

# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

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



March 2004



Cover Page

I hope everyone enjoyed the December newsletter. On the 23rd-25<sup>th</sup> of February the following members were at Ft. Benning for the dedication of the statue the Association had made in remembrance of our fallen comrades. James Segars and his wife, Wilburn Jones, Parker Pierce, Jr., Tom Knepp, Randy Smith, Otis Ponds, Larry Curtis, Toby Jordan, his wife, and myself.

We were all greeted like royalty by the 1/50<sup>th</sup> staff. A very special thanks to the following personnel: Col. Brian Baldy, LTC. William O Payne and his wife Linda, Major Jeff Shoemaker, Sgt. Major Ossa, Capt. Little and their staff. These individuals went out of their way to make our stay a pleasant one and did an outstanding job to make this presentation possible. The Association thanks you. We owe special thanks to Ben Foster who designed the statue and mounted the plaques. He and his family did a terrific job on the statue and plaques. Thanks Ben! The ceremony was a real success thanks to the officers and men. Randy Smith gave a great speech that was written by John Topper. Unfortunately John could not be there due to circumstances beyond his control. Randy did a swell job in giving the speech. Nice job Randy! Toby Jordan gave a nice presentation also. Thanks Toby! We were all greeted with open arms, and the Battalion is very proud of all who helped make this monument possible. The statue sits in front of the 1/50<sup>th</sup> Headquarters for all to see upon entering the building. The front plaque has a C I B, our Unit Crest, Combat Medic Badge, and a Purple Heart. Each side has a plaque, each having the 101 names of our fellow brothers listed on them.



EDITOR

**BOB GOLD**

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There are 202 names in all. These brave soldiers will never be forgotten. We should all be thankful and proud of this monument.

A special thanks to John Topper who started this project who spent countless hours on his own time to make this a success. Thanks John! After the ceremony, Linda Payne and some of the troops brought out T-shirts hats and other garments for us to purchase. LTC. Payne gave us a special coin that was made for the Battalion. It has the unit crest on one side and the Follow me patch on the other. Thanks Bill and Linda for all that you have done for us. On Tuesday night we invited LTC. Payne, his wife Linda, XO Major Jeff Shoemaker and SGT. Major Ossa out to dinner. It was the least that we could do for all the time and effort they spent making this a success. I am looking forward to our next reunion in 2005, which will be at Ft. Benning. The officers will be reassigned when we have the next reunion but will be contacted and invited. Thanks so very much to all who made this dedication a real success.

*Play The Game*

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## CHAPLAIN'S CORNER Toby Jordan

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## BACK TO REALITY

Well we got the memorial dedicated and it all seems like a dream now. As usual we were treated like royalty. And my hat goes off to Randy for the job he did in delivering John Topper's speech. Not only did he have to overcome the nervousness but he delivered it like he had been doing things like that all his life. But I guess the most sobering thought I had during Randy's presentation was the fact that there were a little over 200 troops present and the memorial has 202 names on it. Looking out over the 200 troops gave me a real sense of how many young men we lost out of the 1<sup>st</sup> of the 50<sup>th</sup>. Having them all in one room like that at one time made the hair on the back of my neck stand up while Randy delivered the speech. It made me even more aware of how much we have to be thankful for. And that we should thank God each and every day for the many blessing that we receive. I would like to thank everyone that was at the dedication and say that I am very sorry that John Topper couldn't be there. In closing I believe that everyone, if at all possible, should make plans to be at the next reunion so that you can see the memorial. May God bless and keep you safe.

**VICE-PRESIDENT'S COLUMN**  
By Randy "Doc" Smith

Where should I start? At the beginning I guess, and that would be at my house in Seymour Indiana at 7:00 a.m. Sunday morning February 22. That's when Larry Curtis arrived for our departure to Ft. Benning. After stopping for breakfast on the outskirts of Seymour, we motored south through Indiana, Kentucky, Tennessee, and parts of Alabama talking all the while. Larry suddenly looked at me with a concerned expression and asked "How's your gas, we haven't stopped at all?" To which I replied " Oh we can go another 3 or 4 blocks before running out." Luckily an exit was coming up and we made it, barely, to a station and put about \$50 worth of gas in the tank.

