



2nd Battalion 1st Infantry Chapter,
Americal Division Veterans Association (ADVA)
WEBSITE: www.b-2-1-196lib.com



Volume 2

"A Soldier's Footsteps"

September 2012

Commander's Corner: Well, September is finally here and the annual Americal Division Veterans Association reunion is this month from the 13th -15th in Atlanta (details are on our web site). I plan on getting there on Thursday afternoon and hope as many of you as possible can join me for a great weekend. As I mentioned before, it's too bad there is a conflict with the Kokomo, Indiana Veteran's Reunion this year. I know our buddies attending Kokomo will have a good time and we'll miss them at Atlanta. Lately, we have had a lull in recruiting new members and can possibly find some more new 2/1 members at Atlanta. You guys attending Kokomo do some recruiting up there between beers. We are having a hospitality room set up at Atlanta for Friday and Saturday so, you should try to join us if possible. I'm not sure what the hours will be at this time but, we will try to have someone on hand throughout the majority of the two days. The only time I'm pretty sure it will be shut down is during the annual ADVA meeting on Saturday morning. One thing of importance regarding the 2/1 Chapter meeting is it's time for our biennial election of chapter officers. If you cannot attend the annual meeting in Atlanta, please send in any nominations you may have for Commander, Vice-Commander, and Secretary/Treasurer prior to September 13th so they may be considered at our chapter meeting. After the meeting, I will send out an email to all members with the names of the nominees and requesting you to send a return email with your vote. I feel it is only fair to allow all members the opportunity to vote on this and not just the members in attendance at the Atlanta meeting. If I don't have an email for you, I'll send a snail mail ballot. Current incumbents are Commander; Chuck Holdaway, Vice-Commander; Rich Heroux., and Secretary/Treasurer; Don Hicks. We welcome any nominees you may have for these positions. Thanks, Chuck

Keep safe and may the bond of battle never be broken!

Combating Suicides: An estimated 18 veterans commit suicide every day. In just one year, total suicide casualties exceeds total casualties from almost 11 years of war in Afghanistan and Iraq. The VA estimate doesn't reflect military suicides, which continues to frustrate senior leadership, despite increased mental health services and a tremendous push to remove the stigma associated with seeking help. More must still be done, especially after the Army announced this week that 38 active duty and Reserve Component soldiers took their own lives in July, up from 24 in June, and on pace to exceed last year's total of 283. If you know a veteran or service member who might need help, please refer them to the VA's Veterans Crisis Line at 1-800-273-8255.

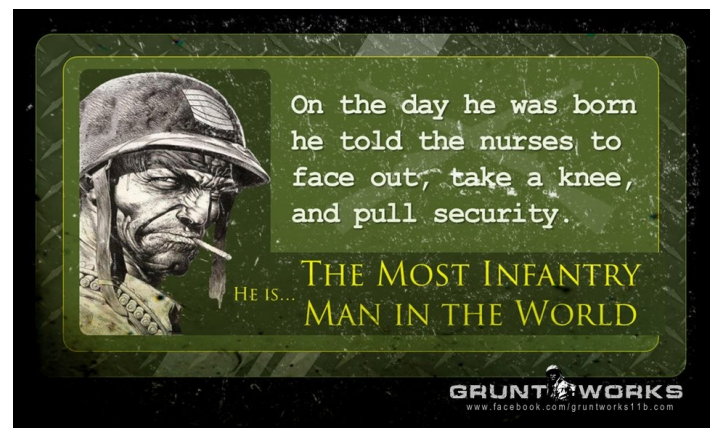
We could learn a lot from crayons. Some are sharp, some are pretty and some are dull. Some have weird names and all are different colors, but they all have to live in the same box.

VETERANS GUIDE 2012: One of the most important services we can provide to Veterans is to keep them informed about the benefits they may be entitled. Each year a new benefit booklet is published by the Veterans Benefit to provide up to date information regarding new entitlements and / or changes in current Veteran benefits. The initial copy is posted publically at <http://www.va.gov> and hard copies are delivered to individual facilities shortly afterwards. Last year about 30% of patient advocate office inquires were request for information with the majority of those questions concerning Veteran benefits. We should all strive to do all we can to inform veterans of these benefits. Please take a moment to acquire a copy of the Benefits Guide. That way you might be able to help a veteran when they have a question about VA Benefits and care.

Federal Benefits for Veterans, Dependents and Survivors
2012 Edition



Editors Notes: Newsletters are uploaded to the 2nd Battalion Chapter ADVA Website. If you missed an issue or would like to look at one from the past look on the Website. The Web address is identified in the heading of the N/L. If you have anything relating to this N/L, email or write them to the following addresses; Email: rheroux1@nc.rr.com or gcarder@columbus.rr.com. Snail mail: Rich Heroux , 2005 Montgomery Road, Franklinton, NC 27525-7300 or Gary Carder, 1725 Demorest Road, Columbus, OH 43228.



