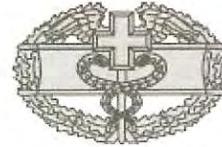
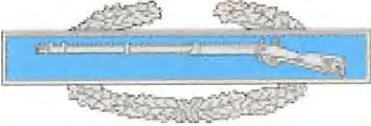


ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1st Battalion 50th Infantry Association



December, 2007

Cover Page

FROM THE TC HATCH

Jimmy Segars, President

Merry Christmas to all of you – from our home to your. May you have a wonderful Christmas. We pray for God's blessings upon all of you – for good health, love and peace. My family and I are counting our blessings. We are thankful for closeness to them and to you, our military family. To those of you currently serving, we pray especially for your guidance and protection. Thank you for all you do – for all Americans everywhere, as you represent us abroad and in the states. Your presence and vigilance is a priceless gift. We give our eternal gratitude in return.

One note, I might add of personal interest – We have a special present on the way. Our daughter and her husband, Monica and Charlie – after ten years of marriage, received a great present – news that they are going to be parents. We always enjoy them, Kirk, Tanya and our granddaughter, Mia. At 19 months Christmas is a wonder to her. We hope all of you have a fantastic 2008.

Please remember to send Diana your recipes at sassydianami@aol.com.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

A Christmas to Remember

By Jim Woodall

I was in my hooch Christmas Eve when I heard some soldiers singing carols outside. It was a platoon of soldiers from Company A. they offered me a drink of champagne, which I accepted, of course. Then the real reason for their presence was revealed. They had come to ask if they could keep their platoon leader. The platoon leader, Lieutenant Paul Erhlich, had been seriously wounded some months earlier and evacuated to Japan. After his return to the battalion, he was wounded again, but not seriously. After his second wound, I told him he was getting a rear area job. He protested, but I told him two wounds were enough. After the pleas of his men and a couple more glasses of champagne, I told them they could keep their lieutenant. As it turned out, a couple of months later, Erhlich and a squad of his men conducted one of our most successful night ambushes. Erhlich received a minor wound in the fight and I pulled him out of the field, and gave him a safe job in the rear area. He received a Silver Star to add to his three Purple Hearts.

IN THIS ISSUE

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Billie McGregor, Editorial Assistant

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FROM THE VICE PRESIDENT

RON LERAAS

I sat through the news on the evening of the 11th (Veterans' Day) and saw the photo ops from the local cemeteries and programs -- including the obligatory interview with the scruffy "Vietnam Vet". Made a mental note (again) to never attend one of those sessions. Guess I'm not alone, as a local Vietnam vet voiced my opinion (in a more tactful way than I would) in this OpEd piece run in the Dallas Morning News.

Rick Williams: Who is a Vietnam veteran? I'm as typical as they come, and I don't have a ponytail or a scraggly beard.

06:25 AM CST on Monday, November 12, 2007

Dallas Morning News

Veterans Day honors those who have served in the armed forces of the United States. In particular, we honor those who paid the ultimate price for the freedoms and liberties we all enjoy. This day is rightly celebrated with traditional parades and other ceremonies, and I fly my American flag proudly not only this day, but every day.

Local television coverage featuring interviews with veterans from different wars has become another tradition on this day, and it's important to hear the perspective from those who still might fall to the ground if someone yells, "Incoming!"

As a Vietnam veteran, I always listen with interest when another Vietnam vet is interviewed. Unfortunately, the veteran the TV station chooses to interview always looks the same. He will likely have a scruffy, graying beard, an earring or a tattoo and will generally be wearing jungle fatigues. Why? Because that's what most Vietnam veterans are supposed to look like, or, at least, that's what the public is led to believe. I sometimes wonder why the TV stations don't run the same Vietnam veteran interview every year, since it never changes.

