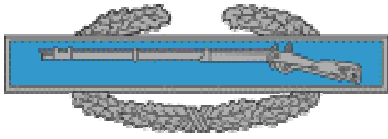


# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

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



September, 2008

Cover Page

## FROM THE TC HATCH

Jimmy Segars, President

Hello, Fellow Association Members,

Sometimes the everyday activities of life, the distances we live apart, and the difference that the passage of time makes can often desensitize an individual to some of the greatest privileges that we share as members of society. One of those privileges is the ability to interact with and to share common ground with those who have experienced pain and deeply stressful situations and yet use those very experiences to help each other. That is why I am so grateful to be a part of our Association. This Association means so much to me and all of us who are a part of it because we share common ground and a closeness not often found. So for this newsletter, I'd like to share some thoughts on just what our Association means.

Each time that I hear "The Battle Hymn of the Republic," "God Bless America," and/or "Proud to Be an American," my heart swells up with tearful pride that I had the privilege of being a part of the long gray line called upon to defend her. All of us in the 1/50<sup>th</sup>, past and present, feel the same way. We love our country and defend her and her principles every chance that we get. Our Association stands for that love of country and love of fellow Americans. And we represent a fortunate group of those who defend her because we know who we are and why we do what we do. And what makes our Association distinct among other "patriotic" groups is that we hold each other up. Each time that we contact each other, hold a reunion, read a newsletter, or make a phone call to each other, the love and compassion we have shows through.

At no time has this been more impressed upon me than recently. At the last reunion, you will recall that we had the family of James Wright, one of our Vietnam KIA's. We had been trying for some time to get in touch with many such families, those who lost loved ones from our unit in Vietnam and whose names appear on our memorial. So at the suggestion of Jim Sheppard and Barbara (John, will you please supply her last name since I don't have it?), the extended search for such families began. James and Barbara, especially Barbara, have worked tirelessly googling, etc. to locate these families. It has been my privilege to contact those found thus far. And what a blessing it has been to be able to connect with these people. So many had many unanswered questions surrounding the last days of their beloved soldiers. I can't tell you how thankful they have been to have someone answer at least some of their questions. It has been a source of healing and closure for them and for me as well. Their stories are remarkable. With their permission, I hope to find a way to acceptably share their stories with all of you.

So helping others in such a way is just one thing that our Association does. It also gives active support to 1/50<sup>th</sup> members on active duty. For example, as men like our own John Topper, Dick Guthrie, and Jay Copley are asked to return to graduations as a commencement speaker and chosen to be honorary colonel and sergeant major of the present bunch of fine soldiers in the 1/50<sup>th</sup> at Ft. Benning, our unit becomes a part of something bigger than just the Vietnam era. We have been given the distinct privilege of being a part of all who are presently serving our country. Thus, we are still soldiers defending and encouraging this great land.

To those who are so blind as to express disdain for America and who choose to denigrate her and the ideals for which she has stood for over 200 years, I say, "Along with others, take a look at the 1/50<sup>th</sup>. These people care. These people love. These people shoulder one another's burdens. These people fight for what is right. These people—us in the 1/50<sup>th</sup>—are real Americans."

For those of you who know others that we served with who are missing out on this great privilege, I urge you to contact them as soon as possible and encourage them to become members. They simply don't know what they're missing. Also, for all of us members, let's remember to support our Association and our troops in every way that we can. Continue to come to the reunions, to contact each other, to pay our dues annually\*, to inform us if you need anything, to participate in our projects\*\*, and above all to pray for our soldiers and this great country.

\* We need back dues turned in at this time. Please send them to Gary Quint, our treasurer.

\*\* At the change of command and honoree ceremonies, the members present and their wives determined to make a more concerted effort to get the cookbook project off the ground. This is to consist of recipes, some from cooking in the field (which are meant to be humorous, "creative" ways to cook when you make do with what you have out in the open), favorite recipes of members of the 1/50<sup>th</sup>, humorous anecdotes (that are printable) about some of our "antics," and perhaps some recipes submitted by family members of our KIA's in memory of their loved ones. Please submit these recipes to Diana Clark by November 1. Send any human interest stories, anecdotes, etc., to Jimmy Segars for my wife to work on. Thanks. This can be a beneficial project as well as a fun fundraiser for our Association. Men, tell your wives about this. We learned recently that few of them even knew about this. So please let them read your newsletters. Thanks.

