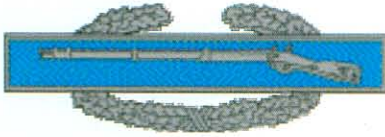


ON THE RIGHT TRACK

1st Battalion 50th Infantry Association



March 2006



Cover Page

FROM THE TC HATCH

Randy "Doc" Smith,

Well, for a change, I don't have to start my newsletter article with apologies for the message board still being down. It is up and being used by some of our members and others that have found it functional. I want to take this opportunity to publicly thank my son for his outstanding work in making this possible. This was a first for him and he read and studied and made it happen. He accepted a mission for which he was not qualified and trained himself with a can-do attitude that took failure out of the equation and left only room for the accomplishment of the mission. Some of you met my son at the last reunion, and I hope his schedule allows for him to be at our next one. If he does make it, I'll introduce you to him. He will be the one standing shoulder-to-shoulder with me (although his shoulder will be a little higher!).

I'd also like to thank Jim Sheppard, our historian, for his work on our website. If you check out "What's New" on the homepage, you'll find that Jim is working daily to update and make additions to our website. I especially liked the crossed rifles beside the Life Members' names, Jim! He is working at bringing all the email addresses up to date as well.

With all the work going on and all the changes being made, it made me realize that a lot more work went into that website than I had ever thought about. When I did stop to look at all the work that Ray has put onto those pages, I'm just overwhelmed by the gargantuan amount of typing that he has done. I hope that some of the help he is getting now somehow makes up for leaving him on his own for so long.

I just received word that Thurman Pike's father passed away recently. He was 87 years old and passed peacefully and without suffering. His name was also Thurman Olan Pike. Please remember the family in your prayers.

Watch the website for information on the upcoming reunion in 2007.

Politics is the art of looking for trouble, finding it everywhere, diagnosing it incorrectly and applying the wrong remedies.

Groucho Marx

CHAPLAIN'S

Parke

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Hello, to all 1/50th vets and their families. I pray that things are well with each of you. The month of March is a very special and significant month in my life each year, especially for the past thirty years. It was the first week of March, 1976 that I committed my heart and life to the Lord Jesus Christ! Throughout all these years Jesus has been faithful to me and as it states in the Bible in Hebrews 13:5. Knowing Jesus Christ in a real and personal way is the most important occurrence in life and it is available to every person (Romans 10:9-21). Other scriptures to note: John 3:16; John 1:1-21; Romans 3:23; Romans 6:23; Romans 5:8. These past thirty years have been the most exciting and rewarding of the sixty years God has given me. As the world continues to get more volatile let's remember to pray for our fellow vets and their loved ones, and most definitely all our veterans all over the globe! Also, let's continue to pray for America and President Bush and his cabinet. Just an update on one of our fellow vets. Johnny Johnston called me several weeks ago to inform me that he was feeling much better which blessed me because I have been praying for Johnny as I know many of you have been. God is good! Please contact me concerning any special prayer requests. May God's blessings be with each of you.

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EDITOR'S PAGE

John

Topper

This month's edition contains some excellent articles by our members. First, Jim Shepherd, our intrepid Historian, has done a bang-up job in his piece about the first casualties the battalion sustained in Vietnam.

We also have a timely item by Randy Smith concerning "friendly fire". I am told by those who have been on the receiving end of "friendly fire" that there is nothing friendly about it. This is a particularly nettlesome problem for the army as it has commissioned a number of studies about the issue, but there is no easy solution as to how to prevent it or how to report it. In a fire fight, as you all know, there is incalculable confusion and sometimes these things simply happen. There are lessons to be learned, for sure, but in every war such happenings occur. In the referenced case of Pat Tillman, the family is being forced to relive a horrible situation, the current investigation is the fifth I believe, and still he is dead. The best solution, for both the family and the soldier, is to report the death as "combat action" or something along those lines. To cast a shadow on the soldier's service, thereby lessening it, and to cause the family to have to suffer more than once is unconscionable in my view – no one should have the brazenness to sensationalize the incident and then hide behind the first amendment by calling it "free speech". It is reprehensible, disrespectful journalism, again in my view. Having said that, I am sure there are others who take a different stand on the issue, and, if so, I welcome your counterargument for the next issue of this newsletter.

