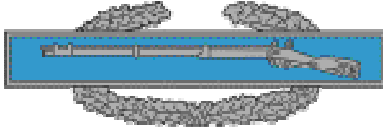


# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

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



December, 2009

Cover Page

## FROM THE TC HATCH

Jimmy Segars, President

Merry Christmas! I am so thankful for our Association and the ties that we have and our involvement with veterans and current men and women now serving in our military. We in America are enjoying Christmas at home today with our families, but many of our nation's finest are far away from home. Let us do all that we can to let them know that we love and appreciate them and the sacrifices that they are making on our behalf.

I encourage you to get with your families, your church congregations, your civic organizations, and your school groups to send care packages to those soldiers with whom you have a personal connection and those who do not have families to support them closely. We all remember how important it was to us to have someone back home to encourage us, especially at Christmas.

Recently, our church ladies sponsored a cookie drive to send something home-baked to the soldiers that various members in our congregation knew. We packed several dozen cookies for each soldier along with a booklet of notes of appreciation from many families, a card of thanks to commemorate Veteran's Day, a devotional booklet, and a music CD. These were very simple items, but they seemed to mean a lot to our soldiers as evidenced by an e-mail letter that our pastor received the next week. In it the soldier told us how much it meant to have folks back home to remember him and his men and what they were doing. He related that things were going well where he was stationed and that he was happy to serve his country. He also indicated that he would pay a personal visit to our church when he came home on leave to further express his thanks. Something so simple—yet we all can do it—let our men and women in the service know that we love and support them all the time.

Thank you who are currently serving at Ft. Benning. We love all of you very much! Thank you, fellow association members, for your service and friendship. May you and your families have a Very Blessed Christmas and great and Happy New Year.

## FROM THE EDITOR

John Topper

In case you haven't been paying attention these past few decades after you returned from Vietnam, the clock has been ticking. The following are some statistics that are at once depressing yet in a larger sense should give you a huge sense of pride.

"Of the 2,709,918 Americans who served in Vietnam, Less than 850,000 are estimated to be alive today, with the youngest American Vietnam veteran's age approximated to be 54 years old." How does it feel to be among the last third of all the Vietnam Veterans who served in Vietnam to be alive? I don't know about you guys, but it kind of gives me the chills.

Considering the kind of information available about the death rate of WWII and Korean War Veterans, publicized information indicates that in the last 14 years Vietnam veterans are dying at the rate of 390 deaths each day. At this rate there will be only a few of us alive in 2015.

These statistics were taken from a variety of sources to include: The VFW Magazine, the Public Information Office, and the HQ CP Forward Observer - 1st Recon April 12, 1997.

## STATISTICS FOR INDIVIDUALS IN UNIFORM AND IN COUNTRY

### DRAFTEES VS VOLUNTEERS

- 1) 25% (648,500) of total forces in country were draftees.
- 2) 66% of U.S. armed forces members were drafted during WWII).
- 3) Draftees accounted for 30.4% (17,725) of combat deaths in Vietnam.
- 4) Reservists killed: 5,977
- 5) National Guard: 6,140 served: 101 died.
- 6) Total draftees (1965 - 73): 1,728,344.
- 7) Actually served in Vietnam: 38%
- 8) Marine Corps Draft: 42,633.
- 9) Last man drafted: June 30, 1973.

(Continued on page 2)

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## FROM THE VP

Ron Leraas, Vice-President

Here's hoping that you and yours have had an enjoyable holiday season.

I'm writing this column during the weekend after Thanksgiving, and, as is usual most Thanksgivings, my mind slips back in time to a Thanksgiving I spent in the Army hospital at Camp Zama, Japan, thirty-nine years ago. Its strange the things that my mind holds onto --