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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 June 2008 issue.....*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.

#### **Thuan Dao**

After coming out of the An Bao hamlets, we went north on QL1 about 2 K and turned east on Road 505 heading towards the coast. We never drove on this road in 1968 because it was mined. It is now a paved road and heavily traveled. Pic 207 is a shot south at the Nui Mieu mountains and Pic 108 is a shot towards the Nui Loi. From Jim's retrieved records, both were VC and NVA base areas in a big way. We didn't have time to go up to the shore of Dam Tra O, where we drove so often in 1968.

The Thuan Dao firefight was largely a C Company action covering several days, although we had assistance from artillery and from an aerial rocket artillery chopper unit from the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav. Those ARA choppers saved us on the morning of 2 Mar 68.

To give background, I will write what I remember of this firefight. On the morning of 2 March 68, the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> platoons of C Company were airlifted out of Uplift on air assaults to the immediate east of Thuan Dao next to the Nui Mieu rock pile (3<sup>rd</sup>) and to Chanh Giao (2<sup>nd</sup>), next to the beach. The plan was that these two platoons would hit their LZs just as the rest of C Company was arriving with tracks from Uplift in a kind of hammer and anvil op. The problem was that the two airlifted platoons went out of Uplift 2 ½ hours early, due to circumstances that I do not know of. CPT Copley told me in May 2007 that he knew trouble was brewing when he heard on the radio of the early airlifts out of Uplift while on his way out with the rest of the company in the tracks.

The Daily Log from Jim Sheppard indicates that 2<sup>nd</sup> platoon landed on a cold LZ. Not us. We could see the gunship prep from the air coming in. As we came close to the ground, it was obvious this was going to be a hot LZ. The slick I was riding on took some kind of hit at about 10 meters up, and we had a very hard landing. We scrambled off and formed a perimeter. There was sporadic incoming fire. After it died off in a few minutes, we moved out as light Infantry east towards Thuan Dao, parallel to, but not on, the trail, as called for in the plan. See Thuan Dao edited map2.bmp for our location, and the trail. By the way, the trail on the map is inaccurate. It actually, at least now if not then, cuts north to cross the creek up to what was our LZ.

While we were moving, the sporadic incoming fire grew. After about 15 minutes, I decided to pull the platoon back to the original LZ, because the incoming was starting to be a problem, and because the original LZ was known to command and was a possible extraction point. Since I was in regular radio commo with CPT Copley, I am certain he agreed. We did that, got back to the original LZ, and then incoming fire got real hot from the hedgerow 10-15 meters in front of us and from the hillside close to the west of us. See Pic 216 and 217 for the NVA positions, and Pics 219, 223 and 228 for our location. We were returning fire with our only cover being low paddy dikes. It turned out, as we later learned, that we had landed right on top of a NVA headquarters company of a battalion. I tried calling artillery fire in support from Uplift, but the minimum stand off distance was 50 meters plus, and that was too far away to matter. The incoming and out-going was serious, and very close-in. Within 10-20 minutes, Russell Hass was hit about 10-15 feet in front of me, and then our new medic Erwin Bruce Sims went out to give aid, and was killed also. Ask Chuck McAleer about Sims. He was young and brave, as was Haas. I have attached a pic taken in 1968 of what I think was Sims, KIA that day of 2 March 68, Bruce Backes, KIA 5 May 68, and me taken by Toby Hamon in late February. 68. Pic 8490013.

We were saved because an aerial rocket artillery (ARA) unit of the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav happened to be coming through Uplift that morning heading north with the rest of the Cav, and was diverted to give us fire support. We called them to sweep in east to west, very low, and to unload 2.75 rockets right into the ditches shown in the photos. There were 8 UH-1 ARA choppers as I recall, and we had 2 on station at all times after they arrived about 30-45 minutes into this action. Between our ground fire and their door gunners, they had cover to come in at about 20-50 meters up, hover, and fire. Their rockets were impacting only 10 meters away from us, and sometimes on top of us. Each ARA had 48 rockets as I recall. CPT Copley had the pilots in direct radio contact with me. It was tight, but it saved the day. I and the platoon have many thanks to those old UH-1 gunship pilots and door gunners. After that, I never liked the new Cobra gunships that dove and had a 50 meter stand

off distance. Given cover, the old and slow UH-1s could fire ARA at impossibly close distances. (The modern Army might want to reconsider this close air support issue. I think of the Air Force wanting to abandon the A-10 Warthog for the F-16. The stand off for an F-16 is probably 2-500 meters. That is not Infantry distance.)

