

ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1st Battalion 50th Infantry Association



December 2005

Cover Page

FROM THE TC HATCH

Randy "Doc" Smith,

Here it is Christmas Holiday season again, some 30-odd years after many of us spent our holidays in Vietnam. Remembering back it was a particularly lonely time for most and I am drawn to think about our troops of today. All over the world the soldiers are there serving us and we owe them much. May God bless and take care of them.

The message board on the website is still down and still a problem we need to solve. We called Ray by telephone from my home to his and he agreed to send us the password that we need to access the website. John Topper is also contacting Chris Lange to see what can be done about changing the current situation.

An invitation has been extended to the WWII 1/50th Veteran's Organization (<http://www.50thaib.org>) to join with us at Fort Benning for our next reunion in 2007. We don't have an answer yet and don't know how many are left or how many would or could come, but the possibility is there.

One other thing we would like to do is to try and notify the families of the men on our memorial of its existence. In most cases they probably don't know a memorial to their loved ones stands at Fort Benning or that they are remembered with ceremonies on Veteran's Day and when we have our reunions. Some may be interested in coming for the memorial service at our next reunion. I'm sure it will be impossible to find every one of the families but we would like to find as many as possible. If you have any information as to the families of any of our 202 KIA's please send it to me at smittys@comcast.net.

May you all have a very Merry Christmas and a Happy New Year.

NEW YEAR'S RESOLUTION

Become an Association Volunteer.



Ambush Patrol

By Mick Hawkins

(Editors Note: This article was only partly published last month – this is the entire story. Apologies to Mick, but its worth a second read)

I had talked with John Topper about telling a story about an ambush that I went on while at LZ English. I hope no one takes this wrong, it is a true story and as I age my brain hates the pressure of trying to remember things, dates, names and places. I hope I get the names right that went on this ambush if I do not, most will read it in the newsletter except Jim Derwitch I don't think he is a member.

As a young boy I was raised to be a Pitch player. How well you played Pitch would determine your rank or status in the town of Browning where I lived as well as in the Hawkins family.

Browning is a rather large town in my part of Missouri. Being about 200 in size. When I was a small lad of about 6 years of age, me and my brother, who is a year younger than me, would play my dad and grandfather in Pitch and they would invariably beat us bad. Crying did no good they would just say shut up and deal. When I got to be about 12 my brother and I could hold our own and if we won grandpa or dad would hurt their leg, have to go to the bathroom and never come back or something to stop our run of luck. If they were winning we would have to play until wee hours in the morning.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

John Topper

Christmas edition 2005

This holiday season, as the war on terrorism continues, it is only fitting and proper that we reflect on the service of our soldiers in Iraq, Afghanistan, Kosovo and all the other countries around the globe where they are to be found. It is important, I believe, to realize that each and every one is there because he, or she, has volunteered to serve our country in a most meaningful way. That is a remarkable testimony to the youth of today and it was brought home to me on a very personal note this past Monday as my grandson, Casey, and I were traveling together. We were enroute to the Military Entrance Processing Station, Louisville where he had asked me to swear him in as a soldier in the United States Army. The good news is that Casey decided he wanted to be an Infantryman and serve his country. So, he left college and enlisted. The further good news is that it appears he will undergo basic and AIT with the 1st Battalion 50th Infantry. He eventually wants to attend the US Military Academy prep school and then go on to West Point.

The first company (Charlie) in 1/50 to complete the Legacy Card program is about to graduate. The Legacy Card is a program I discussed in last month's newsletter, wherein each soldier in the company took the name from the memorial that commemorates those who died in Vietnam and carries the card with him throughout the training cycle. I received this news in a message from the C Company First Sergeant yesterday, 8 December: "After a long cycle, and a 12 mile road march, the Soldiers were awarded their Crossed Rifles. After that, the company marched down to the Memorial, where one by one, with Tiki Torches lit, they marched up, laid the card they had been carrying the whole cycle at the base, took a step back and saluted. They had returned the names to their rightful place and were ready to take on their new mission of Infantryman." I don't imagine there is another battalion in the Army that has such a program and each of us can be rightly proud of the individual roles we have played in that battalion.

Other news from Fort Benning is that former battalion commander and Association member, Bill Payne, has orders to Iraq. His actual duty station is unknown, at least to me. We all wish Bill well and hope to hear from him as time permits. I am hopeful he becomes a contributor to our newsletter and keeps us apprised of his experiences.