- the night one of the patients smuggled in a bottle of sake and passed it around. Being a simple farm boy and not familiar with exotic beverages, I quickly developed a warm glow and felt no pain for the rest of the night
- the night a buddy and I decided we wanted to go to a movie at another Army base across Tokyo. No cabbie would stop for a couple of round-eyes dressed in hospital pajamas, so we trapped one in a narrow alley and forced him to give us a ride and take our money
- that same night, on the way back to the hospital, being accosted by a small group of belligerent GIs who had apparently found some happy weed and were feeling no pain. Luckily, they were so messed up that we just forced our way through them and they weren't able to do anything about it
- the gut-shot patient on the other side of the bed dividers, who thought it would be a good prank at mealtime to mix mashed potatoes and brown gravy in a colostomy bag and throw it over the divider. Actually, it was a good prank, except that it landed in someone's plate and he wasn't overly forgiving at that moment
- washing down my neighbor's bed on the morning he was sent back to the World. He would not be discharged until he washed his bed -- the fact that he was missing both of his legs didn't seem to faze the orderly who was unwilling to help
- the choices for TV viewing -- Japanese SciFi (my fave was an action series set in a spaceship with a member of the crew who would slip into a compartment, say a couple magic words, do a couple of karate hand gestures, and turn into a superhero); the semiannual Sumo tournament (really cool); and episodes of Bonanza (Hoss Cartwright's lines being dubbed in Japanese was especially hilarious)

And, on a completely different subject --

File this one under the category of "The Continuing Disintegration Of The United States Of America". I recently wandered into the Current Events section of a book store, being assailed by books giving justification as to why it is right and proper for countries and US citizens to hate the United States, when I stumbled across a small book titled "10 Excellent Reasons Not To Join The Military", compiled / edited by Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg. Essentially, she has compiled ten essays into a book, with the following chapters:

- |   |  |
|---|--|
| 1. You May Be Killed - by Cindy Sheehan                             | 7. You May Face Discrimination - By Aimee Allison                                    |
| 2. You May Kill Others Who Do Not Deserve to Die - By Paul Rockwell | 8. You May Be Asked to Do Things Against Your Beliefs - By Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg |
| 3. You May Be Injured - By Robert Acosta and Nina Berman            | 9. You May Find It Difficult to Leave the Military - By Louis and Marti Hiken        |
| 4. You May Not Receive Proper Medical Care - By Adele Kubein        | 10. You Have Other Choices - By Rae Abileah with assistance from Jen Low             |
| 5. You May Suffer Long-term Health Problems - By Tod Ensign         |  |
| 6. You May Be Lied To - By Elizabeth Weill-Greenberg                |  |

At times, I strongly resent having gone off to war, while those who did nothing but complain about the military had a free hand. But then, I suppose every Roman Legionnaire had the same resentment at the time the Roman Empire was crumbling. But then, again, I'm reminded of the favorite saying of one of my college ROTC instructors: "I may not agree with your comments, but I will defend your right to say them with my life".

### Continued from Cover Page SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

- 1) Vietnam veterans have a lower unemployment rate than the same non-vet age groups.
- 2) Vietnam veterans' personal income exceeds that of our non-veteran age group by more than 18 percent.
- 3) 76% of the men sent to Vietnam were from lower middle/working class backgrounds.
- 4) Three-fourths had family incomes above the poverty level; 50% were from middle income backgrounds.
- 5) Some 23% of Vietnam vets had fathers with professional, managerial or technical occupations.
- 6) 79% of the men who served in Vietnam had a high school education or better when they entered the military service. 63% of Korean War vets and only 45% of WWII vets had completed high school upon separation.
- 7) Deaths by region per 100,000 of population: South -- 31%, West --29.9%; Midwest -- 28.4%; Northeast -- 23.5%.

### DRUG USAGE & CRIME

- 1) There is no difference in drug usage between Vietnam Veterans and non-Vietnam Veterans of the same age group. (Source: Veterans Administration Study)
- 2) Vietnam Veterans are less likely to be in prison - only one-half of one percent of Vietnam Veterans have been jailed for crimes.
- 3) 85% of Vietnam Veterans made successful transitions to civilian life.

### WINNING & LOSING

- 1) 82% of veterans who saw heavy combat strongly believe the war was lost because of lack of political will.
- 2) Nearly 75% of the public agrees it was a failure of political will, not of arms.

## WELCOME HOME

Richard P. Guthrie

Around twenty-two hundred the waiter announces he needs to close the hospitality suite. Several men grab the ice chests, and thirty or more old soldiers file through the budget motel's austere lobby enroute to the gazebo out by the swimming pool. In no time the Command Post is reactivated, and the night air of Phoenix City, Alabama reeks of cheap cigar smoke.