After about 2 hours of this, CPT Copley arrived with the rest of the company mounted on tracks. By then, the NVA fire had quieted down, as many were dead and the rest had fled up the Nui Mieu (many picked off by our troopers and by the ARA door gunners). We were almost out of ammo and beat. Where we crossed the hedge row/trench line to meet CPT Copley is shown at the very bottom in Pic 224 (that's my wife in the pic). Norm Poage and I were out last. Norm insisted on going down into the trenches to look. He did, fired some final rounds at what he didn't tell me, and then found a pile of documents. It turned out that we got what was described in the Daily Log as an NVA "big shot".

The other Pics in this series are other photos of the same area. After we rejoined the rest of the Company around 1130 that morning, we pulled back to the beach for artillery prep of the original contact area and surrounding areas. In the afternoon we went back through the area, and did draw and return some fire. A Company joined us for a while. The Daily Log for that day said we had a third trooper killed on 2 Mar 68. I am pretty sure from the In Memoriam page of the Association website that it was Todd Handy. Jim Sheppard and I are pretty sure he was with C Company, but I do not remember which platoon.

#### **South Coastal Nui Mieu and 18 Jan 68:**

After leaving Thuan Dao in September 2007, my wife and I and our guides drove south on Road 505. I knew that there had been a C Company firefight on 18 Jan 68 down near the south eastern edge of the Nui Mieux where they face the beach with a rock pile face. We do not have Daily Logs or After Action reports that cover those dates, so I did not have coordinates. Between Xuan Binh (5) and (4), I saw a hill face that struck me immediately as the place of this firefight. See Pics 233 and 234. But this is only memory.

I remember this action as a C Company operation, starting from a night laager somewhere on the beach. We arrived at the base of the rock pile, and 3<sup>rd</sup> platoon assaulted up on foot. Others may have also, but I do not remember. About half way up in the big rocks, we started taking and returning fire, all small arms fire. SGT Jim Tilley, my FO, was hit close by me by an NVA (I think) who popped out of a cave entrance. SFC Woods tried to fire at the guy, but his old model M-16 misfired. SFC Wood was then wounded by a grenade, bad enough for a Stateside evacuation.

We were firing up from a downhill, exposed position at NVA hiding in caves and behind the rocks. After some period of firing from this bad position, we withdrew down the hillside. CPT Randall called for fire support, including an air strike as I recall (probably accounting for the collapse on the hillside seen in the photos.) We then prepped the area with .50 cal's, and I went back up the rock pile with SGT Poage and about 7-8 others to retrieve Tilley's remains. As we were doing this, Norm Poage insisted on going down the tunnel that Tilley's gunner had popped out of. He did, alone, and it took a long time. When he emerged, he told me he had gone down to the bottom of the second level of ladders and had found a large room with a table, but no enemy. I thought then, and still do, that this was incredibly brave.

C Company and 3/C had three other significant firefights (i.e. serious casualties) in this period between January and June 1968, and perhaps more. I remember firefights in the southern Nui Mieu where a track was destroyed and burned, with our KIAs, up the 506 in April where Norm Poage was badly wounded, another unremembered location where Bill Sims was killed on 12 Feb 68 by a B-40, and on the Bong Song plain where we assisted a Cav company in a firefight (some MP tried to give us a ticket for speeding up QL1 to get there until John Geghan backed him off with his .50 in the middle of that pass north of Uplift leading to Bong Song.) I don't remember the places, and Jim's fine but not complete Daily Logs don't report them that I can yet find. I do remember having to do security for LZ Geronimo for week with just a short platoon – an uncomfortable task in Indian country with so few troops -- also doing daytime reach out patrols. We also had a lot of just engagements (i.e., some exchange of firing) between January and June 1968. But I do generally remember the serious firefights, the tense times and the very brave 1/50<sup>th</sup> soldiers, however fleeting in memory are the times, but indelible are the pictures in my mind.