I am still looking for stories and other contributions from Association members. It needn't be lengthy. Maybe it is only a bit of news about what is going on with you and your family, send it in.

Wishing you all a safe and happy holiday season.

CHAPLAIN'S

Parker Pierce

Merry Christmas - 2005

O Blessings and Season's Greetings to each of you and your families. It's hard to believe we are coming to the end of another year - they fly by! It is that special time of year when we celebrate the most significant and important event in history - the birth of JESUS - who is CHRIST THE LORD - the hope for all people! This time of year is also a traditional time to remember and reflect on the past, special times, significant times, and special people that are or have been in our lives. All of us Vets remember how we felt when we were in Nam at Christmas in 1967 and beyond. So, let's remember to keep our military in our thoughts and prayers this Christmas and the coming new year. Let's also continue to pray for our president who continues to be ridiculed and verbally abused by many who oppose everything he does! Personally, I am thankful and honored to have been blessed by God to have such a God fearing man in the White House. In my recollection I can't recall any other president that attended Sunday morning church worship services while out of our country visiting an atheistic country such as our president did while in China recently - what a testimony! In closing our final newsletter for 2005 I want to encourage each of us to continue to read and study God's Word, which has all the answers for the issues of life! My prayers are with you all, and may each of you and your families have a most blessed Merry Christmas and coming New Year.



Battalion Command Sergeant Major Kaufman and LTC Burns laying wreath at last month's Veterans Day ceremony (Note sidewalk addition)

Ambush Patrol

By Mick Hawkins

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Now you might be asking yourselves about now what a Pitch game is and what it has to do with an ambush at LZ English. Pitch is a card game and only the most elite and higher status individuals in the community are good at it – at least that's how it is in Missouri.

Around November and December of 1967 we spent a lot of our time around LZ English looking for the NVA. The first part of December some of the mortar platoon was at LZ English some were at LZ pony. I was at LZ English where we mostly worked patrols.

I met Jim Derowitch who was from a small town like Browning in Kansas, (Bellville, Kansas). He, like me was a born Pitch player and I think only someone with my world class skill could ever beat him.

I received in the mail one day a deck of cards from my dad with a note attached, "maybe you can beat someone over there that has never played the game before". My dad was a big kidder.

I got Jim and we developed some complicated signs, not that we needed to cheat to win, it was just our ace in the hole. We had signs like one finger means spade, two means hearts and things like that. We then went to look up two old Vietnamese women who cleaned tents At LZ English. They couldn't speak much English and I asked them if they wanted to learn how to play cards. They nodded yes and I said to make it fun we would play best of seven games and if they won Jim and I would clean their tents and if we won they had to clean our APC, wash our socks and feet, get us a 6 pack of coke, fan us as we ate our dinner and the like.

They agreed and Jim and I let them play one game for fun to see how the game is played and of course I told them that the rules can be changed as the game is played, but only by the dealer and as the cards were mine, I would always deal. Jim and I chuckled as I dealt the first round of cards. Things didn't go exactly as we had planned and, since Jim was always very good at math, he did some addition and some subtraction and declared there was no way we could mount a comeback being down five games – after five games. After Jim and I cleaned out the tents we thought we would find some GI's to play Pitch with. We found two guys from New York that had never played cards before and it looked too easy. Two great card players like Jim and I playing two city boys. Like taking candy from a baby.

Later that afternoon after playing twenty-two games of pitch, Jim, again being quick with math, calculated that if we won this last game that would be one game for us. About that time Johnny Johnston came by to say Sergeant Ward was looking for volunteers to go on an ambush that night.

After we lost the twenty-third game the boys from New York allowed as how Pitch was a fun, easy to learn game and wanted to play some more. I hate playing with amateurs that don't know how to play the game. Jim and I told them we were in the infantry and had to go on an ambush, we didn't have time to play games. We left and I took my cards with us. We reported to Sergeant Ward's APC where he told us there was a VC that had been shooting into camp every morning about daylight. It was believed he might be from a small village north of English and we were to set up between it and the spot he always shot from in hopes of capturing him.

It sounded like a long shot for sure, but beat the hell out of playing Pitch with a bunch of losers. I think there were six of us that volunteered for this ambush and I hope I have the names right. I'm putting a lot of faith in my brain to get this one right.

