign Affairs*, dated December 2005. It is written by Melvin R. Laird, former Secretary of Defense.

MELVIN R. LAIRD was Secretary of Defense from 1969 to 1973, Counselor to the President for Domestic Affairs from 1973 to 1974, and a member of the House of Representatives from 1952 to 1969. He currently serves as Senior Counselor for National and International Affairs at the Reader's Digest Association.

### SUMMARY

During Richard Nixon's first term, when I served as secretary of defense, we withdrew most U.S. forces from Vietnam while building up the South's ability to defend itself. The result was a success – until Congress snatched defeat from the jaws of victory by cutting off funding for our ally in 1975. Washington should follow a similar strategy now, but this time finishes the job properly.

### SETTING THE RECORD STRAIGHT

Richard Nixon was elected in 1968 on the assumption that he had a plan to end the Vietnam War. He didn't have any such plan, and my job, as his first secretary of defense was to remedy that – quickly. The only stated plan was wording I had suggested for the 1968 Republican platform, saying it was time to de-Americanize the war. Today, nearly 37 years after Nixon took office as president and I left Congress to join his cabinet, getting out of a war is still dicier than getting into one, as President George W. Bush can attest.

There were two things in my office that first day that gave my mission clarity. The first was a multi-volume set of binders in my closet safe that contained a top-secret history of the creeping U.S. entry into the war that had occurred on the watch of my predecessor, Robert McNamara. The report didn't remain a secret for long: it was soon leaked to *The New York Times*, which nicknamed it "the Pentagon Papers." I always referred to the study as "the McNamara Papers," to give credit where credit belonged. I didn't read the full report when I moved into the office. I had already spent seven years on the Defense Subcommittee of the House Appropriations Committee listening to McNamara justify the escalation of the war. How we got into Vietnam was no longer my concern. (Although, in retrospect, those papers offered a textbook example of how not to commit American military might.)

The second item was another secret document, this one shorter and infinitely more troubling. It was a one-year-old request from General William Westmoreland to raise the U.S. troop commitment in Vietnam from 500,000 to 700,000. At the time he had made the request, Westmoreland was the commander of U.S. forces there. As soon as the idea had reached the ears of President Lyndon Johnson, Westmoreland's days in Saigon were numbered. Johnson bumped him upstairs to be army chief of staff, so that the Pentagon bureaucracy could dilute his more-is-better philosophy during the coming presidential campaign.

The memo had remained in limbo in the defense secretary's desk, neither approved nor rejected. As my symbolic first act in office, it gave me great satisfaction to turn down that request formally. It was the beginning of a four-year withdrawal from Vietnam that, in retrospect, became the textbook description of how the U.S. military should decamp.

## Earning the Desk



Back in September of 2005, on the first day of school, Martha Cothren, a Social Studies schoolteacher at Robinson High School in Little Rock, Arkansas, did something not to be forgotten. On the first day of school, with the permission of the school superintendent, the principal and the building supervisor, she removed all of the desks out of her classroom.

When the first period kids entered the room they discovered that there were no desks. 'Ms. Cothren, where're our desks?' She replied, 'You can't have a desk until you tell me how you earn the right to sit at a desk.' They thought, 'Well, maybe it's our grades.' 'No,' she said. 'Maybe it's our behavior.' She told them, 'No, it's not even your behavior.' So they came and went, the first period, second period, third period. Still, no desks in the classroom. By early afternoon television news crews had started gathering

in Ms. Cothren's classroom to report about this crazy teacher who had taken all the desks out of her room.

The final period of the day came and as the puzzled students found seats on the floor of the desk less classroom, Martha Cothren said, 'Throughout the day no one has been able to tell me just what he/she has done to earn the right to sit at the desks that are ordinarily found in this classroom. Now I am going to tell you.'

At this point, Martha Cothren went over to the door of her classroom and opened it. Twenty-seven U.S. Veterans, all in uniform, walked into that classroom, each one carrying a school desk. The Vets began placing the school desks in rows, and then they would walk over and stand alongside the wall. By the time the last soldier had set the final desk in place those kids started to understand, perhaps for the first time in their lives, just how the right to sit at those desks had been earned.

