

# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1ST Battalion 50th Association



December 2015

Cover

## From the TC Hatch

By Jim Seagers

### President's Corner

Hello Members,

I hope you all had a wonderful Veteran's Day. I think of all of you and the pride I have to be associated with each and every one of you honorable men in the past and present 1/50th. It is an honor to have served with you and to serve now as your president. All of you have made a valuable contribution to this nation and the cause of freedom.

I enjoy spending Veteran's Day for a whole week since I have the privilege of attending programs, parades, and community events with my children and grandchildren. It is great to hear children singing patriotic songs, including the Army Fight Song. They are our future generation to keep this country free. I was honored to be one of four men chosen to talk at the Albertville, Alabama, Veteran's Day Program. Our speeches were to be on a person in the military whom I admire and had an influence on my life. I spoke about Dick Guthrie, my company commander in Vietnam. He was a great leader who always took great care of us. It was directly because of him that many in our company made it home. I

will always be grateful to him for that. I Salute you, Dick, as an officer and a gentleman!

After I returned home yesterday, I received a note from Toby Milroy that John Topper was inducted into the Indiana Veteran's Hall of Fame. John is another outstanding office and gentleman. He does so much to organize our reunions each year. Thank, you John for all you do for our association.

I want to take this time to wish all of you a Happy Thanksgiving, a very Merry and Blessed Christmas, and a Wonderful New Year. May God bless and keep you.

Play the Game,  
Jim Seagers  
President

**Merry  
Christmas!!**

### Lorene Burch, Editor

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## From the Editor: Lorene Burch



Greetings:

This is the time of year we can get stressed out because of all the extra activities planned at work, our children's, and grandchildren's schools. We have parties to go to, gifts to buy and wrap and then to decorate our homes. We rush here and there in the hopes we can get it all done before the day arrives so we can open all the gifts and clean up all the wrappings and eat all that food.

One of the things I have been thankful for in learning how to deal with someone with severe PTSD, is that it is better to keep things simple. I find we are enjoying our holidays more. We still do the baking, but it is more so we can spend time together than about the baking itself.

As we approach this season take the time to visit someone you know is lonely.

Our DAVA unit will be taking 200 gifts to the nursing homes for the veterans in our area. We do not want our vets to feel they have been forgotten. We may not know the names of the vets receiving the gifts, as they cannot tell us, but we will know the number of vets who will be receiving them. It is not important for us to know who, only to know that a heart has been touched.

**Merry Christmas**, may you be blessed beyond measure.

**Happy New year** and may it be the best ever.

## Change in Newsletter

I have learned so much since the last publication on how to deal with a mass mailing. This issue 109 of you will be receiving this in an email.

I am excited as it cut our mailing down from 250 to 150. We are able to mail out the newsletter to others who have requested it, because it will cost us no more to add an email.

Thank you all for supporting our endeavor to be responsible with the associations finances.

## LET'S TALK



<http://cygig.blogspot.com>

I'm Cynthia Beach Guthrie and this is my personal story of being a "waiting wife." It is only one story, it is my story, but it represents the stories of, and I tell it in honor of the millions and millions of family members and loved ones who "waited" for the 2.7 million Americans who served in the Vietnam War to come home, particularly those who waited for members of the 1st Bn/50th Inf(M). I also tell it to honor the family members who are still waiting for their loved ones to come home from Iraq and Afghanistan.

I myself have never been in the Army or worn a uniform or gone to war. But war has shaped my life. Those who train for war or go to war- those who are the protectors of our Nation- are my family in both the literal and figurative sense. They are the people I know and love best.

I'm an "Army brat" ...an Army daughter, Army wife and I even was an Army mother for three years. I have spent a lot of my life waiting..waiting for warriors to come home from war....my father and my uncle, who did not make it home. I waited for my brother and brother-in-law and my husband and way too many friends.

In 1967-68, I waited for my husband Dick Guthrie, an Infantry Company Commander, to come home from Vietnam.