My recollection of these events is imperfect and reflects my limited perspective, and my descriptions are inadequate. I would welcome other 1/50<sup>th</sup> comments, and particularly from C Company. Combat infantry is "indescribable", as former Supreme Court Justice Oliver Wendell Holmes said a little more than a century ago. Justice Holmes was a Civil War Infantry veteran.

#### **Interview with COL Binh Ba Loc:**

In choosing to make this return trip to Vietnam, I was influenced by a lot of factors, not the least being Dick Guthrie's two trips before (guys, go to reunions!) and my desire to do it with a very old friend and fellow Vietnam vet, Steve Higgins (Army, Phoenix, Central Highlands 69-70, scary stuff, too), who would understand if I or he or wives got moody.

After I had the trip set in terms of flights and in-country stuff, I talked to Dick both at the May 2007 reunion and over this Summer about his experience in meeting former senior Viet Cong officers. Dick encouraged me to meet at least one of these guys who were across the battlefield from us 39 years ago. So, with the trip designed, I emailed our travel agent in August 2007 and said I wanted to meet the VC Colonel Dick correctly identified as the number 2 VC commander in Binh Dinh in 1968, COL Binh Ba Loc. After 3-4 weeks, I got back an email saying he was a very senior government official and an interview would probably be impossible (Vietnamese for "no"). I realized the travel agent knew little more than that I was a vet, so I emailed back telling my agent to say that I with the 1/50<sup>th</sup> and at An Bao on 5 May 1968. A couple of days later that I got an email back that the Colonel would meet me.

We met at our hotel near Qui Nhon. I had a translator and a number of topo maps, as well as gifts to exchange. My wife Ann was with me. COL Loc was very gracious, as he had been with Dick Guthrie and his group some years earlier. See Pic 140. He was the second on command of what the translator called the Army in Binh Dinh in 1968. He was later the top commander of the People's Liberation Army (VC to us) in Binh Dinh. He knew about An Bao, and knew it was a large action, but was not there himself. What he personally remembered were the tracks of the 1/50<sup>th</sup>, and firefights up on the Bong Song plain and down near Phu Cat with the ROK forces. He did say that his forces were very strong around Dam Tra O lake.

Continued from page 3.....COL Loc likes to talk, and I let him go. He is a Binh Dinh native. He joined what the West called the Viet Minh, or Ho Chi Minh's national liberation army, in 1946 when he was 16 years old. He fought with the Viet Minh against the French in the French Indochina War until that war ended by treaty in 1954. As the country was then partitioned into North and South, he went North to Hanoi. He described meeting frequently with Ho Chi Minh, of whom he spoke with high reverence, and about whom he talked for some length.

While he was speaking about the French War, I opened a stitched-together topo map of Highway 19 from Qui Nhon through An Khe and on to Pleiku. At one point while he was talking, I put my finger on the Mang Yang Pass. He stopped, and before I could say a word, he spoke to the translator. The translator looked at me and said "French Regiment 100?". I was impressed. I had read Bernard Fall's "Street Without Joy" and knew that the Battle of Mang Yang Pass was the coup de grace for the French war effort in Vietnam. It happened about a month after the fall of Dien Bien Phu in May 1954. The French unit that was ambushed in the Mang Yang Pass was Groupe Mobile 100.

In 1959, COL Loc was sent back to Binh Dinh with two others to recruit for the Viet Cong, or the National Front for the Liberation of South Vietnam. He worked under cover using aliases, but said the South's government knew who he was and searched for him. His wife and younger son were imprisoned periodically. He older son joined the VC also. Within a year, he said, he was able to pay his soldiers, who mostly worked under cover. By 1968, he said that the VC compromised two regiments in Binh Dinh.

After the American War, as they call it, in 1975, COL Loc left the military for a year to study. Then he rejoined to fight in the war against the Khymer Rouge in Cambodia, and served as an advisor in Laos. He retired to Qui Nhon in 1990, and has been active in the effort to recover VC MIA remains in Binh Dinh ever since.