So what is a typical Vietnam veteran? First, one cannot say a typical Vietnam veteran engaged in combat because, statistically, that was only about one in six – most were support troops. Divorce rates and suicide rates are well within the norm for the general population, so nothing atypical there to attribute to a typical Vietnam veteran. Numerous studies have shown that Vietnam veterans are more likely to have gone to college, to have a job, to own a home and to earn more money each year than their peers who did not serve. I'd suggest that there is no "typical" Vietnam veteran. No two veterans had the same experience in Vietnam, and how each reacted to their war experience after returning to the United States was largely a consequence of his emotional stability and mental maturity before his departure from the U.S. So who should local TV stations interview for their annual Vietnam Veterans Day interview? How 'bout me? Am I a typical Vietnam vet? Don't know, but I'm not atypical. You'll find me wearing a coat and tie. Here's my story:

I served in Vietnam between November 1967 and November 1968 as a helicopter gunship pilot. On Veterans Day, I have many poignant feelings about other pilots who were also my friends, like Jim Moore and Sam Gardner, whose return flight home from Vietnam was in boxes. I also remember how fortunate I am to have returned physically and mentally intact. I am married and have never been divorced. I was fully employed until my recent retirement, and I was never turned down for a job because of being a Vietnam veteran. I have never been called a "baby killer." Since retiring, I have now become a City Council member for the great city of Garland. I never indulged in drugs before, during or after my service in Vietnam. I don't have a scruffy beard, and my hair (what little is left) is not tied in a ponytail. I don't wear jungle fatigues, and I don't "work for food." When I came back from Vietnam, there were no parades or other expressions of gratitude from the American people, and I have read that I'm supposed to be resentful. However, this has never bothered me. Why should the American people thank me? It is I who would like to thank America for the opportunity to have served the greatest country in the world.

Written By CPT Stephen R. Ellison, M.D. US Army

I am a doctor specializing in the Emergency Departments of the only two military Level One-Trauma Centers, both in San Antonio, TX and they care for civilian Emergencies as well as military personnel. San Antonio has the largest military retiree population in the world living here. As a military doctor, I work long hours and the pay is less than glamorous. One tends to become jaded by the long hours, lack of sleep, food, family contact and the endless parade of human suffering passing before you. The arrival of another ambulance does not mean more pay, only more work. Most often, it is a victim from a motor vehicle crash.

Often it is a person of dubious character who has been shot or stabbed. With our large military retiree population, it is often a nursing home patient. Even with my enlisted service and minimal combat experience in Panama, I have caught myself groaning when the ambulance brought in yet another sick, elderly person from one of the local retirement centers that cater to military retirees. I had not stopped to think of what citizens of this age group represented.

I saw 'Saving Private Ryan.' I was touched deeply. Not so much by the carnage, but by the sacrifices of so many. I was touched most by the scene of the elderly survivor at the graveside, asking his wife if he'd been a good man. I realized that I had seen these same men and women coming through my Emergency Dept. and had not realized what magnificent sacrifices they had made. The things they did for me and everyone else that has lived on this planet since the end of that conflict are priceless.

Situation permitting, I now try to ask my patients about their experiences. They would never bring up the subject without the inquiry. I have been privileged to hear an amazing array of experiences, recounted in the brief minutes allowed in an Emergency Dept. encounter. These experiences have revealed the incredible individuals I have had the honor of serving in a medical capacity, many on their last admission to the hospital.

There was a frail, elderly woman who reassured my young enlisted medic, trying to start an IV line in her arm. She remained calm and poised, despite her illness and the multiple needle-sticks into her fragile veins. She was what we call a 'hard stick.' As the medic made another attempt, I noticed a number tattooed across her forearm. I touched it with one finger and looked into her eyes. She simply said, 'Auschwitz.' Many of later generations would have loudly and openly berated the young medic in his many attempts. How different was the response from this person who'd seen unspeakable suffering.

Continued on page 3

Continued from page 2

CPT Stephen R. Ellison, M.D. US Army

Also, there was this long retired Colonel, who as a young officer had parachuted from his burning plane over a Pacific Island held by the Japanese. Now an octogenarian, he had a minor cut on his head from a fall at his home where he lived alone. His CT scan and suturing had been delayed until after midnight by the usual parade of high priority ambulance patients. Still spry for his age, he asked to use the phone to call a taxi, to take him home, and then he realized his ambulance had brought him without his wallet. He asked if he could use the phone to make a long distance call to his daughter who lived 7 miles away. With great pride we told him that he could not, as he'd done enough for his country and the least we could do was get him a taxi home, even if we had to pay for it ourselves. My only regret was that my shift wouldn't end for several hours, and I couldn't drive him myself.

I was there the night MSgt. Roy Benavidez came through the Emergency Dept. for the last time. He was very sick. I was not the doctor taking care of him, but I walked to his bedside and took his hand. I said nothing. He was so sick; he didn't know I was there. I'd read his Congressional Medal of Honor citation from Vietnam and wanted to shake his hand. He died a few days later.