Reliving our time together in another hot, steamy part of the world, our Band of Brothers divides into small groups that form and dissolve and renew continuously. Men circulate from one huddle to the next, eavesdropping until they find a story they want to contribute to, or one they just haven't heard in a while. Those who've been to several reunions fall easily into conversation, but all remember how intimidating it felt to come to their first one, so newcomers get a warm welcome. The noise level ebbs and flows, but never dies out. Some groups emit bursts of laughter at a funny anecdote, or hoots as one man joshes another. In more subdued cohorts, the story-teller may lose his voice as memory takes him to a place so sad his eyes tear up, and his throat constricts, choking off his words. Usually a nearby buddy will finish the account for him, getting out at last the painful story he's been wanting to tell for over four decades.

I'm sitting with a couple of old B Company officers. I've just bummed another cigar from Thurman Pike, and I'm using his lighter to fire it up when, from behind me on the fringe, a loud voice drowns out most conversations: "Did I ever tell you the time the Cap'n tried to drown me?" Oh... shit! I don't have to look to know it's Richard Wilson. Mutterings of disbelief come from some groups, but hearing an NCO call out an officer isn't usual, and most of the men listen up. "No, really, look! The Cap'n says: 'Sarn't Wilson, Get your ass down there and hook this cable up to the tow-pintle.'" His salvo draws sympathetic murmurs from the crowd, and there isn't any doubt about just which Captain he's talking about. Knowing I'm in trouble if I don't get the initiative, I shout: "Hey wait a minute!" "Hell, yes," he presses on, "And him?" Pointing my way, he asserts: "Used to be Captain of the West Point swim team!" Wilson is warming up now... creative, loose with the facts. And the tactic seems to be working, as many around him are getting into his story. "Hell, that 13-ton Armored Personnel Carrier was sunk in water so deep you couldn't see more than the top three feet of the antenna," he bellows, righteous indignation dripping from every word. He holds out his hands, palms facing, a yard apart. "I dove down in there, water all muddy... couldn't even see the APC, much less find the tow-pintle and hook into it. When I come up... he sends me right back down again!"

Looking over my shoulder at him, I take a long pull on my can of tepid Budweiser. I know I'm playing catch-up now. "God Damn it, Sarn't Wilson, what was your job?" "Cap'n, you know I was the Motor Sergeant," he cocks his head to one side and scans the smiling faces -- to be sure everyone shares his amazement that the Cap'n should ask such an inane question. "Motor Sarn't," I press on, "let's see now, s'posed to keep the vehicles running... right?" He nods. "And... was that APC running?" "Running? Hell no it wasn't running, Cap'n, it was in fifteen foot of water. How in the Hell could it run?" "OK. Now, and what was my job?" "Why... you were Company Commander, supposed to take care of me... and that's what I'm talking about. Me not knowing how to swim, you were trying to drown me!" "OK, stalled vehicle. So, I commanded the motor Sergeant to get it out of the water, and make it run." "Yeah, but Cap'n, I told you ..." he stammered, still playing the crowd. "OK, now; and who was it that finally got the cable hooked up?" "Well... you did, Cap'n, but only after you tried to drown me." Many roar with laughter, but he hesitates, apparently grasping for a fresh line of attack. "Cap'n, you know... you'd better treat me right. I've got the goods on you." "Wilson, what are you talking about now?" "I've got evidence! Even before that time you tried to drown me, you tried to destroy my morals. I have documentary proof!" "Oh, come on..." "I have in my possession the official pass whereas you authorized Staff Sergeant Richard Wilson to go to Sin City in An Khe, Vietnam. It's signed 27 September, 1967, by Richard P. Guthrie, Captain, Infantry, Commanding." Howls of laughter reverberate from the two storey façade of the motel courtyard as, nose in the air, lips pursed, he pans the crowd triumphantly. "Now we're getting somewhere. Wilson, Damn it! You should have been back at the Motor Pool, taking care of the vehicles, and now you admit... you confess you were off in the ville, chasing the honeys!" The crowd hoots and roars. "Careful now, Cap'n, or everyone will know. I'm warning you, that pass you signed is going up, on the World... Wide... Web!"