I know Jim Derowitch was there. Jim was from Kansas and a good friend of mine. We had been together since Basic. Jim was good in a fire fight. Johnny Johnston I know was there, he was Sergeant Ward's driver and Ward wouldn't let anyone but Johnny drive his APC. Johnny was also good in a fire fight and was from Delaware. I'll never forget at Tam Qaum after we had broken through the NVA bunkers, Ward's APC threw a track and Johnny was out changing it. Bullets flying everywhere and Johnny right there changing that track (man that takes guts)

Dan Higgins was a Sergeant, and he went with us. Dan joined us after basic and trained with us in AIT, he was from Minnesota. Our AIT was conducted by Sergeants Bell, Ward, Higgins and Curtis. I always respected them, as they trained us in the states then went to Nam with us.

Ronnie Overcashier was on the ambush. He was from Ohio. I think he lived on the same block as Bob Gold or at least close by. He was a motorcycle nut. I think Stan Waluek was there. Stan was from New Jersey and we called him the Polack mine sweeper. Stan was always good in a tight spot and you could count on Stan. If I remember right there were six of us. Ward gave us instructions that our goal was to capture the VC sniper and if we ran into anything else not to make contact and to wait till day light to come in unless something happened and maintain radio silence.

It all seemed so easy, go out set up and come back in. Beats playing Pitch. We went to the location at the green line were we where going out and they were to open up a hole for us so we set up a pass word in case we had to come in early.

Ambush Patrol

By Mick Hawkins

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It wasn't dark yet and we waited around smoking our last cigarettes for the night and it got dark and darker and darker till you couldn't see your hand right in front of your face. I could now see the downside of this ambush - if we couldn't see where we were going it could be bad. I for one was for calling this thing off. Getting beat at Pitch didn't seem like such a big deal now.

Sergeant Higgins said we were going on so out the hole in the wire we went. It was slow going as you had to keep right up as if you were farther then two feet behind, you couldn't see the person directly in front of you. I was last and Jim Derowitch in my immediate front. I would get to walking fast to keep pace and then they would stop and I would crash into Jim. We had walked some ways or at least it seemed like we had walked a long time. I had no idea which direction we were walking, and I don't think anyone else did either. At one point we stopped and got in a circle. Sergeant Higgins had his flashlight with the red lens pointing at what I thought must be his left hand and I guess he must have had a compass in his hand as he asked who knew what direction the needle was pointing and Johnny Johnson pointed out he couldn't see his hand how could he see the compass or the needles on the compass. We were all agreed so Sergeant Higgins said we would go this way as it felt like the right way.

Now I want to know where in the hell anyone ever learns to feel the right way to go. In map reading and compass reading training I don't remember anything about being taught to "go the way you feel is right". If you're in an airplane in the clouds with no instruments and you can't see the ground west feels the same way as east. If you're on the ground and it's so dark you can't see anything I think south feels the same as north. Jim said, "I think we are going the right way now". I hit him on the helmet with my fist and said, "hell, you're as nuts as Higgins".

We stopped again after walking some distance on the bearing that Derowitch and Higgins thought "felt like the right direction". I said, "look, let's stop this foolishness and set up an ambush right here". "We're in Vietnam and there are VC and NVA all over Vietnam". "This is as good as spot as any to set up an ambush and if some VC or NVA walk by here we will shoot them or capture them, and if we don't, then at daylight we will go back to LZ English and eat breakfast". I then hit Derowitch on the helmet again with my fist - I'm not sure why it just seemed to help me get though the situation we were in.

We took off again and had went a ways when two shots went off - we hit the ground and Overcashier said someone is shooting at us and I think it was Waluek that said we couldn't see our hand two feet in front of us he didn't see how anyone could see us to shoot at us.

Sergeant Higgins broke radio silence and called Sergeant Ward and they thought things being as they were, decided it best to call off this walk. Overcashier said, "Good we're going back to camp". I said, "We have no idea which way we left from camp how the hell would we know how to get back". I think to this day that my idea of just setting up an ambush where we were was the best, but off in the dark we went. I don't know how, but suddenly we were back at LZ English. Which makes me think we were never more than a mile from LZ English at any point in our sojourn. I'm pretty sure we walked in a big circle right back to English, but I can't prove that since I couldn't see anything all night.