I remember learning I was pregnant with our first child the day we left Panama to go to Ft. Hood, Texas for six weeks where Dick joined a Mechanized Infantry Battalion on alert to go to Vietnam.

I remember Dick taking me to Hawaii to join my parents and sisters where I would live that year.

I remember standing with my father and watching Dick's plane lift off. I kept a stiff upper lip as befits a member of a military family whose "business" is war... inside I wondered if I would ever see him again or if he would ever meet our unborn child.

Shortly after he arrived in Vietnam, I remember Dick writing me that he was about to meet up with our good friend Dave Decker, who was also a Company Commander in the same area of operations.

My mother and sister always remembered the tortured wail I let out while reading the letter that said Dave had been killed the day before he and Dick were to meet.

I remember my father being furious- -outraged-- that anti-war demonstrators would picket the Veterans Day ceremony at the Punch Bowl National Cemetery in Honolulu.

I remember my Mom and Dad driving me to Tripler Army Hospital right before Christmas.

I remember giving birth to Laura and feeling all the joy and hope one feels when holding your child in your arms for the first time...and then suddenly I was sobbing uncontrollably because I remembered that Dick was not there, but in Vietnam.

I remember loving and taking care of sweet Laura and concentrating on the dailyness of life...and writing letters, sometimes making tapes, almost every day to send to Dick. But once in a while- not often- I would be overcome with waves and waves of fear of what *could* happen.

I remember Dick meeting Laura for the first time when she was 7 weeks old when he came to Hawaii on a 5 day R&R (Rest & Recreation leave) from Vietnam.

Since I lived in Hawaii, I also hosted a number of wives and friends who came from the mainland to meet their husbands for R & R.

I also remember the stories from the R&R Service Center at Ft. DeRussy on Waikiki of personnel having to knock on doors of hotel rooms to tell wives who'd arrived early to meet their husbands on R&R, that their husbands would not be coming.

(con't on page 5)

# Chaplin's page



## 'The Legend of the Poinsettia'

Maria and Pablo lived in a tiny village in Mexico. Because Christmastime at their house did not include many gifts, Maria and Pablo looked forward to the Christmas festivities at the village church with great joy and anticipation.

To honor the birth of Christ, the church displayed a beautiful manger that drew crowds of admirers. Villagers walked miles to admire the manger, bringing lovely, expensive gifts for the Baby Jesus. As Maria and Pablo watched the villagers place their gifts in the soft hay around the manger, they felt sad. They had no money to buy gifts for their family and no money to buy a gift for the Baby Jesus.

One Christmas Eve, Maria and Pablo walked to the church for that evening's services, wishing desperately that they had a gift to bring. Just then, a soft glowing light shone through the darkness, and the shadowy outline of an angel appeared above them.

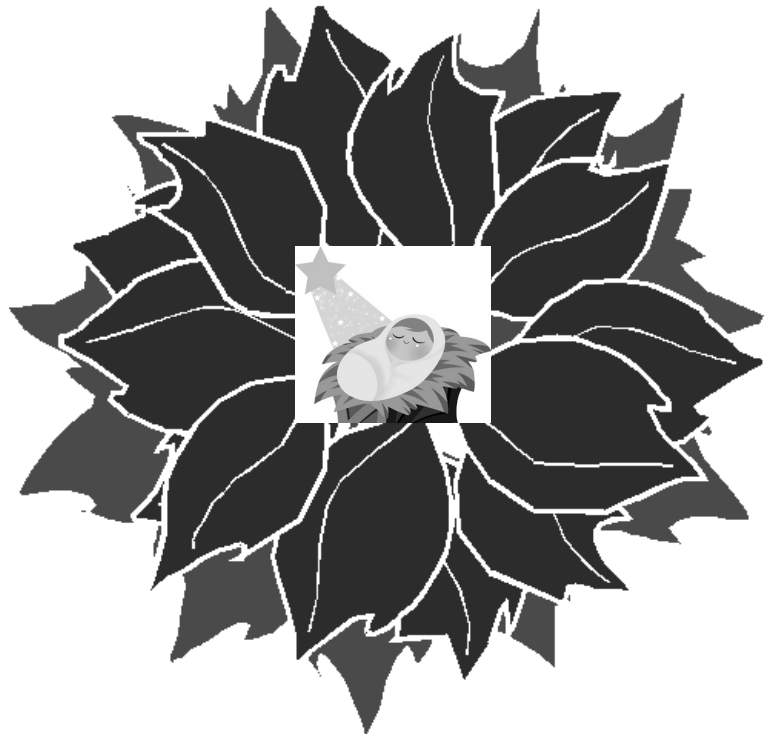
Maria and Pablo were afraid, but the angel comforted them, instructing them to pick some of the short green weeds that were growing by the road. They should bring the plants to the church, the angel explained, and place them near the manger as their gift to the Baby Jesus. Then just as quickly as she had appeared, the angel was gone, leaving Maria and Pablo on the road looking up into the dark sky. Confused but excited, the children filled their arms with large bunches of the green weeds and hurried to the church.