Our faces distorted with mirth, Wilson and I jump to our feet as one, and thread our way through the crowd to come together in a bear hug that lasts. "Welcome home, you crazy bastard," I say softly, "I'm glad you finally made it to one of these." "Yeah," he murmurs, "it's good to be home, Cap'n. You know I'd follow you all the way to East Hell...Welcome Home."



LZ Betty/Whiskey Mountain  
Submitted by Frenchy Lagimoniere

### Vietnam War Veteran Courtesy of George Bell

I was that which others did not want to be.

I went where others feared to go and did what others failed to do.

I asked nothing from those who gave nothing and reluctantly accepted the thought of eternal loneliness should I fail.

I have seen the face of terror, felt the stinging cold of fear, and enjoyed the sweet taste of moment's love.

I have cried, pained and hoped...but most of all, I lived times others would say were best forgotten.

At least someday, I will be able to say that I was proud of what I was.....a soldier.

(Continued from page 2)

#### CASUALTIES

- 1) The first man to die in Vietnam was James Davis, in 1958. He was with the 509th Radio Research Station. Davis Station in Saigon was named for him.
- 2) Non-hostile deaths: 10,800
- 3) Total: 58,202 (Includes men formerly classified as MIA and Mayaguez casualties). Men who have subsequently died of wounds account for the changing total.
- 4) 8 nurses died -- 1 was KIA.
- 5) 61% of the men killed were 21 or younger.
- 6) 11,465 of those killed were younger than 20 years old.
- 7) Of those killed, 17,539 were married.
- 8) Average age of men killed: 23.1 years
- 9) Enlisted: 50,274 - 22.37 years
- 10) Officers: 6,598 - 28.43 years
- 11) Warrants: 1,276 - 24.73 years
- 12) E1: 525 - 20.34 years
- 13) 11B MOS: 18,465 - 22.55 years
- 14) Five men killed in Vietnam were only 16 years old.
- 15) The oldest man killed was 62 years old.
- 16) 2,709,918 Americans served in Vietnam, 58,202 were KIA for a percentage of .0214%.
- 17) 303,704 were wounded: 303,704. 153,329 were hospitalized.
- 18) 150,375 were injured requiring no hospital care.
- 19) 75,000 were severely disabled. 23,214 were 100% disabled. 5,283 lost limbs. 1,081 sustained multiple amputations.
- 20) Amputation or crippling wounds to the lower extremities were 300% higher than in WWII and 70% higher than Korea.
- 21) Multiple amputations occurred at the rate of 18.4% compared to 5.7% in WWII.
- 22) Missing in Action: 2,338
- 23) POWs: 766 (114 died in captivity)
- 24) As of January 15, 2004, there are 1,875 Americans still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

#### INTERESTING CENSUS STATISTICS & THOSE TO CLAIM TO HAVE "BEEN THERE."

- 1) 1,713,823 of those who served in Vietnam were still alive as of August, 1995 (census figures).
- 2) During that same census count, the number of Americans falsely claiming to have served in-country was: 9,492,958.
- 3) As of the current census taken during August, 2000, the surviving U.S. Vietnam Veteran population estimate is: 1,002,511. This is hard to believe, losing nearly 711,000 between '95 and '00. That's 390 per day.
- 4) During this census count, the number of Americans falsely claiming to have served in-country is: 13,853,027. By this census, FOUR OUT OF FIVE WHO CLAIM TO BE VIETNAM VETS ARE NOT.
- 5) The Department of Defense Vietnam War Service Index officially provided by The War Library originally reported with errors that 2,709,918 U.S. military personnel as having served in-country.
- 6) Corrections and confirmations to this erred index resulted in the addition of 358 U.S. military personnel confirmed to have served in Vietnam but not originally listed by the Department of Defense. (All names are currently on file and accessible 24/7/365).
- 7) Isolated atrocities committed by American Soldiers produced torrents of outrage from anti-war critics and the news media while Communist atrocities were so common that they received hardly any media mention at all.
- 8) The United States sought to minimize and prevent attacks on civilians while North Vietnam made attacks on civilians a centerpiece of its strategy.
- 9) Americans who deliberately killed civilians received prison sentences while Communists who did so received commendations.
- 10) From 1957 to 1973, the National Liberation Front assassinated 36,725 Vietnamese and abducted another 58,499. The death squads focused on leaders at the village level and on anyone who improved the lives of the peasants such as medical personnel, social workers, and school teachers. - Nixon Presidential Papers.