You will also observe in this edition an update of 1/50 activities by the current battalion commander, LTC Frank Burns. I have written previously about the Legacy Card program instituted by First Sergeant David Robinson, Charlie Company, and he graciously shared the speech he gave at the ceremony last month, so it is included as well. It explains what the program, almost certainly the only one of its kind in the army, is all about. Great reading.

Wishing you all a pleasant and productive springtime. Keep those cards and letters coming – the next issue will be out in June. And as always "Play the Game."

**1st BATTALION
50th INFANTRY****BAYONET BATTALION FRG NEWSLETTER****BAYONET 6 - FRANCIS B. BURNS, Lieutenant Colonel, Infantry, Commanding**

Greetings to all in the Bayonet Family! Darlene and I trust that you had a great Christmas Exodus period with your loved ones. You all continue to amaze us with your dedication to duty and commitment. Everyone is doing a fantastic job, and we are extremely proud of their work. We're quite busy in the battalion now with all six companies in session.

The Battalion had two very successful FRG events this past quarter – the Christmas Party and a New Year's Reception. The children all had a great time with Santa, and it was wonderful to welcome in the new year in the military tradition of a New Year's Reception. Thanks to all who attended - we certainly enjoyed opening our home to you.

We have two upcoming battalion events this quarter - the 1-50 Ball on Saturday, the 8th of April at 1800 hours, and the Easter Egg Hunt on Saturday the 15th of April starting at 1300 hours. Thanks to all of volunteer efforts with the T-shirt sales – it is free!

So break out the Dress Blues, and your best dresses! On the 8th of April, we will host our own ball at the Columbus Trade Center. There will be a cocktail hour, a receiving line, formal dinner, followed by DJ music until Major Adkins gets tired. For your convenience, there will be babysitting provided upstairs of the ball room. It promises to be a great event. – you won't want to miss it!

Lastly, on the 15th of April, there will be an Easter Egg Hunt. Each age group will be able to gather eggs, and some with a little more than candy in side (\$\$). The adult hunt also promises to be quite a hoot. The Echo Company Executive Officer will don the floppy ears and furry suit as the Easter bunny this year. Last years' event was huge success, and we look forward to seeing ya'll there.

THE MAN-EATER OF AN KHE

Jim Woodall

While the 1st Bn, 50th Infantry was operating in the Central Highlands around An Khe, the battalion had operational control of a Mike Strike Force (battalion sized unit composed of Montagnards from the Civilian Irregular Defense Group [CIDG] and led by Special Forces Officers and NCO's). These Mike Forces were rotated each 30 days. In the fall of 1968, a Mike Force was conducting operations to the south of Highway 19. During the night a tiger entered a night defensive position, grabbed a Montagnard striker and bounded into the dark. The striker's screams could be heard for several minutes as the tiger dragged him away. The next morning the striker was found some distance from the night position half eaten. A couple of months later in the same area another Mike Force striker was seized and eaten by the man-eater. Shortly after the second incident, several Montagnards from a local village were cutting bamboo in the same area when they encountered a tiger. The Montagnards killed the tiger with arrows from their crossbows. Some soldiers from the 1/50 Inf. saw the Montagnards making their way to the highway carrying the tiger slung on a bamboo pole. They described the tiger as weighing about 400-500 pounds and tried to buy the skin. The Montagnards offered the skin for \$500 and that offer was passed. Undoubtedly, the tiger killed by the Montagnards was the An Khe man-eater.