Speaking of us, he said that he remembered the 1<sup>st</sup> Cav, and knew that McNamara had played a role in its formation. He also remembered the 4<sup>th</sup> Division and the 173<sup>rd</sup> Airborne. When I showed him where we were going the following days, he told our guide to take us anywhere we wanted to go. He did warn us that his forces had heavily mined the area on the coastal front of Nui Mieu mountains, with the implication that we should stay on established trails.

At the end of the interviews, we exchanged gifts. I gave him my hunting knife from back then, a gift from my father, and he gave me the book he wrote "Nui Ba Khu Dong Thoi Ay". Part of this is the name of a mountain near Phu Cat, I think. I will try to get some translation done. He described the book as not political, just war stories. He picked Dick Guthrie out from a group photo that our guide was carrying of Dick's trip back in 2001, and asked that my wife and I convey his best wishes to Dick and his group. I did.

**Acknowledgements:**

As I mentioned earlier, this trip would not have been possible without the great document research and retention work that our Jim Sheppard (3<sup>rd</sup> platoon also) has done. But there are others I wish to acknowledge for their commentary and papers that made my writing possible. These include in no particular order: Dick Guthrie (S-3 Air and prior B Company CO); Jay Copley (CO C Company 5 May 68); John Topper (S-2, S3 and prior A Company CO); Norm Poage (3<sup>rd</sup> platoon and then 1<sup>st</sup> platoon leader until 4/68); Toby Hamon (3<sup>rd</sup> platoon 5 May 68); Gary Quint (A Company 5 May 68); Bob Bihari (A Company 5 May 68); Jim Fitzgerald (A Company 5 May 68); Timothy Grogan (CO, B 1/69<sup>th</sup> Armor 5 May 68); Don Spaulding (Historian 1/69<sup>th</sup> Armor 5 May 68); Bill Roskilly (3<sup>rd</sup> platoon 5 May 68); Jeff Felder (3<sup>rd</sup> platoon 5 May 68); and Bill Bontemps (C Company 5 May 68).  
9 December 2007

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**Anthony Benitez LTC MIL USA TRADOC**

**Friday, September 05, 2008 3:12 PM**

Just to keep you updated, we've almost come to the conclusion of the "Summer Surge" here on Sand Hill. During that time, the battalion has graduated over 700 Soldiers to be sent to worldwide units. We've had two companies change command, as well. CPT Jason Wenger gave up the guidon in Alpha Company to CPT Tom Flook. Jason will pursue interests in the civilian sector as a project manager in Winchester, VA. CPT Flook comes to us from 3ID in Savannah, GA, after a recent deployment to Iraq. In Foxtrot Company, CPT Rob Padgett changed out with 1LT(P) Don Kim. Rob is headed to the Captains' Career Course and Don is coming to us from 25ID in Hawaii after a recent deployment to Iraq. Our Drill Sergeants continue to do outstanding work and are the pride of this unit. A prime example is Drill Sergeant Daniel Roney who was recently recognized as Fort Benning's NCO of the Quarter - a great accomplishment. One last thing, we were able to recognize a 1-50 alum, Ed Fischer, during the graduation ceremony for our Bravo Company as he attended to see his grandson join the ranks of the Infantry. It was a fitting tribute and I hope to have the opportunity to do it again.  
Play the Game!, Tony

P.S. - they still have not published the dates beyond 1st QTR for graduations. More to follow.

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**MAKE PLANS FOR...**  
**REUNION**

**REMINDER**



*Send in your recipes*

**ROBERT ALLEN FIELD**

**Jim Sheppard**

***Memorial to a hometown boy***

The Tribute page to Robert Allen, from The New Jersey Vietnam Veteran's Memorial Web Site reads, in part: *"There is a Little League Field on 76<sup>th</sup> Street, West of JFK Boulevard in North Bergen (New Jersey) named in his honor"*

Robert Samuel Allen was killed in action on May 5<sup>th</sup>, 1968, during the Battle of An Bao in Binh Dinh Province, located in the coastal Central Highlands region of the former Republic of South Vietnam. The area is, in today's world, an idyllic landscape of rice paddies and small peasant villages. One of our unit's Platoon Leaders, Harry Wilson, recently brought back photos to bear this out, but in 1968 these paddy fields were dry as a bone and the scene of some of our Battalion's most horrific fighting. It was in the middle of this carnage the Bob Allen made that supreme sacrifice, machine gun blazing, to try to save his wounded and bloodied fellow soldiers. He died in his efforts, but those same struggles negated some of the intensity of enemy fires being leveled on a pocket of troops surrounded by North Vietnamese Army soldiers. To those who witnessed his bravery, including our own former Medic, Jim Fitzgerald, there is little doubt that his actions saved many lives that fateful day.