#### VIETNAM VETERANS

- 1) 9,087,000 military personnel served on active duty during the Vietnam Era (Aug 5, 1964 - May 7, 1975).
- 2) 8,744,000 GIs were on active duty during the war (Aug 5, 1964 - March 28, 1973).
- 3) 2,709,918 Americans served in Vietnam, this number represents 9.7% of their generation.
- 4) 3,403,100 (Including 514,300 offshore) personnel served in the broader Southeast Asia Theater (Vietnam, Laos, Cambodia, flight crews based in Thailand and sailors in adjacent South China Sea waters).
- 5) 2,594,000 personnel served within the borders of South Vietnam (Jan. 1, 1965 - March 28, 1973). Another 50,000 men served in Vietnam between 1960 and 1964.
- 6) Of the 2.6 million, between 1-1.6 million (40-60%) either fought in combat, provided close support or were at least fairly regularly exposed to enemy attack.
- 7) 7,484 women (6,250 or 83.5% were nurses) served in Vietnam.
- 8) Peak troop strength in Vietnam: 543,482 (April 30, 1968).

(Continued on page 6)

Truman Library Speech

September 12<sup>th</sup>, 2009

MG (Ret) Robert H Scales

Mr. Skelton, Mr. Cleaver, distinguished guests and, most importantly, fellow veterans. What a great thrill it is see my comrades in arms assembled here so many years after we shared our experiences in war.

Let me give you the bottom line up front: I'm proud I served in Vietnam. Like you I didn't kill innocents, I killed the enemy; I didn't fight for big oil or for some lame conspiracy I fought for a country I believed in and for the buddies who kept me alive. Like you I was troubled that, unlike my father, I didn't come back to a grateful nation. It took a generation and another war, Desert Storm, for the nation to come back to me.

Also like you I remember the war being 99 percent boredom and one percent pure abject terror. But not all my memories of Vietnam are terrible. There were times when I enjoyed my service in combat. Such sentiment must seem strange to a society today that has, thanks to our superb volunteer military, been completely insulated from war. If they thought about Vietnam at all our fellow citizens would imagine that fifty years would have been sufficient to erase this unpleasant war from our conscientiousness. Looking over this assembly it's obvious that the memory lingers, and those of us who fought in that war remember.

The question is why? If this war was so terrible why are we here? It's my privilege today to try to answer that question not only for you, brother veterans, but maybe for a wider audience for whom, fifty years on, Vietnam is as strangely distant as World War One was to our generation.

Vietnam is seared in our memory for the same reason that wars have lingered in the minds of soldiers for as long as wars have been fought. From Marathon to Mosul young men and now women have marched off to war to learn that the cold fear of violent death and the prospects of killing another human being heighten the senses and sear these experiences deeply and irrevocably into our souls and linger in the back recesses of our minds.

After Vietnam we may have gone on to thrilling lives or dull; we might have found love or loneliness, success or failure. But our experiences have stayed with us in brilliant Technicolor and with a clarity undiminished by time. For what ever primal reason war heightens the senses. When in combat we see sharper, hear more clearly and develop a sixth sense about everything around us.

Remember the sights? I recall sitting in the jungle one bright moonlit night marveling on the beauty of Vietnam. How lush and green it was; how attractive and gentle the people, how stoic and unmoved they were amid the chaos that surrounded them.

Do you remember the sounds? Where else could you stand outside a bunker and listen to the cacophonous mix of Jimmy Hendrix, Merle Haggard and Jefferson Airplane? Or how about the sounds of incoming? Remember it wasn't a boom like in the movies but a horrifying noise like a passing train followed by a crack and the whistle of flying fragments.

Remember the smells? The sharpness of cordite, the choking stench of rotting jungle and the tragic sweet smell of enemy dead...