We arrived that evening at our hotel and settled in. The next morning we went to Ft. Benning and found that many of the exits and entrances had been closed. We contacted the Bayonet about coverage for the dedication and we went to the Rangers Walk memorial. We had to leave then for Atlanta to pick up Bob Gold and Tom Knepp at the airport. From there we went to Nathan Toppers home (John's son) to pick up the plaques with the 202 names of our fallen comrades that were to be attached to the memorial statue. We then headed for Battalion Headquarters and LTC Payne's office and met with him discussing the ceremony and placement of the memorial once put together. I was relieved to find out that the monument company would attach the statue to the base stone and move it to it's permanent resting place at Headquarters entrance.

*Vice-President's Column (continued)*

We agreed to meet the next morning and Ben Foster the artist that made the statue, would affix the plaques to the statue. However the next morning we found that the plaques were not made to size and would not fit with the current base stone. The monument company would add a slab to and recut the base stone and affix the plaques when they moved the memorial. The dedication would proceed the next morning.

Before leaving Headquarters for the day we invited LTC Payne, Major Shoemaker, and Sgt. Major Ossa with their families to join us at our hotel for dinner later that evening. We then spent the rest of the day checking hotels for deals on rooms in case we vote to have our next reunion at Columbus, Ga. Then it was back to the hotel to get dressed for dinner, and we were delighted when LTC Payne and his wife Linda, Major Shoemaker, and Sgt. Major Ossa were able to make it. Conversation was lively at dinner that night and it was a most pleasurable experience.

After dinner I was coming down with symptoms of the flu. I made a copy of the speech I was to give the next morning and gave it to Toby Jordan and asked if he would practice it in case I was worse. The next morning I was better and without breakfast felt that I could read the speech that John Topper had prepared so beautifully but couldn't be there to give because of illness in his family.

Mother Nature was against us on Feb., 25th the day of the dedication. It was raining sideways and the ceremony had to be moved indoors. The Chaplain for the battalion was not available for the ceremony and our Chaplain, Toby Jordan, was asked to give the invocation and he did a very good job. LTC Payne then spoke and complimented our association and introduced me. I then gave the speech and immediately after LTC Payne and I unveiled the memorial dedicating it to the 202 brave KIAs of the 1/50th Infantry battalion during the Vietnam War. Finally I felt that these men had been honored properly.



In Memory of  
**NANCY NIX**

*Mrs. Nix recently passed away after a lengthy illness. She is the sister of Association President, John Topper. Please pray for her family during this time.*

MEMORIAL DEDICATION  
Fort Benning, GeorgiaWritten by John Topper  
Presented by Randy Smith

25 February 2004

(Acknowledgement of dignitaries and special guests)

There is an inscription on a tombstone, somewhere in the Pacific, of an American soldier who gave his last full measure of devotion fighting for his country. It reads, "Tell them I gave up all my tomorrows, so they could have today." On this particular "today", we honor the members of the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 50<sup>th</sup> United States Infantry who gave up all their tomorrows in a distant time and in a distant land called Vietnam.

The first soldier the battalion lost in Vietnam, Tom Pipkin, fathered a child he never saw, and more tragically, a child who never knew him. Going off to war has never been easy, but Tom didn't complain nor did he use his young wife's pregnancy as a means of not going. He died at the age of 20 in a rice paddy, on a dark night; fighting in a country he knew little of in a war he probably didn't understand. Another 201 soldiers fighting under the proud colors of this battalion were to meet similar fates before those colors were returned to the United States.

We have gathered today to pay tribute to the memories of those 202 soldiers. Men who sacrificed their all so this nation can be free. Freedom, however, isn't free. A dear price has been paid and a lot of pain endured for that freedom. And it is important for us to understand that those freedoms are more endangered today than at any other time in our nation's history.

Dedicating the memorial at Gettysburg, Abraham Lincoln said of America, "We are now engaged in a great Civil War, testing whether this nation or any nation so conceived and so dedicated can long endure." The nation endured and went on to become even stronger.