First Casualty – A Night Remembered

October 10th/11th, 1967

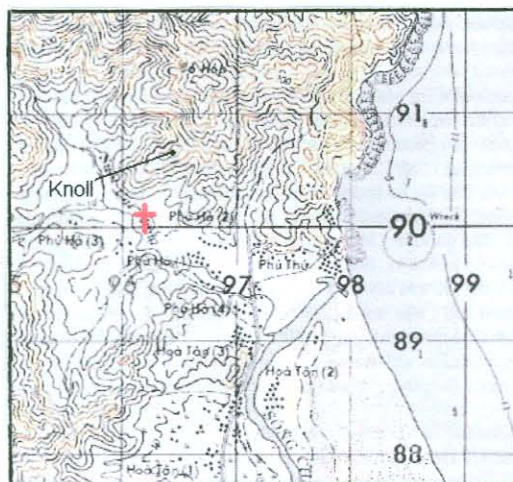
Bong Son Province

Vicinity of Phu Ha

Written by James H. Sheppard, 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion (Mechanized) 50th Infantry, "As I remember it" January 17, 2006. With considerable correction from Bob Driscoll, John Topper, Gary Quint with help from Toby Hamon.

We had yet to realize the seriousness of the conflict we were about to embrace. Third Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Battalion (Mechanized) 50th Infantry departed the Main body of Charlie Company to establish a night position about 1000 meters North of the village of Phu Ha near the South China Sea. We were to form up as a blocking force the following morning as the main body of Charlie Company was to sweep through the southern part of the village toward us in the early morning hours.

We set out on foot about an hour before dark. Bob Driscoll, our Platoon Leader, recalls that earlier in the day someone from the 2nd platoon had tripped a grenade booby trap. Although no one was killed in that incident, several were wounded...and the trails in our vicinity were loaded with booby traps. For this reason, we were ordered to stay off the trails wherever possible as we moved toward our night position.



Our platoon had two radios, Bruce Backes on one, and for this night only, I on the second. The reason escapes me, but I believe the regular Radio Telephone Operator (RTO) was back at our Base Camp Area, LZ Uplift, for Sick Call. We proceeded up a beautiful draw...lush with green brush and jungle growth... below high ground rising to our right.

Before taking the main elements of the platoon up to their night position, Platoon Leader LT. Bob Driscoll split off one squad to set up an ambush position to the Northeast of the platoon. Their orders were to rejoin the main platoon element just before dawn, and the reformed platoon would move to the appointed blocking position.

Continued on page 4

First Casualty – A Night Remembered (continued from page 3)

I recall the brush was heavy climbing up to our night position. This was our first field mission alone...that is to say, our first platoon sized overnight mission. Having yet to experience any contact with the enemy, I believe we had no idea of how potentially dangerous the mission really was! I can vividly remember the laughter and playful joking between Bruce and myself as we made our way up this slope.

We emerged on a knoll with scattered brush and also a loose perimeter of fox holes...obviously having been used before as a night position. The night was extremely dark....no moon. In Vietnam one learned to love the full moon phase. It lit up the paddies and jungle almost like day!...and the VC and NVA generally stayed at home...lest they be easily spotted. But the dark nights opposite the moon's full stage were the worst. This night was one of those very dark nights...which would prove to be a lifesaver for the Platoon Leader and me. You could hardly see your hand in front of your face...and even the new Starlight Scopes we used showed no images to speak of. The mood quickly changed as darkness fell.

The men of third platoon silently took up occupancy of the foxholes, which were in a circular configuration around the top of the knoll at an elevation of about 100 meters. There was a large foxhole in the center of the knoll and Bruce and I, as well as the Platoon Leader settled in and radioed our position to the Company Commander. The Company Commander, CPT Herbert Randall, in turn notified Battalion HQ of our night position, lest we be spotted by other friendly elements and be mistaken for the enemy. The approximate coordinates of the squad set out on ambush were also reported. The night was rather uneventful...very quiet. The darkness brought on a grim silence to all the men...suddenly becoming aware that this was a precarious position...and if we were attacked, we were basically on our own! Bruce tutored me on the radio a bit. It was my first time carrying the big old backpack sized radio common to the field Infantry in Vietnam and I was not totally familiar with it. He explained the "squelch" knob...which would keep the background noise off...and only allow the incoming "spoken" (stronger) signals through. There were communication and situation reports throughout the night back to the Company Commander. Bruce and I took turns sleeping...what little sleep we could muster was not for long... more like "cat naps".