I remember the touch, the wet, sticky sensation when I touched one of my wounded soldiers one last time before the medevac rushed him forever from our presence but not from my memory, and the guilt I felt realizing that his pain was caused by my inattention and my lack of experience.

Even taste is a sense that brings back memories. Remember the end of the day after the log bird flew away leaving mail, C rations and warm beer? Only the first sergeant had sufficient gravitas to be allowed to turn the C ration cases over so that all of us could reach in and pull out a box on the unlabeled side hoping that it wasn't going to be ham and lima beans again.

Look, forty years on I can forgive the guy who put powder in our ammunition so foul that it caused our M-16s to jam. I'm OK with helicopters that arrived late. I'm over artillery landing too close and the occasional canceled air strike. But I will never forgive the Pentagon bureaucrat who in an incredibly lame moment thought that a soldier would open a can of that green, greasy, gelatinous goo called ham and lima beans and actually eat it.

But to paraphrase that iconic war hero of our generation, Forrest Gump, "Life is like a case of C Rations, you never know what you're going to get." Because for every box of ham and lima beans there was that rapturous moment when you would turn over the box and discover the bacchanalian joy of peaches and pound cake. It's all a metaphor for the surreal nature of that war and its small pleasures....those who have never known war cannot believe that anyone can find joy in hot beer and cold pound cake. But we can...

Another reason why Vietnam remains in our consciousness is that the experience has made us better. Don't get me wrong. I'm not arguing for war as a self-improvement course. And I realize that war's trauma has damaged many of our fellow veterans physically, psychologically and morally. But recent research on Post Traumatic Stress Disorder by behavioral scientists has unearthed a phenomenon familiar to most veterans: that the trauma of war strengthens rather than weakens us (They call it Post Traumatic Growth). We know that a near death experience makes us better leaders by increasing our self reliance, resilience, self image, confidence and ability to deal with adversity. Combat veterans tend to approach the future wiser, more spiritual and content with an amplified appreciation for life. We know this is true. It's nice to see that the human scientists now agree.

I'm proud that our service left a legacy that has made today's military better. Sadly Americans too often prefer to fight wars with technology. Our experience in Vietnam taught the nation the lesson that war is inherently a human not a technological endeavor. Our experience is a distant whisper in the ear of today's technology wizards that firepower is not sufficient to win, that the enemy has a vote, that the object of war should not be to kill the enemy but to win the trust and allegiance of the people and that the ultimate weapon in this kind of war is a superbly trained, motivated, and equipped soldier who is tightly bonded to his buddies and who trusts his leaders.

I've visited our young men and women in Iraq and Afghanistan several times. On each visit I've seen first hand the strong connection between our war and theirs. These are worthy warriors who operate in a manner remarkably reminiscent of the way we fought so many years ago. The similarities are surreal. Close your eyes for a moment and it all comes rushing back...Continued on page 7

FROM THE GAZEBO

Darrell Sourwine

For those who did not attend the reunion in Aug. 09 The Gazebo at the Quality Inn in Phoenix City, AL is now the new 1/50th CP. Hopefully the title of this article will become the capstone of a section of our newsletter, which will contain our personal letters to the rest of the 1/50th members. This is my first contribution to this section.

The first thing I want to do is applaud three new attendees who submitted letters expressing their personal account of attending their first reunion. These attendees are: Jim Tilley, III, Jerry Cooper and Dave Knechtel.

Each of these new attendees came to their first reunion with much apprehension. Their thoughts were: who would know or remember me; would I know or remember them and lastly would attending this reunion awaken old, bad memories. Each of them indicated that their fears were unfounded. They were all welcomed into the 1/50th family with open arms.

Jim Tilley, III came to the reunion hoping to learn more about his father. He may not have learned a lot about him specifically but he left knowing the embodiment of his father----the members of the 1/50th. Knowing us helped him learn more about his father as a composite.

Jerry Cooper commented about the misconception that the reunion is for the "Boat People". He said that nothing could be farther from the truth. We are about all of our brothers: those who went over on the boat and those who carried the baton after we left. It also includes the cadre of the 1/50th at Ft. Benning. Jerry also commented that the reunion was the best therapy he could have ever received. This is exactly what Dick Guthrie has preached many times. Our reunions are our therapy for us.