The gentleman who served with Merrill's Marauders, the survivor of the Bataan Death March, the survivor of Omaha Beach, the 101 year old World War I veteran, the former POW held in frozen North Korea, the former Special Forces medic - now with inoperable liver cancer, the former Viet Nam Corps Commander. I remember these great citizens.

I may still groan when yet another ambulance comes in, but now I am much more aware of what an honor it is to serve these particular men and women. I have seen a Congress who would turn their back on these individuals who've sacrificed so much to protect our liberty. I see later generations that seem to be totally engrossed in abusing these same liberties, won with such sacrifice.

It has become my personal endeavor to make the nurses and young enlisted medics aware of these amazing individuals when I encounter them in our Emergency Dept. Their response to these particular citizens has made me think that perhaps all is not lost in the next generation.

My experiences have solidified my belief that we are losing an incredible generation, and this nation knows not what it is losing. Our uncaring government and ungrateful civilian populace should all take note. We should all remember that we must 'Earn this.'

LETTERS SENT HOME FROM NAM

Mick Hawkins

Johnny P. Johnston passed away August 22 2006. Johnny is gone but not forgotten.

I found a box upstairs at my folk's house. They had kept every letter I had written to them while in the Army. I went through them and dug out the ones from December and I'll start around Dec. 15th and go to Christmas of 1967. Please keep in mind I was 19 years old and I never told my parents anything about the fighting. Sometimes I wish I had written more it just never seemed important at the time.

Dec. 15th 1967 Mom, Dad, How are you? We are at a small base camp, but are going to the field in the morning. I sure like it here at the base camp. We can get out of the rain. I got a letter from Mary. Tell her I enjoyed the letter and the power book. Have you got a Christmas tree yet? I got a jungle hat will send it to Steve. Dad how many cattle did you get out west. Do you have them all home yet?

Dec. 16th 1967 Hi I'm in the field now. I started this letter yesterday but couldn't finish it. We are in LZ Uplift now but they say we won't be here long. Maybe not even all morning. Has Steve been killing a lot of Quail? Did he deer hunt with my new rifle? I got a letter from Mary she seemed kind of far off. Just got word we would be moving out right after noon. I like the field. Time goes faster and I like seeing the country. Don't have much time to write in the field, but will do my best. I have to stop now and go eat.

Dec. 18th 1967 Hi I'm fine and we are in the field now and sounds like we will be here for a while. It has been kind of cool in the mornings and raining everyday. They say after December it will not rain as much. We have been in and out of LZ English. It is a nice base camp and we're here awhile go to the field then to Uplift back to the field and then to English. December has been tough. We are still using our APC. It is not too bad; beats walking but it is rough riding and we have to stand up all the time. I guess we will be in the field Christmas. I got the Christmas tree and it was real nice. Made me feel good. Have to quit.

Dec. 19th 1967 Will write a fast letter as we are stopped for a while. Did you get the film I sent? There is a picture of Jim Derowitch and me by the bunker. He is the one with no hair. I'm the guy with hair. I sent Steve the jungle hat all the guys wrote something on it. I got some candy from the Army mothers in Brookfield. That was nice of them. We are moving out.

Dec. 22nd 1967 We are at this little base camp. They say we will be here maybe only 20 min. so this will be short. How are dad and Steve getting along with the cattle? Got a letter from Steve he says the old long hair dog is better than my Jr. but I don't think so. He said Roger got a new rifle. This is a neat little base camp but we will be moving soon - that is the way it is. Sometime we use the APC, some time we don't they say move out we move not knowing where we are going or how long. That is ok with me if I knew I might not want to go. I'm getting tired of C Rations. When I get home I will buy me the biggest steak they have. I keep \$20 a month out of my pay. I don't know why we are always in the field and I can't spend it. We are moving out. I sent Mary some pictures, have her show you them.