We got back to the wire at LZ English at a different location than where we went out. I guess Sergeant Ward had got hold of everyone on the line - at least they didn't shoot us. Someone from a bunker came down to lead us in though the wire. I was behind and there was a message that started from the guy leading us to Sergeant Higgins to watch the trip wire to the left and Higgins relayed to Waluek that to the left was a trip wire who relayed to Johnson there was wire to the left who relayed to Overcashier that someone had left wire who relayed to Derowitch to walk to the left to avoid the wire who relayed to me to go left which I did and, of course, I hit the trip wire to the flare which went off. Now in high school I was very good in track I went to state all four years and when the flare went off we took off running I have no idea why we ran but we all broke at the same time I passed everyone and was running beside Derowitch when he just went out of site. As I got up close to the bunkers and everyone was coming up the hill they were laughing their heads off and they said Derowitch had fallen in a straddle trench. We all got a big laugh out of that and it kind of released some tension of the ambush.

Well that is my story. The sad part it is true - at least as best I can remember it. The only part that I made up is me losing at Pitch.

Never, never, never believe any war will be smooth and easy, or that anyone who embarks on the strange voyage can measure the tides and hurricanes he will encounter. The statesman who yields to war fever must realize that once the signal is given, he is no longer the master of policy but the slave of unforeseeable and uncontrollable events.

Sir Winston Churchill 1864-1965

For Christmas 1967, a small folded bulletin was printed and distributed to the U.S. troops.



Inside was this prayer and the menu for Christmas Dinner

Prayer for Christmas

Our Father in Heaven, we give thee thanks for the gift of thy Son, Jesus Christ, our Savior, the Prince of Peace and Lord of Life. May thy gift of Bethlehem, announced by the Angelic Chorus, be born again in our hearts this day. Help us to know and experience the meaning and blessedness of their message: "Peace on Earth, Good Will Toward Men." Remove from us fear and hate and help us to know by faith thy peace which passes all understanding. We pray that the spirit of Christmas will be shared by our loved ones. With them help us to ponder, like Mary, the deep mystery of Christmas. May the truth and love which the Holy Child of Bethlehem brought to earth abide in our lives. In His name receive our praise and thanks. AMEN

Christmas Day Dinner

Shrimp Cocktail	
Crackers	
Roast Turkey	Turkey Gravy
Cornbread Dressing	Cranberry Sauce
Mashed Potatoes	
Glazed Sweet Potatoes	
Buttered Mixed Vegetables	
Assorted Crisp Relishes	
Hot Rolls	Butter
Fruit Cake	
Mincemeat Pie	
Pumpkin Pie w/Whipped Topping	
Assorted Fresh Fruits	
Tea w/Lemon	Milk
Assorted Nuts and Candy	

Editors Note: This article was first written by a great American, friend and mentor, in 1998. It is still worth reading and especially relevant to each of you who served in 1/50 at that fateful time.

Tet 30th Anniversary

Harry G. Summers, Jr., COLONEL OF INFANTRY

If the Vietnam War had a defining moment, it had to be the Tet Offensive of 1968. For today's high school and college students all of that war is ancient history, and even for those who lived through it, most of its battles have faded. But not Tet. Like Pearl Harbor or the Cuban missile crisis, it sticks in our collective memory. Unfortunately, however, much of what we "know" about Tet is actually part of the bodyguard of lies that has distorted its true meaning, leaving many veterans feeling guilty by association for the loss of the war.

The most enduring untruth about Tet is that it was the turning point of the war. In fact, as University of Rochester Professor John E. Mueller documented in *War, Presidents and Public Opinion* (Wiley), the American public actually turned against the war in October 1967, three months before Tet. When U.S. troops first went ashore in Vietnam in 1965, 61 percent of the American people approved and only 24 percent were opposed. A plurality continued to support the war, albeit in decreasing numbers, for the next 31 months, until October 1967, when for the first time more Americans opposed the distant war (46 percent) than approved of it (44 percent).

The decline was not due to the efforts of the anti-war movement, which, polls showed, was the most despised group in American society. American pragmatism was the cause of the decline. "Either win the damn thing or get the hell out," was the public mood. After all the reassurance from the politicians and generals that all was well, Tet was the icing on the cake, proof positive that we did not know what we were doing. The perspicacity of the American people was confirmed by Clark Clifford when he took over as secretary of defense after Tet and found that three years into the ground war the Joint Chiefs of Staff still had no plan for victory.

That shortcoming is usually ascribed to ineptitude, but in this issue, Stephen B. Young claims that President Lyndon B. Johnson, following the lead of his predecessors, never subscribed to the goal of traditional victory and, in fact, had instructed his ambassador to Vietnam, Ellsworth Bunker, to work toward an eventual U.S. disengagement without losing the war (see story, P. 20). That, says Young, was achieved in the wake of the 1973 Paris Accords, but was then sabotaged by Congress and by the fecklessness of the Ford administration.