We are dedicating a similar memorial today – dedicated to fewer numbers, to be sure, but these are not just numbers. These are names - and these are men we knew. Men who were someone's son, brother, husband, uncle and men who were our friends. Men who had unrealized dreams. Men who had a first haircut, a first hit on a baseball diamond, a first kiss from a sweetheart. Men who did not return with us to a nation that was largely ungrateful for their sacrifice.

For us to turn a blind eye to the sacrifices that were made by these young men would be to betray the trust they placed in their country and in us. Trust that their deaths were for a just and noble cause. Trust that the freedoms for which they died would long endure. Trust that their families would continue to have the benefit of those freedoms. Trust that their deaths will not have been for naught.

And that is why this memorial is both fitting and proper. It is overdue, perhaps. But perhaps not. It has taken some mellowing on my part to be where I am today with respect to that war and to the way I felt about the losses that seemed disproportionate to the cause for which we were fighting – and the frustration I felt for losing our friends. Frustrated by a war that was unpopular in a nation that seemed not to care that our friends were dead. And frustrated by fellow veterans of that war who were protesting its continuance, thereby giving that hated enemy new hope and extending the time we were to be there, and further causing the political leaders of this nation to make foolish decisions that were without honor – and, in doing so, causing more of our friends to die.

But we cared and perhaps the time then was not right for a memorial to their sacrifice. The time is now right, however, and we are dedicating a memorial to ensure they are never forgotten.

Lincoln went on to say at the dedication at Gettysburg, "It is for us the living, rather, to be dedicated here to the unfinished work which they who fought here have thus far so nobly advanced. It is rather for us to be here dedicated to the great task remaining before us--that from these honored dead we take increased devotion to that cause for which they gave the last full measure of devotion--that we here highly resolve that these dead shall not have died in vain--that this nation, under God, shall have a new birth of freedom--and that government of the people, by the people, for the people, shall not perish from the Earth."

It is for us the living to go on defending what they died for. It is for us the living survivors of that war to expect to get a bit uncomfortable as we continue to tell the truth even as the vocal minorities try to silence us. It is for us the living to continue the proud traditions that have been set for us as a nation. It is for us the living to continue the standards set for us by this country's founding fathers that wrote our Declaration of Independence and our Constitution. It is for us, the remaining members of that fateful war to keep alive the memory of those who died. For us to do less would be to dishonor the memory of those who have gone before; *for us to do less will be to have wasted all those tomorrows.* Thank you.



*Association Representatives at Memorial Dedication*



**Hop to It!  
Pay your  
2004  
Association  
dues.**

**Send your \$25.00  
check or money order  
today to:**



*Artist, Ben Foster*

**HISTORIAN REPORT****JIM SHEPARD**

Greetings everyone!

As I mentioned in a previous report, I will be obtaining the Daily logs for 1070 during the coming year. Having already copied some of these, I can tell you there is not a whole lot of "meat" here. As the Battalion neared it's final days, there was a significant drop in action but there were casualties and contacts right up to the very end. I recently spoke with a new member from Tennessee who believes he may have been the last wounded soldier during our involvement. Indeed, I recall Ron Leraas mentioning the last KIA & that he recalled the last action of the Battalion elements. The gentlemen from Tennessee and Ron have been in touch.

I still enjoy the enthusiasm our new members show...and I especially appreciate, from a historian viewpoint, that we have representation from all phases of our involvement!

**THOUGHTS ON ALCOHOLISM**

I wanted to take this opportunity, since things are a bit slow on the "Historian" front this early spring, to relate some personal information about myself that I hope you will be of use to our membership.

After the war, I returned home and moved on with my life. Over the course of the 1970's I became a very heavy drinker...finally having to face my problem, I sought help and have been drug and alcohol free for over 23 years now. An important part of my recovery is working with others in their recovery from alcoholism. I do this for no pay...as there is no price that can be put on this type of help (In my case) and in helping others, I help myself.