Dec. 24th 1967 We are still in the field. I talked to Sgt Ward a while ago and he said we might get to go in for a hot meal for Christmas. I got a letter from Larry Ashlock he said it was cold in Japan. I have been writing a girl from Salisbury my friend Danny Scott knows her. She is friends with his girl friend and he always wants to know if she says anything about her. I think he asked me to ask but I forget. We all leave country in September so they are going to be moving some people to other units so everyone from the 1/50 won't be leaving at once. Jerry Hedges sent me a box of cigars. We all enjoyed them tell him thanks. I guess Dad and Steve are fighting snow trying to feed the cattle. We are below a hill getting ready to look it over. We have been in this area many times this month, so I'm starting to know the area pretty good. Sgt Ward just came by and we talked awhile. I guess he is ok. He knows what he is doing. See you love mick

Dec. 25th 1967 This will be short. We are at LZ Uplift and we get a hot meal for Christmas then back to the field. Last year at this time I wanted nice clothes, guns, watch. This year I'm tickled to get a hot meal for Christmas. Love mick

CHAPLAIN'S

PARKER PIERCE

O Hello and special holiday greetings to all Nam vets and your families. It's hard to believe but the Christmas season is here once again! It gets here before we can really prepare for it, but as we all know this is the most exciting and significant special day celebration of the year- the birth of the Lord Jesus Christ!! This past year has been filled with heartaches, challenges, accomplishments and achievements for myself, and many of you and your family members, but through it all our Heavenly Father has comforted and cared for each of us. Only He knows what lies ahead in 2008 and beyond, but we can be assured that He has everything under control! He gives us a lot of freewill and choices in each of our lives. I'll be praying for all of you and your families in the months ahead, and I know all of us will be praying for our President, our Nation, our troops and each other. All of you have a most blessed Christmas and coming New Year.

Parker

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HISTORIAN'S REPORT — CHRISTMAS, 2007

I have begun a project that was first born of our last Association President's dream of inviting the family members of our Battalion's Vietnam KIAs to this past reunion. Randy Smith invited quite a few families to join us and the sister of one was a surprise guest at Fort Benning this past spring!

I have expanded on this idea by creating a file for each one of our KIAs and I hope to fill them all with contact information of the family and friends of our fallen brothers. I'm soliciting all to send me whatever information they have collected over the years for this new endeavor. If all goes well...we hope to have a larger showing of these Gold-Star families at the next reunion...primarily for the wreath-laying ceremony...which has become a highlight of the past two reunions. Please e-mail me at kiss-ac@juno.com or "snail mail" me at 231 33rd Street South, 1st Floor Rear Apt., Brigantine, NJ 08203.

My work as Historian and with maintaining the Website keeps me busy! I am continuing to "tweak" the website here and there and will work towards streamlining the sight by eliminating some of the unused and outdated pages.

I do plan on finally returning to the National Archives Records Administration in College Park, Md. In the coming months (finally!) and will be working on copying documentation from 1970. The initial planning for a third Document CD is set and the latest collection should be available at the next reunion. This will bring our Document CD total to 3 disks that are also supplemented with the new Maps DVD, which debuted at Fort Benning this past Spring. I've gotten rave response to this new Map DVD that has ALL of the maps from our various areas of operation in both Adobe pdf format as well as editable jpg picture format. Also on the CD are copies of all maps created for our Web Site's Map Pages.

Finally, I have been expanding our archives library...now totaling about 2 dozen books. Among these are recent purchases of an original 50th Armored Infantry book from WWII! As well as a mint, original copy of the DA PAMPHLET 525-2 "Military Operations VIETNAM PRIMER lessons learned" written by S.L.A. Marshall and David Hackworth in 1967. I plan to scan the "Vietnam Primer" DA Pamphlet for the 3rd Document CD.

A final note is for our Association's newest friend and helper...Barbara Anne Daniels. Barbara specializes in finding missing persons, and has volunteered to help us find old war buddies and the surviving family members of our KIAs. Barbara can be reached by e-mail at BarbaraAnne@centurytel.net

I wish you all a very happy Holiday Season and a healthy and prosperous New Year!

Your Historian,

Jim Sheppard

BOB HOPE CHRISTMAS 1968

By Glen "Nick" Nicholls

I suppose I was not the best trooper the 173rd had, but I did promise Lyndon that I would go help him out of this "situation" in Southeast Asia, on one condition: That I get to see the Bob Hope Christmas special "LIVE" as long as I was over there anyway!