When the children entered the church, many of the villagers turned to stare. As Maria and Pablo began placing the weeds around the manger, some of the villagers laughed at them. "Why are

those children putting weeds by the manger?" they asked each other. Maria and Pablo began to feel embarrassed and ashamed of their gift to the Baby Jesus, but they stood bravely near the manger, placing the plants on the soft hay, as the angel had instructed.

Suddenly, the dull green leaves on the tops of the plants began to turn a beautiful shade of red, surrounding the Baby with beautiful blooms. The laughing villagers became silent as they watched the green plants transform into the lovely star-shaped crimson flowers we call poinsettias. As they watched the weeds bloom before their eyes, Maria and Pablo knew they had no reason to be ashamed anymore. They had given the Baby Jesus the only gift they could--and it was the most beautiful gift of all.

Today, poinsettias are a traditional symbol of Christmas, thanks to young Maria and Pablo and their special gifts to the Baby Jesus. -- By Stephanie Herbek



(Continued from page 3)

## Let's Talk

All of the friends I had welcomed to Hawaii during their R&R's ..and their families and marriages.. were affected by the war. Some went on to serve two or three combat tours in Vietnam. One friend was killed on his second tour two weeks before he was to return home and left a widow and three young children, one was badly wounded and lost an eye. Another arrived home to be met at the airplane by a wife who wanted a divorce. Of the couples I hosted in Hawaii, only Dick and I are still together.

I remember Dick coming home when Laura was nine months old. We met him at the airport wearing brightly colored flowered muumuus. And as we put plumeria and pikake leis around his neck, I breathed a sigh of relief. He was home from Vietnam. My "waiting" was over. *So I thought.*

For the next twenty odd years we lived the normal military gypsy life...we had another child, son Park, nine months after Dick returned from Vietnam; we lived in thirteen more houses, six states and four foreign countries. Dick went to Korea for a year long unaccompanied "hardship" tour, but not to war, while we waited in California. Our last active duty station was at old Fortress Monroe, Virginia. While there, in 1991, Brian Thomas, a former platoon leader, contacted Dick. Brian had been searching for Dick for several years. The last time Dick had seen him was on December 10, 1967 when Brian had been severely wounded and evacuated from the battlefield. When Brian hobbled up the sidewalk to our 100 year old quarters, our son Park, then in college, said it was the first time he'd seen his father cry.

Dick retired from the Army and we were off to Peru for almost six years. We were stateside again in 1997 and I waited as Dick traveled to Washington, DC to attend a reunion of the organization of the 1st Bn/50th Inf(M). It had just been formed the year before. Almost 30 years after the unit left Vietnam.

In 1998, I waited as Dick traveled to the National Archives in Washington, DC and searched collections of the Army War College in Carlisle Barracks, Pennsylvania. He looked for old maps, documents, after action reports, anything that related to the 1st/50th particularly B Company. He'd found his new calling. To write the story of the boys of Company B in 1967-68.