Veterans Benefit Package Sent to President

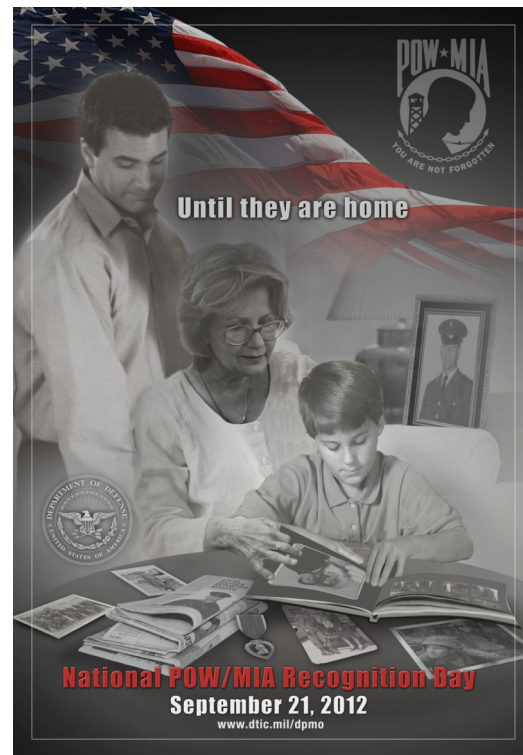
The House passed *H.R. 1627, the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act of 2012*, a comprehensive benefits package containing several Veteran - supported bills. The bill, cleared by the Senate last week, will provide VA healthcare to Camp Lejeune veterans and their families who have been diagnosed with a disease related to the water contamination that occurred at the base between 1957 and 1987. It also streamlines the disability claims process, ensures transparency in VA funding, protects veterans from sexual assault and transforms how VA does business in the 21st century. Veteran organizations worked with members and staff to ensure that the legislation agreed upon and passed will have immediate impact in the lives of veterans, their families and survivors. The President signed the bill during the August recess.

Military Medal Website a First Step: Recently the Defense Department launched a new post-9/11 medals website that lists the recipients of the top two valor medals that have been awarded since 2001—10 Medals of Honor and 68 service crosses—with plans to add the names of Silver Star recipients. To many veterans it's a first step. What DOD needs to do now is enhance and expand on what's currently posted by:

- * Adding hyperlinks to medal citations so that readers can learn the heroism behind the award.
- * Indicate by asterisk if the medal was presented posthumously.
- * Include all valor awards, to include the Purple Heart and any medal that can have a combat "V" device attached, as well as specialty badges, such as the Combat Infantryman Badge, that can only be earned under hostile fire.
- * And to begin adding those who were so recognized from previous wars and conflicts.

Veterans' organization were invited to testify before Congress earlier this year regarding the need for the Pentagon to create one searchable, online database to track the medals it awards. For years, DOD was against creating such a site, but yielded after the Supreme Court overturned the Stolen Valor Act in late June.

Medicare and Retired Military: Many retired military personnel have Tricare for Life for themselves and their family and go to work in the civilian sector being covered by a commercial or work-provided healthcare policy. What happens to their coverage, if they end their second career and go on Social Security? If they are receiving Social Security, Medicare becomes their primary insurance. However, if they continue their private insurance, that insurance is their primary insurance and Medicare is secondary. Medicare will not pay primary medical claims, nor will Tricare. This is the case for most retired military personnel. Be sure to notify Medicare when you fully retire and drop your private insurance. This will remove that carrier's name from your claims records. What happens if I forget? Medicare will reject your doctor's claim. The central claims processing section will see a private carrier as your primary provider. Tricare will also reject the claim. They do this because Medicare has rejected the claim. Notifying is your responsibility. Another related item is the supplemental program for prescriptions. If you have Tricare for Life, Tricare can provide your prescriptions (with a co pay). This satisfies the Medicare rules for prescription coverage.



The President issues a proclamation commemorating the observances of National POW/MIA Recognition Day. It is traditionally observed on the third Friday in September each year.

Two Vietnam MIAs Identified: The Defense POW/ Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of remains belonging to Air Force Lt. Col. Charles M. Walling, 27, of Phoenix, and Maj. Aado Kommendant, 25, of Lakewood, N.J. On Aug. 8, 1966, Walling and Kommendant were flying an F-4C Phantom II that crashed while on a close-air-support mission over Song Be Province, Vietnam. Other Americans in the area reported seeing the aircraft crash but no parachutes. Search and rescue efforts were not successful in the days following the crash.