Continued on page 6

## FROM THE EDITOR

**John Topper**

The reunion planning is coming together and will be completed soon. I am going to Fort Benning next month for a final coordination effort and Tony Benitez and his guys have shared a lot of ideas with me and we will decide on how many and which of those ideas we can best fit into the schedule. Because at this time of year (early August) when temperatures are at their peak, we are trying to conduct as much of the activities with which we are involved, indoors. We may have an opportunity to get into the simulators for the .50 caliber machine gun and M-203 Grenade Launcher. The new CG, Major General Ferriter, who assumes command 24 July, has been invited to attend, with his wife, our BBQ at Uchee Creek on Wednesday evening.

Just a reminder, the telephone number for reserving your room at the Quality Inn is: 334-298-9321. We have about 50 signed up so far with more who have committed but not sent in the money. We have tentatively planned for 90 – that would be a good number all around.

While browsing through some of the stuff I have kept over the years, I came across a piece in the *Armed Forces Journal* (December 2006) written by Major General Robert H. Scales, former Commandant of the Army War College. It is entitled *Infantry and National Priorities*. In it he chronicles war through the ages. Key to every epoch, however, is the Infantry, from the beginning through the technological advances of weaponry and back to the Infantry. I found it interesting and thought it worth sharing. This is how he describes the Infantry:

*Infantry is a function, not a service or branch of service. The infantry function includes Army, Marine Corps and Special Forces troops who occasionally share the close-combat space with like-minded specialists such as tankers, military police and artillerymen. Two tasks define the function. First is intimate killing. Killing close is the essence of what it means to be an infantryman. Others on the battlefield, such as pilots and artillerymen, kill — but they kill at a distance. Killing, to them, is detached, antiseptic. After a mission, a pilot may feel remorse at the realization that the bomb he dropped at some distant target killed someone. But an infantryman sees his target die. He watches the life drain out of an enemy who chances across his sights. To be sure, soldiers other than infantrymen may occasionally stumble upon the enemy. These are incidental fighters, occasional victims of war who die in ambushes, roadside bombings and assassinations. But only an infantryman goes out every day with the intention of taking another human life in face-to-face intimate combat. It is his skill at this method of killing that wins contemporary wars.*

*The infantryman's second task is to make other infantrymen. Teaching others to fight as infantry is a competency that the Army and Marine Corps have perfected over more than a century of practical experience, beginning with the creation of the Philippine Scouts before World War I and continuing with distinction to Greece and Israel immediately after World War II. The Army learned to build armies while fighting in such disparate places as Korea, Vietnam and El Salvador, and most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan.*

See you in August, until then PLAY THE GAME!

### EARNING THE DESK (continued from page 5)

Martha said, 'You didn't earn the right to sit at these desks. These heroes did it for you. They placed the desks here for you. Now, it's up to you to sit in them. It is your responsibility to learn, to be good students, to be good citizens. They paid the price so that you could have the freedom to get an education. Don't ever forget it.'

**Editors Note:** By the way, this is a true story as reported by [www.snopes.com](http://www.snopes.com) and the *Arkansas Democrat-Gazette*.

Former Arkansas governor, Mike Huckabee referenced this story at the 2008 Republican National Convention. This daughter of a WWII POW regularly has veterans visit her classroom – its one of the ways she teaches her course on the history of war. Part and parcel of what she teaches is an appreciation for members of the armed forces.

In May 2005, she and her class organized a Vietnam Veterans Recognition Week, including an official "Thank You Ceremony" held in the Joe T. Robinson High School auditorium. Veterans from World War II and the Korean War also attended, as did people from all walks of life, to honor those who had served. During that week, students videotaped veterans as they recounted their war memories, thus preserving their stories for later generations.

Cothren and her students have sent numerous care packages to US military personnel serving in Iraq and Afghanistan. They also write letters to soldiers in those theaters, sending off 1,200 missives in 2005 and 2006. In 2006 the Veterans of Foreign Wars named Martha Cothren their "Teacher of the Year."

LESSONS OF VIETNAM – COL. HARRY SUMMERS, JR.