Dave Knechtel talked about approaching The Gazebo with apprehension about not knowing anyone. He was immediately greeted by several people from his platoon. That is the spirit of the 1/50th Association. Although Dave was in the same company (Bravo) as myself he was in another platoon than mine. That did not matter because we all fought the same war together looking out for each other. I discovered that Dave and his wife Kathy are from Pittsburgh, PA which is 130 miles south of my hometown, Erie, PA. Had it not been for the reunion I would not have known this.

There was a common theme through each of these letters. Each new attendee came to the reunion with much apprehension. They each left knowing that they are part of a big family who cares about them as brothers.

Dick Guthrie tried to tell me many times of the therapeutic value of the reunions. However, you know that you cannot tell a lieutenant very much. OK, Tom Clark, don't bust my chops about not knowing how to read a map. The reunions are not about us as individuals but rather US as a family of brothers. Personally, I am closer to the members of the 1/50th than I am to my own family.

We need to find a way to get the message out to the rest of our brothers who have not attended a reunion. Three new attendees wrote about their apprehensions and yet they all went home knowing that those apprehensions were unfounded. We need to find a way to find our "lost" brothers who can benefit from the reunions. The reunions are not about a bunch of vets getting together to drink and tell stories. They are about us giving each other the kind of therapy we will never get anywhere else. It is about US as a family healing each of us as individuals. The reunions are also not just for us as veterans and brothers but also for our extended families. They are invited to The Gazebo as are the cadre of the 1/50th.

Play The Game. I hope to see all of you and more brothers at The Gazebo at the next reunion. Get the word out to our "lost" brothers.

(Continued from page 4)

RACE AND ETHNIC BACKGROUND

- 1) 88.4% of the men who actually served in Vietnam were Caucasian; 10.6% (275,000) were black; 1% belonged to other races.
- 2) 86.3% of the men who died in Vietnam were Caucasian (includes Hispanics); 12.5% (7,241) were black; 1.2% belonged to other races.
- 3) 170,000 Hispanics served in Vietnam; 3,070 (5.2% of total) died there.
- 4) 70% of enlisted men killed were of North-west European descent.
- 5) 86.8% of the men who were killed as a result of hostile action were Caucasian; 12.1% (5,711) were black; 1.1% belonged to other races.
- 6) 14.6% (1,530) of non-combat deaths were among blacks.
- 7) 34% of blacks who enlisted volunteered for the combat arms.
- 8) Overall, blacks suffered 12.5% of the deaths in Vietnam at a time when the percentage of blacks of military age was 13.5% of the total population.
- 9) Religion of Dead: Protestant -- 64.4%; Catholic -- 28.9%; other/none -- 6.7%

HONORABLE SERVICE

1. 97% of Vietnam-era veterans were honorably discharged.
2. 91% of actual Vietnam War veterans and 90% of those who saw heavy combat are proud to have served their country.
3. 74% say they would serve again, even knowing the outcome.
4. 87% of the public now holds Vietnam veterans in high esteem.

(Continued from page 5) In Afghanistan I watched soldiers from my old unit, the 101st Airborne Division, as they conducted daily patrols from firebases constructed and manned in a manner virtually the same as those we occupied and fought from so many years ago. Every day these sky soldiers trudge outside the wire and climb across impossible terrain with the purpose as one sergeant put it "to kill the bad guys, protect the good guys and bring home as many of my soldiers as I can." You legacy is alive and well. You should be proud.

The timeless connection between our generation and theirs can be seen in the unity and fighting spirit of our soldiers in Iraq and Afghanistan . Again and again, I get asked the same old question from folks who watch soldiers in action on television: why is their morale so high? Don't they know the American people are getting fed up with these wars? Don't they know Afghanistan is going badly? Often they come to me incredulous about what they perceive as a misspent sense of patriotism and loyalty.