History aside, I was curious to see this Little League Field. My work with the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 50<sup>th</sup> Infantry KIA files, specifically with attempting to build a database of contact persons for each of our fallen men, has made me aware of several locations named in honor of our brothers lost long ago. Since my personal life's work takes me in the general vicinity of North Bergen, New Jersey, on many days, I packed my camera and, as expected, had a chance to stop at the field this past week.

I should mention that I was "spurred on" by a post I found recently on one of the many Vietnam memorial posting sites. Ron Belven, now of Branchburg, NJ, wrote: *"I grew up in your hometown of North Bergen. I was a young boy when you died. They named our Little League Field in your honor, and I was the first to play on it...."*

North Bergen, New Jersey is not quite suburbs, not quite city. It is located in Northern New Jersey, East of the Hudson River, across from Manhattan and the 5 Burroughs of New York City. It rests on the western slope of a ridge that borders that well known river. To the immediate west of this ridge is another river valley prominent to Northern New Jersey, the Hackensack River Basin, formerly rife with landfill stench but now a pristine wetlands area. So while there is the strong influence of urban living...houses packed one upon the next with only small backyards...if any at all, there remains a "feel" for the suburbs, as the view is often unobstructed out over these reestablished wetlands. It almost puts one in mind of many a San Francisco landscape.



At first I wondered where this field might be! There seemed to be no gaps in the overcrowded blocks leading up to the address I knew to be that of this Little League Baseball Field. As I turned the corner from JFK Boulevard, North Bergen's "Main Drag" I first noticed only a School with a parking lot and small basketball court in the rear.

Then I noticed that the School Parking lot also provided parking for the Baseball Field located across the street. I parked and walked over to the field. You could not really get much of a view as this field was built into the sloping hillside terrain and surrounded by a tall 8 foot fence...padlocked! I could see a sign through the gate: "Robert Allen - Tony Avillo Field" but could get little more than a hint of the actual playing surface.

I briefly toyed with the idea of scaling the fence, but decided this would not sit well with my employer should the local police "take exception" at my trespassing!

I walked down the block, simply finding myself descending below the level of the field as I did so, and the view vanished as I proceeded. Then I realized I could get a better photograph seeking some higher ground and looking down. There it was! Just back across the street and above the parking lot was a basketball court on ground that was raised and actually higher than the baseball field. I sought out a suitable location there and got my final shot as the sun began to set in the distance. It was quite a field! Equipped with Lights for night baseball games! As a young boy, I played Little League Baseball and can think of no greater thrill than to have such a fine playing surface for those childhood games!



Lon Belvin's tribute website post to Bob Allen continued: *"I can still see the people crying at the ceremony honoring you. I was young and did not understand..."*

As I gazed over this scene, the green grass of the field coupled with the beautiful sunset to the West, I took a moment to remember a soldier and the home town he left to fight a war long ago. I can only imagine the wonder of this then young little leaguer at all the grief contradicting such a beautiful gift to the youth of this community. Years later he returned to the memory, much as I now seek to chronicle these same memories for posterity. Belvin wanted to thank the man, not so much for the great Little League Field of his youth, but for making the ultimate sacrifice for his country long ago.