I quickly forgot my "pledge" when I arrived at Bien Hoa, on 13 May 68, upon hearing about the 1/50 Mechs battle of 5May. Then when we arrived at An Khe, the first night was spent guarding the "Sky Hook" crash (without weapons) and I'll never forget that smell. My time "in the bush" seemed pretty tame after the first night spent in a graveyard, of all places. At first I thought Lt Edge was picking on me, until he made me his RTO (that's sort of like your 'right hand man' right")?

In keeping with my desire to be "low key" I took a month's vacation in Cam Rahn Bay (recuperating from falciprium Malaria), and body surfing in the South China Sea with Sgt. George Bell (the latter), and one particular Great White (19' or so, long). He ended getting too close to us in the breakers, so a Huey gunship came out to "scare him off" but the M-60 door gunners were better shots than he was a swimmer!

I must have been a favorite of Sgt George Bell (the latter), since we got Bridge 19 for a month, and then did road security/strong points/ and night firebase security from about Aug68 through Sep68. Sgt Bell then recommended me for the Ambush platoon from early Oct through about New Year's Eve. (John Smerdon 60/RTO, Rick Sharp, Jack Nobel and Roger "Reb" Williams 60 and myself RTO (A Co)- Gabriel Moreno, Terry Gouge, Tom "Flip" Bellinato60, Dan Rayburn, William Holly, Ed Kalima 60, and SSG Eldridge Holloway- (B Co) Virgil Hamilton60, Rick Handly FO, medic Ventura Rodriguez, Mark Gladson, Ted Clark 60, point man Brian Greenlee, 12Guage (C Co) I think made up the first 18). The early rotations back to the states, and returns to line companies, brought in Mike Griffin60, Bill "mud" McCarthy, Chris Ullman, Lionel Doria, Olsen, Pollitt, Owens, and SSG Donald Harrington joined when SSG Holloway was WIA.

Those three months were the scariest, and the safest of the entire year. I was an RTO for SSG Holloway, and enjoyed the autonomy, and was proud of the contribution we made to the enemy KIAs, and it seemed like the entire battalion liked having us around on standby, 24/7.

On 24 Dec 68 I awoke with a "start", when I realized I was about to miss the Bob Hope Christmas show, so I hustled my butt up to A Co orderly room and began "chatting up" 1SGT Smith, who kept saying "hold on, slow down, hold up". I think he was glad I was in the SRAP Platoon, because I was not one of his favored troopers, and when I said I wanted to go to the Bob Hope show, and "did he know where it was"?

He was pleased to inform me it was that afternoon in Phu Cat, but I wouldn't be attending, since my personal invitation must have gotten lost in the Christmas mail. When I informed 1SGT Smith about my "deal" with Lyndon B. Johnson, he just laughed, and said "we only had 4 seats, so we sent 4 Line Soldiers, who were still in the field, and he didn't have any seats left to accommodate any 'rear area, OR SRAPs' !"

I asked if I got my own transportation, if I could have the day off, and he said "sure - go for it - but just make sure you are back by dinnertime or I'll throw you in jail for being AWOL, and no Major or Colonel will be able to get you out of that jam !"

I hustled up to the log pad, and found a Chinook, which had fueled and was about to depart. When I found out they were going to Phu Cat for the Bob Hope show, and it was just the three-man crew, they said "common along" and off we went.

We landed, and parked on the extreme West end of the runway, and the Pilot told us that he saw the stage, and natural amp theater, on the far East end of the runway. I asked why didn't we park a little closer, he said "hey, I just fly these things, and when they tell me where to park, I just park it". We walked East, maybe 150 or 200 yards, and split up when we hit the amphitheater. The pilots and crew chief were going to sit with some other pilots they knew, so I just went down and sat in about the sixth row.

It was a great show, with Jerry Calona, Les Brown and his Band of Renown, The Goldiggers (Dean Martin's dancers), and ANN MARGARET ! After the show, I walked up the incline and when I got to the runway, my heart sank! I knew I was in deep doo doo, when I saw row after row of Chinooks, all with their front rotors tied down, identically, and with nice identical yellow chocks around the wheels, in perfect Army rows - as far as the eye could see. I froze in my tracks, and tried to remember if I made any stops before, walking down to my seat. I didn't think I did, but just on the chance that my brain "took a picture" of the stage, I did an "about face". NOPE, no such luck. Another "about face" put me looking at this sickening Gaggle of Birds - all painted green, and all with neat numbers painted on them, so I took a chance, (sighting in on a hilltop in the distance) and began walking towards the other side (West) of the runway. I was getting panicked as I approached the last Chinook, since I did not recognize the Crew Chief or Pilots, but the crew chief, upon seeing me said: "It's about damn time you got here; we were going to leave without you!"