I tell them time and again what every one of you sitting here today, those of you who have seen the face of war, understand: it's not really about loyalty. It's not about a belief in some abstract notion concerning war aims or national strategy. It's not even about winning or losing. On those lonely firebases as we dug through C ration boxes and drank hot beer we didn't argue the righteousness of our cause or ponder the latest pronouncements from McNamara or Nixon or Ho Chi Minh for that matter. Some of us might have trusted our leaders or maybe not. We might have been well informed and passionate about the protests at home or maybe not. We might have groused about the rich and privileged who found a way to avoid service but we probably didn't. We might have volunteered for the war to stop the spread of global communism or maybe we just had a failing semester and got swept up in the draft.

In war young soldiers think about their buddies. They talk about families, wives and girlfriends and relate to each other through very personal confessions. For the most part the military we served with in Vietnam did not come from the social elite. We didn't have Harvard degrees or the pedigree of political bluebloods. We were in large measure volunteers and draftees from middle and lower class America . Just as in Iraq today we came from every corner of our country to meet in a beautiful yet harsh and forbidding place, a place that we've seen and experienced but can never explain adequately to those who were never there.

Soldiers suffer, fight and occasionally die for each other. It's as simple as that. What brought us to fight in the jungle was no different than the motive force that compels young soldiers today to kick open a door in Ramadi with the expectation that what lies on the other side is either an innocent huddling with a child in her arms or a fanatic insurgent yearning to buy his ticket to eternity by killing the infidel. No difference. Patriotism and a paycheck may get a soldier into the military but fear of letting his buddies down gets a soldier to do something that might just as well get him killed.

What makes a person successful in America today is a far cry from what would have made him a success in the minds of those assembled here today. Big bucks gained in law or real estate, or big deals closed on the stock market made some of our countrymen rich. But as they have grown older they now realize that they have no buddies. There is no one who they are willing to die for or who is willing to die for them. William Manchester served as a Marine in the Pacific during World War II and put the sentiment precisely right when he wrote: "Any man in combat who lacks comrades who will die for him, or for whom he is willing to die is not a man at all. He is truly damned."

The Anglo Saxon heritage of buddy loyalty is long and frightfully won. Almost six hundred years ago the English king, Henry V, waited on a cold and muddy battlefield to face a French army many times his size. Shakespeare captured the ethos of that moment in his play Henry V. To be sure Shakespeare wasn't there but he was there in spirit because he understood the emotions that gripped and the bonds that brought together both king and soldier. Henry didn't talk about national strategy. He didn't try to justify faulty intelligence or ill formed command decisions that put his soldiers at such a terrible disadvantage. Instead, he talked about what made English soldiers fight and what in all probably would allow them to prevail the next day against terrible odds. Remember this is a monarch talking to his men:

"This story shall the good man teach his son;  
From this day ending to the ending of the world,  
But we in it shall be remembered;  
We few, we happy few, we band of brothers; For he today that sheds his blood with me shall be my brother;  
And gentlemen in England (or America ) now a-bed  
Shall think themselves accursed they were not here,  
And hold their manhood's cheap whiles any speaks  
That fought with us upon Saint Crispin's day."

You all here assembled inherit the spirit of St Crispin's day. You know and understand the strength of comfort that those whom you protect, those in America now abed, will never know. You have lived a life of self-awareness and personal satisfaction that those who watched you from afar in this country who "hold their manhood cheap" can only envy.

I don't care whether America honors or even remembers the good service we performed in Vietnam . It doesn't bother me that war is an image that America would rather ignore. It's enough for me to have the privilege to be among you. It's sufficient to talk to each of you about things we have seen and kinships we have shared in the tough and heartless crucible of war.

Some day we will all join those who are serving so gallantly now and have preceded us on battlefields from Gettysburg to Wanat. We will gather inside a firebase to open a case of C rations with every box peaches and pound cake. We will join with a band of brothers to recount the experience of serving something greater than ourselves. I believe in my very soul that the almightily reserves a corner of heaven, probably around a perpetual campfire where some day we can meet and embrace... all of the band of brothers throughout the ages to tell our stories while envious standers-by watch and wonder how horrific and incendiary the crucible of violence must have been to bring such a disparate assemblage so close to the hand of God.

Until we meet there, thank you for your service, thank you for your sacrifice, God bless you all and God bless this great nation...

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