*"I want to extend my sympathy to your family and try to relay, in some small way, the respect I have for you! Rest in peace Soldier and thank you from my family for doing the job you did".*

## CHAPLAIN'S

Parker Pierce

**O** I pray this newsletter finds all of the 1/50th members and their families in good health, and excited about life, liberty, and freedom. The upcoming presidential election is a very critical time for our country. Ironically, as I write this article it is that date in our United States history that will never be forgotten\_\_\_ 9-11-2001!! As at many other significant events in our lives we will never forget where we were and what we were doing on that world changing date! I was standing in my kitchen about to leave for work when my mother called to ask me if I was aware of what had just happened in New York City a few minutes earlier. I told her I hadn't been watching the news that morning on TV. Just as I turned on the TV the second plane hit the other twin tower! It was surreal, and very eerie and heartbreaking all at the same time. Knowing that many souls had just entered eternity was very humbling. My mother and I were speechless for a few moments, and then we agreed we needed to start praying for families of the victims and the ones going through that horrific tragedy as were conversed on the telephone. That horrible day made me as well as millions of people around the world realize, some just for a very short time, that life on this earth and eternity is only a split second apart! This is why it is so critically important we know where we will spend eternity, and we can know! I pray God's blessings for each of you and your family members, and I know we will all be praying for God's intervention again in the November presidential election, our country, our president, our troops, and each other.

## FROM THE EDITOR

John Topper

I am aware everyone is anxious to know what is going on with respect to next year's reunion. We are still awaiting word from the Army, which must analyze accessions data and project fill of recruits to the battalion for initial entry training. Our reunion is predicated on scheduling it during the week a graduation exercise is programmed. This is an especially important consideration for next year because the graduation will be held at the new parade field adjacent to the Infantry Museum, an almost 200 million dollar facility that is tentatively scheduled to open in March 2009. We want to avail ourselves not only of the museum but the new parade ground as well. It will be even more awesome than those we have experienced during the past three reunions. The new parade field will contain turf from all the major battles around the world in which the US Army Infantry has participated.

The new National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center at Patriot Park features an 180,000 square-foot museum. At the entrance of the museum, the "Follow Me" statue will stand in an open rotunda. Inside, six galleries ranging in size from 2,700 to 5,600 square feet will tell the Infantry story from pre-revolutionary war times to the present. The galleries will open into a grand hall large enough to seat 500 for special dinners.

The Soldier Center will feature a 3-D IMAX theater, themed café, gift shop and simulator attractions. Patriot Park will include an authentic WWII Company Street (which we got a preview of during Reunion 2007); a Memorial Walk of Honor and the seven-acre parade field where it is anticipated 28,000 students will be graduated annually.

LTC Tony Benitez, battalion commander, is mindful of our desire to know something soon, and will inform us as quickly as possible. Tony was most gracious in providing an update from the battalion that is reprinted elsewhere in this newsletter.

As soon as the Association Board selects the dates for Reunion 2009, they will be posted, along with registration information, on the website. A registration form will be included in the next newsletter as well. **PLAY THE GAME!**

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### ACTIONS IN REPELLING RAID EARN SOLDIER DSC

Staff report Army Times \* Thursday Sep 18, 2008

A mortar platoon sergeant for the 173rd Airborne Brigade Combat Team has been awarded the Army's second highest valor decoration for his actions while battling Taliban forces in northeast Afghanistan one year ago. Staff Sgt. Erich R. Phillips of Chosen Company, 2nd Battalion, 503rd Parachute Infantry Regiment (Airborne) was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross by Gen. Carter F. Ham, U.S. Army Europe Commander, in a ceremony Sept. 15 at Vicenza, Italy, the brigade's home station. Phillips received the award for combat action at the "Ranch House," a remote NATO base in Nuristan Province that was attacked in the pre-dawn hours of Aug. 22, 2007 by 60 to 80 Taliban insurgents.

When Taliban attacked the Ranch House with rocket propelled grenades and small arms fire, 22 soldiers of the 173rd ABCT were living at the base, working with members of the Afghan National Army. Phillips, a native of Eastpoint, Fla., is credited with organizing defenses around the base's tactical operations center, leading a counterattack with grenades and small arms and assisting in the evacuation of wounded comrades. The base was not overrun during the 2½-hour firefight, although 50 percent of the U.S. soldiers who fended off the attack were wounded, and two Afghan allies killed. "I just tried to maintain the front line," said Phillips of his role in the fight. "The other soldiers deserve just as much recognition as me."

During his brigade's 15-month deployment to Afghanistan, Phillips also participated in the Battle of Wanat, which resulted in the combat deaths of 14 Chosen Company soldiers. Phillips received a Purple Heart for Wanat, and has been recommended for another valor award, according to information provided by Installation Management Command-Europe. Phillips is scheduled to leave Chosen Company and become an instructor with the 6th Ranger Training Battalion.