I said: "where are you going?", and he said "An Khe, don't you remember our flight down? You're Nick from L.A., with the handlebar mustache - climb aboard!". I swore, right then and there, that I would never cross my first sergeant again. I made it all the way to New Year's Eve, when wanting to carry on a family tradition of shooting little, fast climbing bullets into the air, at the strike of midnight - well you probably get the picture ?.....

FROM THE EDITOR

JOHN TOPPER

As you read this edition of "On the Right Track" we are approaching Christmas and I wish each and every one of you a joyous time with family and friends. As I reflect back on the Christmas I spent in Vietnam, I realize that it was forty (!) years ago. I don't remember much about that Christmas day, I'm sure we had a good meal, but I don't remember eating. The Battle of Tam Quan and the losses the battalion sustained during that horrific fight were still fresh in my thoughts, as they were in the thoughts of many. I hope I asked God's blessing for the families of those who lost loved ones and were spending their first Christmas without them. But I don't remember.

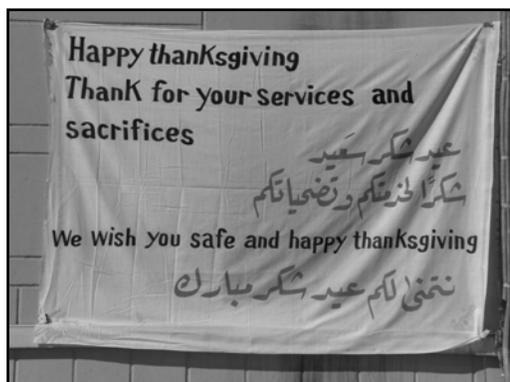
I do remember a tree that Janet sent, along with cards from our daughters. And a care package from my cousin containing some caramel popcorn, peanuts, cookies and the like. Gary Quint's father sent a case of Lucky Strike's which I vividly because I had never seen a case of cigarettes before. They lasted a good while. I shopped for my family out of the AAFES catalog, which I thought was an easy way of accomplishing that task – why hadn't I heard of this before? Not sure how I managed that, because I didn't have a credit card or check book....Magic.

Thanks to all who contributed to this newsletter. Their input is much appreciated and I hope it inspires others to contribute to future issues. Best wishes to you and yours for a blessed Christmas and happy and prosperous New Year.

FRANCIS B. BURNS, LTC, IN

MiTT 0600, 6th IAD * VOIP: 243-7302/ 7303 * DSN: 318-857-7304 * "ARETE"

Classification: UNCLASSIFIED



Two great holidays last month – Veterans Day and Thanksgiving. Hope that all had a great Thanksgiving. Mine was quite memorable. I was enroute back from Kuwait to my MiTT duties, and had an overnight layover at Victory Base. I was fortunate to go out and visit troops from my brigade at some remote outposts with LTC Kurt Pinkerton's battalion. They are truly out there amongst the population winning hearts and minds in Abu Ghraib and the vicinity. Soldiers were taking a break – playing flag football, having a Texas Hold 'Em, tournament, cooking turkeys on a skewer (had 6 ea, they cooked them all), and enjoying a little reprieve from the daily grind. It was just good to go out and shake Soldiers' hands and say Happy Thanksgiving to them. I was surprised to return to the MiTT base and see the attached sign that the Iraqi Soldiers had made for us. The MiTT was able to get plenty of food, dessert, as no one was hungry that day. A very good spread for all to enjoy.

My short time in Kuwait was spent trying to get face to face with some folks who will assist us in getting our equipment, vehicles, and personnel back to the states. Overall, it was a worthwhile trip to the 52nd state (Puerto Rico is the 51st), and a bit of a break for me.

I was surprised to learn that one of my Iraqi counterparts, the Chief of Staff (an Iraqi Colonel, Koran thumping Shia), actually went out and assisted in delivering school supplies to a local school. It was great to see him smiling, talking to the children, and also to the shop keepers. He said it was important to go out and do this. Believe that they are finally getting it. If only they would do it more often, and be focused on the non-kinetic vs. the kinetic, they would make huge strides. They are able to do this because security is much better than it was a few months or a year ago.