Alcoholism is a cruel and unforgiving malady that affects millions of people around the world. I absolutely do NOT blame my alcoholism on Vietnam, or my experiences in combat. I believe I would have developed my problems regardless. It's important to understand that many use the war as a "crutch" for their shortcomings and addictions. To be sure, those experiences were difficult, but they could not, alone, "cause" alcoholism. Alcoholism is an inherited disorder whose gene has been identified by science. A gene CANNOT be formed by an experience. If you know someone who has an obvious substance problem and blames the war...they are in denial and need help.

I recommend Alcoholics Anonymous. If you know a vet who seems open to the possibility that he may "have a problem" "AA" (As it is affectionately referred to by most) can help. A phone call to any local AA office will result in a confidential and completely anonymous contact from people who are recovered from Alcoholism. In many cases, although it is not preferred, a vet may make this initial contact if necessary. I know in my case, it mattered little who would bring the help, as I was truly ready... and "sick and tired of being sick and tired". My life was unmanageable and I was at my bottom. I realized I was powerless over alcohol and needed help.

I freely offer my help to anyone who genuinely want help. I am not interested in intervention with someone who denies he has a problem. There are those who believe these people can find no sobriety without "intervention" and while it does have its limited successes, I leave that form of therapy to the professionals. I do not have a magic wand that I can wave over your loved one and make them well. Only if they are truly ready and willing to get help...can I offer help.

Please feel free to contact me with your questions. I will answer all inquiries.

**From the TC Hatch  
REUNION 2005**

**John Topper**

Contact: 812-454-3029

At the 2003 reunion, during the General Business Meeting, two locations were offered for the 2005 reunion – Fort Benning and Fort Hood

Richard Kerr has checked out the availability of rooms at the Killeen hotels and the average rate is \$60 - \$70 per night plus tax. There are fewer amenities and attractions in and around Fort Hood, limited primarily to the post activities and Lake Belton.

At Fort Hood we would be turned over to the Retiree Activities Division of the post and treated as any other group of visitors. There is no unit that will serve as our host. We can visit the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division Museum and the 4<sup>th</sup> Mechanized Division Museum. We might get to visit a range firing exercise if there is one being conducted at the time of our visit. Otherwise, we are pretty much on our own.

At Fort Benning, there are more things for us to do. We will be hosted by the 1/50<sup>th</sup> and given access to all their activities, including firing ranges and other field activities. We will have an updated briefing at Infantry Hall on what is going on at the Home of the Infantry. We will have a barbecue as we did last year, including the cadre of the battalion. There is a possibility we will be able to play around with the Bradley Fighting Vehicle and perhaps do some limited driving, if there is sufficient interest.

Regardless of where we go, the Reunion Committee will decide the activities and functions we participate in. If you are interested in serving on the Committee, please let me know.

Hotel rates at Benning are within the same range as at Hood. Amenities are in greater number, and we will conduct tours to Callaway Gardens and Andersonville Confederate Prison again, if the demand is sufficient.

The dates we are looking at are late June or early July. These were the dates selected at the last reunion, and, depending on hotel availability at the installation the general membership selects, will be adhered to as much as possible. Both places have hotels available during that time frame as of now.

Air travel is considerably more convenient and generally less expensive flying into Atlanta as opposed to Killeen. The **cutoff date** to have your ballot to Gary is **30 April**. Ballot results will be posted to the Association website after Gary has verified the numbers and an announcement will be made in the June newsletter.

Please vote on the enclosed ballot and send to:  
Gary Quint  
Secretary  
438 Fairway Lane  
Kirkwood MO 63122

**REUNION 2005 BALLOT**

*For the 2005 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry Association reunion, I select (place an X in the appropriate space):*

Fort Benning, Georgia \_\_\_\_\_

Fort Hood, Texas \_\_\_\_\_

Members Name: \_\_\_\_\_

*For Planning Purposes Only:*

I Plan to Attend \_\_\_\_\_ Number (includes member) Attending \_\_\_\_\_

I May Attend \_\_\_\_\_ Number (including member) Attending \_\_\_\_\_

I Will Not Attend \_\_\_\_\_

