



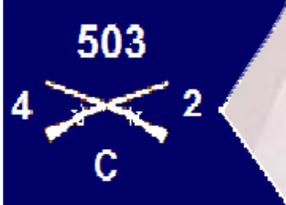
173RD
AIRBORNE
BRIGADE

"THE ROCK"



4TH BATTALION
(AIRBORNE)
503RD INFANTRY

2ND PLATOON



"C" COMPANY



SERGEANT



INFANTRYMAN

ROBERT ERNEST GAFTUNIK

2nd Platoon, "C" Company, 4th Battalion (Airborne), 503rd Infantry
Specialist 4th Class, E4, Posthumous Promotion to SGT, RA569765388, MOS 11B20
Home of Record: Sacramento, CA

Date of Birth: January 27, 1949, Age at time of loss: 20, Single
173rd Airborne Brigade (Separate), Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam
Start of Tour: April 9, 1969, Date of Casualty: August 25, 1969, Days in Country: 138
Casualty Type A2, Gun, small arms fire, Panel 19W – Row 111

We have determined that Robert Gaftunik was not a member of the 1st Battalion (M), 50th Infantry during our tour in Vietnam. We currently do not have access to the information that reported him as one of our KIAs, but it was indicated in a note on our original "In Memoriam" pages that someone within our Association identified him as such. Robert's name is inscribed on our 50th Infantry Vietnam Memorial in front of Battalion Headquarters, Fort Benning, Georgia. His name will remain on our memorial. I was particularly moved by the child photo of "Bobby" Gaftunik. Some loving family member submitted this print of a much younger Sergeant Gaftunik. In tribute, I am posting the except from the well known Bob Dylan song: "Forever Young". Sadly, I learned that Robert's older brother was killed in action on March 27th, 1968. The Gaftunik family lost their two sons to the war.

Jim Sheppard, Historian.

I found the following narrative at:
<http://www.173d.com/memorial/gaftunik.htm>

The following is how Sgt. Gaftunik was killed.

I was the medic with 2nd (?) Platoon, Charlie Co., 4th Battalion. Our Platoon Sergeant was SFC Hasty. Our Company commander was Captain Hugh Shelton (later Gen. Henry Shelton, CJCS). We were humping up the An Lao Valley Northwest of LZ English North. The morning of Aug. 25th 1969 was hot, humid and I had diarrhea. We moved out and were walking through rice patties and hooch clusters.

As we entered one of those particularly dense clusters of brush and huts, a large water buffalo came charging toward me. Second Squad leader Sgt. Robert Ernest Gaftunik emptied a magazine from his M16 into the buffalo which then dropped at my feet. "Damn Gaft, you saved my ass" I said. SFC Hasty said, "OK, excitement over, we just alerted every f...n VC in this AO."

As we were examining the buffalo, smoke'n and joke'n about "big game hunter Gaftunik" Capt. Shelton radioed SFC. Hasty. Another platoon (3rd?) had hit a booby trap, 2 KIA with several WIAs, he told us to meet up with them for a sweeping action. All laughter stopped. The KIAs were Sergeants Gentry and Strazzanti. They had tripped a booby trapped 155mm artillery round.



*May your hands always be busy
May your feet always be swift
May you have a strong foundation
When the winds of changes shift
May your heart always be joyful
And may your song always be sung
May you stay forever young
Forever young, forever young
May you stay forever young.*

Continued...

We moved out. I was 4th man back. Sgt. Gaftunik was two guys behind me. As we walked across an open rice patty I heard Gaftunik say to SFC Hasty, "those are Gooks over there Sgt Hasty!" As I turned to look a machine gun opened up. We hit the ground and returned fire. Spec 4 Hooker ran back and dragged Gaftunik to cover. When I got to him, his eyes were open and he was chewing gum like crazy. He was not responding to me. He had a bullet wound to the top of his head that was gushing blood. Hooker grabbed Gafts helmet which had a hole near the top. I started an IV and was working hard to stop the blood. I knew he was in bad shape and needed med-evac immediately. The dust-off was in route to B-Med with 3rd platoon's KIAs and WIAs. No time to wait for a return trip.

There was a CC bird over head. I requested they land and med-evac Gaftunik. He had stopped breathing so I began CPR. We had another medic with us so I got on the bird with Gaftunik, continued CPR and began a second IV of Ringers. As we lifted off I heard the door gunner yell, "where are the Gooks?" I looked down, they were spread out around a hooch shooting at my platoon. There! I pointed and the door gunner opened up. Yeah, get some!

I returned my attention to Gaftunik. I could not stop the bleeding. The Rear Echelon officers had picked up their feet so as not to get blood on their shiny boots. They were looking pretty pale so I got them to hold the IV bottles. We landed at B-Med and they took Gaft in. A little later a Doctor came out and said he was dead. The bullet had gone through his helmet and straight down into his brain, nothing could be done for him. I cried like a baby then caught the next bird back to my platoon.

We had a sayin', "Don't mean nothin', suck it up and drive on" ... but it did and it still does today!

AIRBORNE ALL THE WAY!"

Nathan "Doc" [King](#)
"B" & "C" Co., 4th Bn, 503d Parachute Infantry
173d Airborne Brigade (Sep.)1969/70

ROBERT GAFTUNIK'S AWARDS AND DECORATIONS



Combat Infantry Badge



Purple
Heart

National
Defense

Vietnam
Service

Vietnam
Campaign