The time approached and passed for the ambush squad to rejoin our position. Finally, unable to delay any longer, LT Driscoll ordered the platoon to begin down the slope towards the daybreak blocking position. LT Driscoll and I remained...fully expecting Toby Hamon's ambush squad to return at any minute...and we would "catch up" to the main element of the 3rd Platoon. And so it was LT & Me there alone...the rest of the Platoon, less the missing squad, set out in the dark and moved down the hill toward a position north of Phu Ha.

Minutes seemed like hours. The Platoon Leader and I spoke in very hushed voices...and I cranked the squelch way up and turned the volume way down on that radio. Then it began...subtle at first...a strange whiff of something foreign to us...yet common to this land...that fishy smell we experienced in the seaside villages...how could it have drifted this far up into the hills? Then we thought we heard muffled voices...sing song...that unmistakable dialect we came to identify so well. (To this day, I can discern Vietnamese conversation and distinguish it from Chinese, Japanese and Korean.....one never forgets). An enemy element was near...very near! We could not be sure if they were searching for us, or just passing by. And occasional "blips" of squelch were popping from the radio...a dead position giveaway! I was grateful for the Lieutenant's sudden order to "turn the damned radio off", and in a flash I had that thing off! We crouched there in the dark...back to back...M-16s at the ready as the sounds of movement were all around us. At one point a voice shouted, from no more than a few dozen meters away: "MEDIC"! That was a sure sign that the enemy was near...since we had agreed NEVER to call "Medic" in combat. We always called for our medic by his first name. They were "fishing" for us...and I fully believe they expected our platoon to still be in our night position and unable to resist firing upon an unseen but well heard enemy! God only knows what size enemy element had watched us take up our night position and had then moved in for the kill! Years later, Bob Driscoll intimated to me that he had seen men in dark pajamas carrying AK-47 Assault Rifles walk right past us in the dark. (It was then that he had ordered the radio off!) He only saw them for a second or two as they passed within a few feet of our foxhole!

They did not see us! I suspect they expected to encounter a larger force...and when they probed the perimeter and found the outer foxholes empty, they assumed we were all gone! Silence soon followed...much to our relief!...And then it began to get light. Just as the first signs of light began to appear, we heard the explosion.

First Casualty – A Night Remembered (continued from page 4)

PFC James Christian Freidt became the first Charlie Company Soldier killed in South Vietnam. The platoon had moved down the mountain from our knoll position and was advancing along a path between reeds in a meadow by a small stream when Freidt hit a trip wire attached to a grenade. The explosion took Freidt's life. Several others were wounded, including the 4th Squad Leader, "Weasel" Morrissey...a "dead-eye" shot and Platoon sniper. LT Driscoll now wanted to rejoin the Platoon...and fast. He recalls us frantically calling for a Medivac chopper. The missing squad would have to find their own way. As the two of us plodded our way down the hill towards the area where Freidt had been killed, I was constantly handing him the radio's microphone...as communications between him, Bruce Backes with the main Platoon element, and the Company Commander were now almost constant...with everyone requesting situation reports on the casualties. The brush and reeds on the slope were very heavy. We were blazing our own trail and it was getting steeper with every step. At one point, the Lieutenant disappeared...and before I could call to him....my feet went out from beneath me! There was a drop of about 6 feet and I was flat on my back, but dutifully holding up the microphone for the LT to answer yet another call from "higher ups". He got a chuckle out of how pathetic I must have looked! Needless to say, I never again would volunteer to carry the radio!

On a final serious note, it was very sobering to witness that loss. Suddenly the war became very real....as one of our own third platoon members became one of our Battalion's first two KIA's that day. By the time LT Driscoll and I reached the sight, the Medivac helicopter had already taken Freidt away...and only a few items of his remained...some bloody clothing and a partly shredded pack of cigarettes. I recall the LT moving ahead quickly to rejoin the rest of the Platoon....leaving me behind with a few men to police the area and rejoin the Platoon and rest of Charlie Company. We divvied up what was left of the cigarettes. The missing squad, led by Toby Hamon finally made their way past the position and we all linked up at Phu Ha Village. Toby recalled the night in a recent correspondence: "I recall that night. My Squad (2nd Squad) moved too far beyond where we were supposed to situate for the night. I remember that it was very dark and I had to rely on all the men to help find what we thought was the ambush site. I set up the squad on a knoll in a defensive position looking down on a draw and trail. We made so much noise getting to that position that it's a wonder the entire VC Army did not hear us coming! It was a frightening night, we were lost! I had an idea of the general direction we needed to go to get back to the Platoon, but was not absolutely sure until we heard the booby trap explode. The good Lord was looking over my squad that night!"