In August 1998, Dick, Brian Thomas and newly found Toby Milroy, B Company's senior medic went... it actually was a sacred pilgrimage... to walk the old battlefields in Vietnam. Dick wanted to refresh his memory to better tell the tale. I waited.

He took another, larger group, including me, back to Vietnam in 2001. I stood in the same place Dick got the word that our daughter Laura had been born on December 21, 1967.

And for the last several years, I've waited for a man who goes to writing classes each week in Santa Cruz and at OLLI at CSUMB, who writes several hours a day, 5 or 6 days a week- his memoir, *Gone to Soldiers, Everyone.*

I'm still waiting for him to come home from Vietnam.

And I'm one of the lucky ones. Just this past spring we reunited with an old friend who had spent 6 and a-half years as a prisoner of war in the "Hanoi Hilton". When John deployed his daughter was three weeks old. He came home to a six year old stranger. Another Army friend, now a widower, whose wife was my best friend, has just recently stopped going to the Monterey Sports Center three times a week with Dick. At almost 85, Bob has spent the last forty-four years without the legs he lost in Vietnam.

When I visit the Vietnam Wall on the Mall in Washington, D.C., on the very first panel that begins in 1957, panel 01E- Line 10, I see the name of a childhood friend, Bill Train, one of the first 50 Americans killed in the Vietnam war. Our son's Godfather, Peter Bentson is on the very last panel, panel 01W- line 55, which ends in 1975. In between the first and last panels are way too many friends and members of B Company.

Now I have also attended many of the 1/50th Bn reunions at Ft. Benning, Georgia and met the young/old soldiers who are in Dick's story. I've met his *other* family, Company B, 1stBn/50th Inf.(M).

I've learned that I will always share Dick with Company B and none of them...and by extension those who love them, will ever get home from Vietnam completely... now we're waiting together. Now I know that December 10, 1967 is as important and significant as December 21, 1967, our daughter Laura's birthday.



Presentation at OLLI@CSUMB course, **Vietnam**

10-07-2014



John A. Topper

## Indiana Veteran's Hall of Fame

John A. Topper was inducted into the Indiana Veteran's Hall of Fame. For heroism in connection with military operations against a hostile force in the Republic of Vietnam, Captain John Topper was awarded the Bronze Star for Valor. While commanding Company A, 1st Battalion (Mechanized), 50th Infantry, in action against a hostile force near Hoa Tan, Republic of Vietnam on 12 October 1967 Captain Topper exposed himself to hostile fire as he directed and controlled the covering fire for his men, enabling an element of his unit to successfully neutralize the enemy. His outstanding action inflicted numerous casualties on the hostile force and contributed greatly to the successful completion of his unit's mission. Captain Topper's display of personal bravery and devotion to duty is in keeping with the highest tradition of the military service, and reflects great credit upon himself, his unit, and the United States Army.

After his active duty tour, John Topper joined the U.S. Army Reserve and continued to serve with the Reserves until his retirement in September 1993, in the rank of Colonel. Colonel Topper continues to serve Reserves and veterans today as an Army Reserve Ambassador. In 1997 John Topper was selected by the United States Small Business Administration as the Small Business Advocate of the Year due to his efforts in helping veteran-owned small business in the Rocky Mountain Region. He is currently President-elect for the Indiana Department Reserve Officer Association.

Colonel Topper's military decorations include a second award of the Bronze Star, two awards of the Legion of Merit, the Purple Heart, two awards of the Meritorious Service Medal, two awards of the Air Medal, and two awards of the Army Commendation Medal.

On November 13, 2015 a banquet was held in Indianapolis.

Submitted by Dennis Apana



### In Need of Articles

Please send in your thoughts articles to me by March 15th. I know there are more of you out there with stories to tell and that some of you are doing some wonderful things in your community. We would love to hear from you. Please send your articles/idea to me at 612 S. Ohio, Apt. i, Salina, Kansas 67401 or email them to me at [themblaburch@gmail.com](mailto:themblaburch@gmail.com). I look forward to hearing from you.

Lorene Burch, Editor.