## M1s for Vets

Ron Leraas

I made another trip to the National Hi-Power Rifle Championships – this time as part of the Texas State Service Rifle Team. Wish I could report that I did better than last year ... but I didn't. It seems like I've been a half-step out of phase all this year – haven't done bad, but also haven't done well. Its time to take a break and prepare for next year.

While I was at the Nationals, I was around a group of competitors loosely organized into an Association called M1s For Vets. I use the term "loosely organized" because they don't have a national organization or charter – instead, it is more of a project, with the word about them spreading through the competitive shooting community (a significant number of whom are vets themselves).

This project started in North Carolina about three years ago, when John O'Shea, himself a competitive shooter, was trying to come up with a method to show support/appreciation for returning Iraq / Afghanistan veterans, with special attention to those combat-wounded. He hit upon the idea of presenting a fully-functioning M1 Garand (WWII-vintage service rifle) to a local veteran, and the project has grown with more than sixty veterans having been gifted with either an M1 or a Springfield Model 1903, with many rifle clubs and shooters across the nation contributing money, rifles, and/or support.

There are only three qualification criteria:

- The recipient must have served either in Afghanistan or Iraq
- The recipient must have a desire to continue in a shooting sport
- The recipient must be willing to accept the gift

Most candidates are referred through Operation Second Chance ([www.operationsecondchance.org](http://www.operationsecondchance.org)), which has also helped out with transportation, organization, and financial assistance.



In addition to receiving the rifle, the veteran is taught the fundamentals of competitive hi-power shooting by an experienced competitor, and assisted in entering and competing in matches, with the end game of competing at the National Matches. This group has fielded a team and competed for the past three years – initially in the non-trophy matches (JC Garand match, Vintage Rifle match, etc), but some members will begin competing in national trophy matches in 2009.

Oh – did I mention that the majority of these veterans are multiple (traumatic) amputees? As a veteran with all of my limbs intact, I am proud of these guys that are (sometimes) helped up to the firing line and yet still turn in credible scores. Their smiles are infectious.

This column is in no means meant to be a solicitation vehicle, but if you would like to help out, contact me and I will give you John O'Shea's contact information – he is already looking toward July 2009 and making arrangements to get as many of his charges to the National Matches as possible.

## TET OFFENSIVE ~ THE TURNING POINT

From Spartacus Educational

In September, 1967, the NLF launched a series of attacks on American garrisons. General William Westmoreland, the commander of US troops in Vietnam, was delighted. Now at last the National Liberation Front was engaging in open combat. At the end of 1967, Westmoreland was able to report that the NLF had lost 90,000 men. He told President Lyndon B. Johnson that the NLF would be unable to replace such numbers and that the end of the war was in sight.

Every year on the last day of January, the Vietnamese paid tribute to dead ancestors. In 1968, unknown to the Americans, the NLF celebrated the Tet New Year festival two days early. For on the evening of 31st January, 1968, 70,000 members of the NLF launched a surprise attack on more than a hundred cities and towns in Vietnam. It was now clear that the purpose of the attacks on the US garrisons in September had been to draw out troops from the cities.

The NLF even attacked the US Embassy in Saigon. Although they managed to enter the Embassy grounds and kill five US marines, the NLF was unable to take the building. However, they had more success with Saigon's main radio station. They captured the building and although they only held it for a few hours, the event shocked the self-confidence of the American people. In recent months they had been told that the NLF was close to defeat and now they were strong enough to take important buildings in the capital of South Vietnam. Another disturbing factor was that even with the large losses of 1967, the NLF could still send 70,000 men into battle.

The Tet Offensive proved to be a turning point in the war. In military terms it was a victory for the US forces. An estimated 37,000 NLF soldiers were killed compared to 2,500 Americans. However, it illustrated that the NLF appeared to have inexhaustible supplies of men and women willing to fight for the overthrow of the South Vietnamese government. In March, 1968, President Johnson was told by his Secretary of Defence that in his opinion the US could not win the Vietnam War and recommended a negotiated withdrawal. Later that month, President Johnson told the American people on national television that he was reducing the air-raids on North Vietnam and intended to seek a negotiated peace.