We found nothing in the village. Any element of surprise we may have held for the Blocking Position was lost when the exploding booby trap took Freidt.

Although Freidt was one of the first two casualties our battalion suffered on that day in October of 1967, over 200 from our Battalion were to follow and pay the ultimate sacrifice.

In memory

Thurman Olan Pike

Please remember this family in
your thoughts & prayers.

What do we mean by patriotism in the context of our times? I venture to suggest that what we mean is a sense of national responsibility ... a patriotism which is not short, frenzied outbursts of emotion, but the tranquil and steady dedication of a lifetime.

Adlai Stevenson (1900-1965), U.S. Democratic politician. speech, Aug. 27, 1952, to American Legion Convention, New York City. "The Nature of Patriotism," *Speeches* (1952)

CHARLIE ROCK

1SG David Robinson, Company C

(This speech was delivered to C Co recruits after completing three weeks of basic)

Congratulations on completing the first phase of 11 series OSUT Basic Training.

In this total control phase, weeks 1-3, you begin the process of becoming a Soldier; learning the Army values; work on physical fitness; learn about communications, basic first aid, map reading, and the military justice system. You also practice drill and ceremony and negotiate the Eagle Tower, Chemical Warfare or Gas Chamber and bayonet training. You have learned the Army Values of Respect, treating others as you want to be treated and Duty, fulfilling your obligations.

In Weeks 4-6, WHITE phase or phase 2, soldiers continue Army values and physical fitness. Much of this phase is spent learning, practicing and qualifying on the M16A4 rifle. You will also learn about other U.S. military weapons, and Advance Rifle Marksmanship. You will learn how to move as an Individual during tactical training, and as a buddy team. Tomorrow morning we will run as a company then see who is the best Drill and Ceremony platoon in the company.

You have all come a long way from getting off the trucks three weeks ago. I am extremely proud of the commitment not only to the U.S. Army but to Charlie Rock. Our code ROCK which stands for Responsibility, Opportunity, Commitment, and Knowledge, is a code that will continue to serve us as we pass into this new phase. When other Soldiers look at you and hear you say, CHARLIE ROCK, they will want something that you have. That is the loyalty of a winning team, one of dedication and honor.

Honor, as you know is our current value of the week. As you watched yesterday during my class; the film about Arlington and all those who were famous and not; they had one thing in common, they were guarding the freedom which made this country free. The defense of this nation is entrusted to less than 1% of the population of the United States of America. You have the HONOR to grab the torch of freedom and carry it proudly by being a Soldier.

In front of you are the names of 1-50 Soldiers, many very young just like you, who gave the Ultimate Sacrifice in the Vietnam War. The Bible says in John 15:13, "GREATER LOVE HAS NO ONE THAN THIS, THAT HE LAY DOWN HIS LIFE FOR HIS FRIENDS"

The names you see before you on these two stones are actually here in spirit. The flames above each one represent the flame of life. The Names of those who came before us are awaiting your arrival. You are about to cross into the next phase of training and take with you the name of a 1-50 Soldier who you will HONOR by carrying his name through out the rest of your time here. When you feel in the dumps or doubt why you made this commitment, take out this card which will always be in your left pocket over your heart, and read the name to yourself. Remind yourself that he made the Ultimate Sacrifice for his country and for you. You owe it to him to carry on his Legacy as a current 1-50 Soldier.

As you come forward, you will stop and salute to pay HONOR and respect to those listed on the memorial. Then CPT Graves will hand you a plastic bag with a card of a single name. Not one name will be the same; this will be your Legacy to carry; HONORING the great traditions of this company, battalion, and United States Army.