(continued from page 2) I think the American public has learned the lessons of the Vietnam War fairly well. I think, though, that we've created some dangerous misunderstandings abroad. In the beginning of the Gulf War, a Chinese diplomat said, "We knew the Americans had a great deal of military might, but they're a paper tiger. They don't have the will to use it." And all of the comments made about how we can't stand casualties. Baloney. If the American people are convinced of the worth of what we're doing, they will spend, as we did in World War II, a million casualties in pursuing it. There is nothing wrong with the backbone of the American character, and people may, very dangerously, misjudge the reaction of America.

Saddam Hussein twice misjudged President Clinton. Hussein thinks he can push President Clinton around in the Gulf. President Clinton is not going to be pushed. For one thing, he doesn't have the political capital to allow himself to be pushed -- as maybe President Bush would have had. I think the world needs to learn the lessons of Vietnam as well as the American people have.

You're critical also of the academic advisors who came to the Kennedy administration and their concepts of limited war. Why is that?

In World War II we saw the greatest conventional victory, probably, in the history of warfare. But almost immediately after, the atomic theorists started coming to the fore. They had the idea that the atomic bomb had changed everything, that wars were no longer winnable in a traditional sense, that conventional forces had no meaning, that the whole nature of war changed with atomic weapons. And only they, the so-called wizards of Armageddon, had the answers. And for the right price, they'd let us in on the secret. One Air Force Secretary called them the "treeful of owls" type of civilian atomic theorists.

That kind of thinking almost destroyed the Army and the Marine Corps. The Air Force became dominated by SAC [Strategic Air Command] and nuclear warfare. The Korean War was seen as an aberration. Air Force Secretary Thomas Finletter said that the future of war was going to be atomic war and total war. So the Army lost its *raison d'être* and lost its soul to some degree.

When President Kennedy comes in, it becomes obvious that the theory of maximum deterrence was not working because it gave you the choice of nuclear war or surrender, and that really wasn't very usable in a nuclear war. So massive deterrence had failed, and Kennedy comes in with this business of flexible response. Khrushchev counters the American nuclear build-up, which he'd been forced to back down on in the Cuban Missile Crisis, with wars of national liberation. If he can't get at us at the upper end of the spectrum, he's going to get at us at the lower. And Kennedy bought it hook, line, and sinker. Not only Kennedy, but a great many academic thinkers as well, and military people – Maxwell Taylor among others – bought into this theory.

So we became convinced that counter-insurgency was the wave of the future. Kennedy puts out the word to the military, "If you want to get promoted, if you want to get ahead, you've got to get on board." And he fired the Army Chief of Staff who didn't go along with it, George Decker. And Maxwell Taylor, who had been brought in from retirement to be a sort of military guru, was very much in charge of it. So, again, conventional war had been denigrated, not only by nuclear weapons but also by counter-insurgency. And the military sort of lost its soul in this struggle, and military thinking degenerated to the point that we lost the old verities.

## RETURN TO VIETNAM

**Editor's Note:** Dave Gallo who coordinated the tours taken by some of our guys in prior years, has proposed some additional opportunities for those wishing to return to Vietnam. A synopsis of each follows. For greater detail, please contact Dave directly at: [dgallo1@mindspring.com](mailto:dgallo1@mindspring.com). Many of those who have made the return trip will be present at the upcoming reunion and will be available to answer questions and provide additional information.

If enough members are interested, Dave will put together some firm proposals with complete details and pricing. As added incentive, Dave is offering free Rice Wine!

### **Return to Vietnam:**

Tour 1: 12 Day Family Vacation Tour: Mountain Resort -Golf and Sea Side Beach and Watersports: Visiting, Saigon-Da Lat and Nha Trang:  
Estimated cost: \$2,200.

Tour 2: 12 Day - Vets/Spouse Return to Vietnam -Binh Dinh Area of Operations (same as 2001 tour). Tour extensions to see more of Vietnam:  
Estimated cost: \$ 2,500 - extensions extra.

Tour 3: 21 Day - Vietnam Country Wide Tour - (Including 3 Day visit to Binh Dinh Province) –  
Estimated cost: \$4,000.