As I was packing some stuff, and going over some notes, I remembered one of the first meetings with the current Chief of Staff in August and stating to him how it was important to establish specific Duties and Responsibilities of each staff section. He now has about a half pound of paper, with input from the staff. It's taken a few months, but it's almost there. Able to see some growth from the previously planted seeds. I can see some parallel with this week's readings: "From the crosses and crucifixions of our world, the reign of God takes shape when we imitate the humble selflessness of Christ in bringing his spirit of hope and reconciliation into the lives of those around us." – Connections media-works.com

Good article this week from Victor David Hansen. A quote: "Adaptability, self-critique, and persistence, in an effort believed to both right and necessary, will eventually prevail." We are able to adapt by constantly conducting After Action Reports on our actions and self critiquing ourselves. I used the word patience with my relationship with my counterpart: however, persistence seems to capture it in a better manner. All the best. R/FB

A Different Christmas Poem

PLEASE, would you do me the kind favor of sending this to as many people as you can? Christmas will be coming soon and some credit is due to our U.S. service men and women for our being able to celebrate these festivities. Let's try in this small way to pay a tiny bit of what we owe. Make people stop and think of our heroes, living and dead, who sacrificed themselves for us.

LCDR Jeff Giles, SC, USN
30th Naval Construction Regiment
OIC, Logistics Cell One
Al Taqqadum , Iraq.

The embers glowed softly, and in their dim light,
I gazed round the room and I cherished the sight.

My wife was asleep, her head on my chest,
My daughter beside me, angelic in rest.

Outside the snow fell, a blanket of white,
Transforming the yard to a winter delight.
The sparkling lights in the tree I believe,
Completed the magic that was Christmas Eve.

My eyelids were heavy, my breathing was deep,
Secure and surrounded by love I would sleep.
In perfect contentment, or so it would seem,
So I slumbered, perhaps I started to dream.

The sound wasn't loud, and it wasn't too near,
But I opened my eyes when it tickled my ear.
Perhaps just a cough, I didn't quite know, Then the
sure sound of footsteps outside in the snow.

My soul gave a tremble, I struggled to hear,
And I crept to the door just to see who was near.
Standing out in the cold and the dark of the night,
A lone figure stood, his face weary and tight.

A soldier, I puzzled, some twenty years old,
Perhaps a Marine, huddled here in the cold.
Alone in the dark, he looked up and smiled,
Standing watch over me, and my wife and my child.

'What are you doing?' I asked without fear,
'Come in this moment, it's freezing out here!
Put down your pack, brush the snow from your sleeve,
You should be at home on a cold Christmas Eve!'

For barely a moment I saw his eyes shift,
Away from the cold and the snow blown in drifts.
To the window that danced with a warm fire's light
Then he sighed and he said 'Its really all right,

I'm out here by choice. I'm here every night.'
'It's my duty to stand at the front of the line,
That separates you from the darkest of times.
No one had to ask or beg or implore me,

I'm proud to stand here like my fathers before me.
My Gramps died at ' Pearl on a day in December,'
Then he sighed, 'That's a Christmas
'Gram always remembers.'

My dad stood his watch in the jungles of ' Nam ',
And now it is my turn and so, here I am.
I've not seen my own son in more than a while,
But my wife sends me pictures, he's sure got her smile.

Then he bent and he carefully pulled from his bag,
The red, white, and blue... an American flag.
I can live through the cold and the being alone,
Away from my family, my house and my home.

I can stand at my post through the rain and the sleet,
I can sleep in a foxhole with little to eat.
I can carry the weight of killing another,
Or lay down my life with my sister and brother..

Who stand at the front against any and all,
To ensure for all time that this flag will not fall.'
'So go back inside,' he said, 'harbor no fright,
Your family is waiting and I'll be all right.'

'But isn't there something I can do, at the least,
'Give you money,' I asked, 'or prepare you a feast?
It seems all too little for all that you've done,
For being away from your wife and your son.'

Then his eye welled a tear that held no regret,
'Just tell us you love us, and never forget.
To fight for our rights back at home while we're gone,
To stand your own watch, no matter how long.

For when we come home, either standing or dead,
To know you remember we fought and we bled.
Is payment enough, and with that we will trust,
That we mattered to you as you mattered to us.'

REMINDER

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