History is being made tonight. One Soldier in this company is the grandson of a great Soldier and Infantrymen who served with and dealt with the loss of the names before you. He will be with us at the end of your Journey to personally thank you for carrying these names. A lot of these names were lost on May 5, 1968 in the Binh Dinh Province, Republic of Vietnam. We will graduate on May 5, 2006, some 38 years later to the exact date. What an Honor for you to be privileged in carrying this Legacy Card. From a Grandson to a Soldier who is also in this company of Vietnamese decent; here together serving this great Nation. What an HONOR for you young men to carry. NEVER FORGET those who are counting on you, counting on me, to continue the Legacy.

I will now lead the way for you to cross into the next phase.

Charlie Rock Soldiers; Learn your name, write home about your name; we will return here after our honor hill ceremony where you will cross into the brotherhood of Infantry. After our all night Journey which will be our last rite of passage, we will assemble back here to return these names to the memorial. You will HONOR them by returning your name back to the Memorial, signifying that you are ready to take your place amongst Infantrymen around the world and there they will wait for the next Soldier to start his Journey into Infantryman hood.

GOD BLESS you, GOD BLESS Charlie ROCK, and GOD BLESS the United States of America. Drill Sergeants, take Charge and move them back to the company

REUNION

BY JOE

MLINAC

I'd like to point out my displeasure with the group sponsoring a separate "reunion" in Joliet in April.

Although a proud unit the 1/50 is by no means large enough to have splinter groups vying for participation in various reunions from time to time. The "On the right Track" group has put a lot of effort into bringing us together every two years at a somewhat reasonable rate considering that registration includes activities for the entire group to share together not to mention that at least five meals are included which saves time and energy when away from home. Not to cap on the Joliet thing but it sounds more like a "travel agents" spiel for the Chicago area than a gathering of soldiers who experienced the horror of war and the joy of camaraderie oh those many years ago. I myself spent time in a line company and with SRAP, as so many others served together in various phases of their military careers. Well the main bond is the 1/50 of which we are all proud. Lets get on the same page and have a grand Reunion that will provide an opportunity for all Play The Game people to reunion ,especially where we have lineage and a monument to those who did not return from SE Asia (Yes, this is etched in stone for you as well as the members on the monument). The committee is always open to better the reunion but a house divided will soon fall (I know that's A. Lincoln). So again let's go for the maximum turnout at one time rather than a sparse gathering from time to time. Hey Jay Wright and I get together once a month for a MOPH meeting and I met a 1/50 guy that served in Iraq. Yes he is a 1/50 guy because he trained at Ft. Benning home of our memorial, imagine that. I, as everyone else, have gotten on with my life and the 1/50 does not come into daily routine but every two years to be able to max-out with the glory days is well worth the wait.

WOUNDED WARRIOR PROJECT

The mission of the Wounded Warrior Project (WWP) is to raise public awareness and enlist the public's aid for the needs of severely injured service men and women, to help severely injured service members to aid and assist each other, and to provide unique, direct programs and services to meet their needs.

WWP accomplishes this mission by providing programs and services to severely injured active service members and their families during the critical time between their initial rehabilitation while on active duty and their eventual transition to civilian life. WWP employs staff with over 55 years of combined experience in providing direct services to active duty service members and disabled veterans, including benefits counseling, representation before the department of veterans affairs, bringing public attention to the needs of wounded service members, and advocating for regulatory and statutory changes beneficial to veterans and active duty service members.

There are many military service organizations that provide services to active duty service members and their families, and many veteran service organizations that provide services and opportunities for fraternal interaction to veterans upon their discharge from service. However, few organizations devote their resources to assisting the severely wounded during this critical period. WWP fills this vital, unmet need, bringing comfort, support, and aid to severely injured service members and their families during this challenging time in their lives.

Editor's note: This project is sponsored in part by the Association of the United States Army and receives donations from the United Spinal Association, both organizations are testament to the projects validity. To find out more, go to their website at www.woundedwarriorproject.org. Donations can be made online or by other means.