Competing myths about Tet claim that it was a defeat for the United States, countered by equally strident claims that it was a military victory. Those opposing views can be reconciled through the use of a military template, for military analysis looks at battlefield events on three distinct but interlocking levels.

First is the tactical or battlefield level. Second is the operational or theater-of-war level. Third is the strategic or political-military level. Victory at one level does not necessarily guarantee victory at a higher level. You may indeed win the battle but lose the war. This was brought home to me in Hanoi a week before the fall of Saigon. "You know you never beat us on the battlefield!" I said to my NVA counterpart. He thought about that a moment, then replied, "That may be so. But it's also irrelevant."

At the tactical and operational levels, Tet was an enormous victory for the United States and for the South Vietnamese government, especially when it came to winning the hearts and minds of the South Vietnamese people, the stated goal of our counterinsurgency warfare efforts. In his classic work *Tet! (Da Capo)*, Washington Post war correspondent Don Oberdorfer made that clear. "There had been no General Uprising and nothing resembling the beginning of one," he wrote. "Among the Vietnamese people, the battles had created doubts about Communist military power. The Liberation Army had attacked in the middle of the Tet truce when the South Vietnamese Army was on leave, and even so it had been able to achieve only temporary inroads. If the Communists were unable to take the cities with a surprise attack in such circumstances, they would probably be unable to do better at any other time." It was the end of the Viet Cong guerrillas. By 1970, 70 percent of enemy forces in the field were NVA regulars.

But at the strategic level it was another matter entirely, as Peter Braestrup, another Washington Post war correspondent whose *Big Story* is reviewed in this issue, pointed out. Lyndon Johnson was "psychologically defeated" by Tet. Veterans need to stop blaming themselves, for if the commander-in-chief is defeated, the nation is defeated, no matter how well military forces in the field may have performed.

*You can't say that civilization don't advance, however, for in every
war they kill you in a new way.*

Will Rogers (1879 - 1935)

New York Times, Dec. 23, 1929



BG Yarbrough (Deputy Commanding General/Assistant Commandant United States Army Infantry Center and School) talking with 1/50 families at Veterans Day ceremony.



*A people that values its
privileges above its principles
soon loses both.*

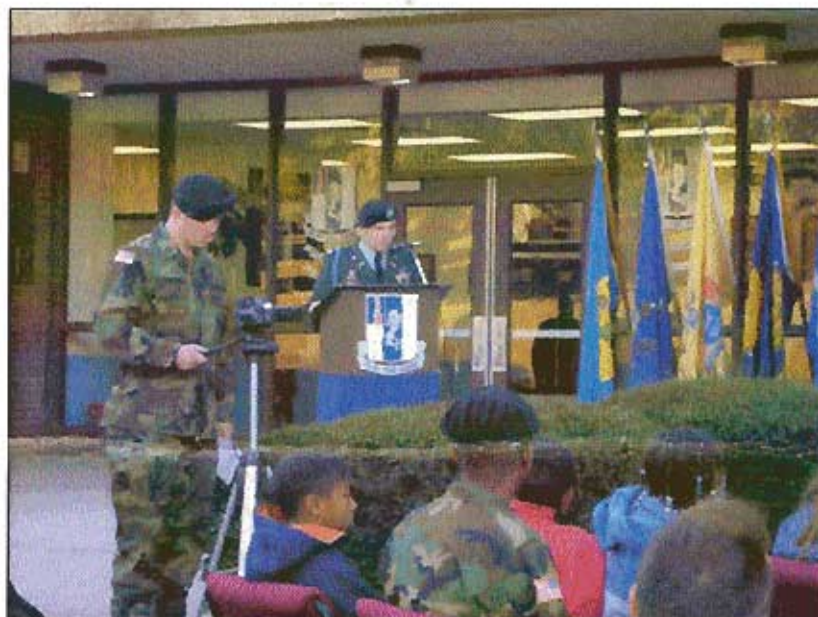
DWIGHT D. EISENHOWER

Inaugural Address
January 20, 1953



CHRISTMAS ARMY STYLE

December, 1941



LTC Burns (Battalion Commander) Veterans Day speech

**Politics is war without bloodshed while war is politics with bloodshed.
Mao Tse-Tung (1893 - 1976)**