Korean War MIA Identified: The Defense POW/ Missing Personnel Office announced the identification of remains belonging to Army Sgt. Thomas J. Barksdale, 21, of Macon, Ga. In late November 1950, Barksdale was reported as missing in action after he and elements of the 2nd Infantry Division were attacked by Chinese forces north of Kujang, North Korea. In 2000, a joint U.S./North Korean recovery team found isolated human remains while excavating former fighting positions on a hilltop in Kujang County.

Army Sgt. William T. Barker, 21, of Rockwall, Texas. In late November 1950, Barker and elements of the 2nd Infantry Division were attacked by Chinese forces near Kunu-ri, North Korea. Baker would be reported as missing as a result of the heavy fighting. In 1953, released American POWs said Barker had been captured but later died as a result of malnutrition.

Marine Cpl. Clarence H. Huff, Jr., 20, of Brunswick, Ohio. In late November 1950, Huff and members of I Company, 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division, were attacked as they withdrew from the Chosin Reservoir in North Korea to Hagaru-ri, South Korea. Huff would be reported as missing a few days after the attack.

New Law Counters Westboro Protests: Congress took action where the Supreme Court didn't to curb Westboro Baptist Church's followers from protesting the funerals of fallen troops and veterans. President Obama recently signed into law the Honoring America's Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act that includes language aimed at protecting service members funerals. The church based in Kansas is best known for staging protests at service members funerals to protest the service of homosexuals in the military. In 2011, the Supreme Court ruled the First Amendment protected Westboro's right to protest the funerals. Chief Justice John Roberts wrote in the majority opinion that "as a nation we have chosen ... to protect even hurtful speech on public issues to ensure that we do not stifle public debate." Sen. Olympia Snow, R-Maine, introduced legislation three months following the Court's ruling that gives the government the right to further protect the funerals. The act argues that ensuring fallen troops have respectful burials is important to maintaining a strong military and protecting national security. The new law extends bans on picketing funeral services of troops and veterans from 150 feet to 300 feet, and prohibits protests from being conducted up to two hours before and after a funeral. Previously the ban was for an hour before and after. Violations are punishable by a fine and up to a year in jail. "The graves of our veterans are hallowed ground, and obviously we all defend our Constitution and the First Amendment and free speech," Obama said at the White House ceremony Monday. "But we also believe that when men and women die in the service of their country and are laid to rest, it should be done with the utmost honor and respect." The other half of the law dictates the medical care for the thousands of service members and families afflicted with illnesses from ingesting contaminated water at Camp Lejeune, N.C. between 1957 and 1987.

VA and Gulf War Veterans Update: It has now been 22 years since the start of the 1990-1991 Gulf War which comprises the deployment and combat operations known as Desert Shield and Desert Storm. Almost 700,000 Servicemembers were deployed during this period. Those Veterans who have enrolled in the VA health care system have made over 2 million outpatient visits for health care and had over 20,000 inpatient admissions in the VA health care system. "The Department of Veterans Affairs has not forgotten the service and dedication of Gulf War Veterans," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "Launching in May 2012, the third follow-up study of a national cohort of Gulf War and Gulf War Era Veterans (earlier studies were conducted in 1995 and 2005; the health surveys are done to understand possible health effects of service and guide health care delivery) Continuing the clinical, research, and education activities of the War Related Illness and Injury Study Center program which focuses on post-deployment health. VA is also improving care and services for Gulf War Veterans through initiatives outlined in the 2011 GWVI Task Force Report. These include the evaluation of a clinical care model specifically for Gulf War Veterans and of enhanced education for health care providers about Gulf War Veterans' concerns. VA operates the nation's largest integrated health care system. With a health care budget of more than \$50 billion, VA expects to provide care to 6.1 million patients during 920,000 inpatient hospital admissions and nearly 80 million outpatient visits during 2012. VA's health care network includes 152 major medical centers and more than 800 community-based outpatient clinics.

Vietnam Veteran Elected to Lead Nation's Largest Organization of Combat Veterans:

America's largest organization of combat veterans has elected a Vietnam War veteran to head the 1.5 million-member Veterans of Foreign Wars of the United States. John E. Hamilton, a resident of St. Augustine, Fla., was elected VFW Commander-in-Chief on July 25, 2012, during the 113th VFW National Convention, held July 21 – July 25, in Reno, Nev. In his acceptance speech, Hamilton, who served in the Marine Corps from 1968-1970, reminded the mostly Vietnam-era audience that VFW must remain vigilant in its efforts to care for war veterans, especially in these tough economic times as our country's wars wind down. "What we have accomplished over the past 113 years on Capitol Hill and in cities and towns everywhere is legendary, but our future existence is 100 percent dependent on what we do tomorrow ... the reason our voice needs to be heard is because all wars end ... Iraq last year and Afghanistan by 2014. That means veterans' issues could once again take a back seat to whatever new national priority becomes the flavor of the day," stated Hamilton. He went on to note the importance of the VFW's role in assisting newly returning veterans, and VFW's commitment to assist them. "Comrades, [combat] experience bridges all generational gaps. That's why we must be there to help them use our own experiences to help them overcome whatever emotional scars they returned home with ... and to help steer them to a service officer and into the VA. This is our sacred duty, comrades ... it's a lifetime commitment to pay it forward ... because we were all young once when we went off to war, but much older and wiser when we returned. We must pass that knowledge on." National Commander Hamilton also discussed his recent trip to Southeast Asia and Vietnam – his first return to the country since being wounded in 1970. Full accounting of America's missing service members is an issue that is extremely important both to Hamilton and the VFW. There are approximately 83,000 missing GIs dating back to WW II and under Hamilton's leadership, VFW will continue to make the trip overseas in an effort to help account for our missing. Hamilton commented on why VFW leaders will continue this initiative, stating: "The reason is because we can open doors no one else can because we are not politicians or bureaucrats ... we are veterans ... and the VFW is respected around the world for our staunch advocacy of this one humanitarian mission that returns our fallen to their families." In recognition of his service, Hamilton received the Purple Heart with two Gold Stars, the Combat Action Ribbon, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Service Medal with two Bronze Stars, the Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation Gallantry Cross Color, the Republic of Vietnam Unit Citation Civil Actions Color (First Class) and the Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal.



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You have to have your parents signature to go on a school field trip but not to get an abortion.

US Begins First Agent Orange Cleanup in Vietnam: Vo Duoc fights back tears while sharing the news that broke his heart: A few days ago he received test results confirming he and 11 family members have elevated levels of dioxin lingering in their blood. The family lives in a two-story house near a former U.S. military base in Danang where the defoliant Agent Orange was stored during the Vietnam War, which ended nearly four decades ago. Duoc, 58, sells steel for a living and has diabetes, while his wife battles breast cancer and their daughter has remained childless after suffering repeated miscarriages. For years, Duoc thought the ailments were unrelated, but after seeing the blood tests he now suspects his family unwittingly ingested dioxin from Agent Orange-contaminated fish, vegetables and well water. Dioxin, a persistent chemical linked to cancer, birth defects and other disabilities, has seeped into Vietnam's soils and watersheds, creating a lasting war legacy that remains a thorny issue between the former foes. Washington has been slow to respond, but on Thursday the U.S. for the first time will begin cleaning up dioxin from Agent Orange that was stored at the former military base, now part of Danang's airport. "It's better late than never that the U.S. government is cleaning up the environment for our children," Duoc said in Danang, surrounded by family members sitting on plastic stools. "They have to do as much as possible and as quickly as possible." The \$43 million project begins as Vietnam and the U.S. forge closer ties to boost trade and counter China's rising influence in the disputed South China Sea.

AWOL Soldier Gets Life Term for Fort Hood Plot: An AWOL soldier remained defiant Friday as a judge sentenced him to life in federal prison for collecting bomb-making materials to carry out what he told authorities would be a massive attack on a Texas restaurant full of Fort Hood troops. Army Pfc. Naser Jason Abdo, a Muslim, was planning a religious mission seeking justice for the people of Iraq and Afghanistan, according to a recorded jail conversation with his mother played for jurors at trial. U.S. District Judge Walter Smith allowed Abdo to represent himself at Friday's sentencing after the 22-year-old told the judge last month that he and his attorneys weren't communicating effectively. Abdo, who was sentenced to two life terms plus additional time, sat in court with a white cloth bound over his mouth and a black mesh covering his hair and face. He has previously been accused of spitting what he thought was HIV-infected blood on agents escorting him.

Post Reports Pentagon Fudged TRICARE Numbers: *The Washington Post* reported that the Department of Defense requested nearly \$3 billion, over the past three years, be moved from funds dedicated to TRICARE into weapons programs and other accounts unrelated to healthcare. This was despite assurances from Pentagon officials that healthcare costs were "eating the U.S. military alive." This reprogramming has been happening at a time that VFW has worked tirelessly to prevent the Pentagon from arbitrarily raising healthcare fees. VFW has called on the Pentagon to stop its "bait-and-switch" tactics on Congress, and to improve its budget controls, instead of putting the burden on service members and retirees.

Ineptocracy (in-ep-toc'-ra-cy) - a system of government where the least capable to lead are elected by the least capable of producing, and where the members of society least likely to sustain themselves or succeed, are rewarded with goods and services paid for by the confiscated wealth of a diminishing number of producers. (job creators)

Storied 101st Airborne Marks 70th Anniversary: After months of grueling road marches through the north Georgia mountains, a group of elite paratroopers had to put their training to the test in a trial by fire. They leapt from an airplane, bullets whizzing past parachutes and shrapnel pelting the plane's side panels. Now 90, Ed Shames was 19 when he signed up for new parachute units created military leaders who wanted a quicker, more aggressive unit that could sneak behind enemy lines in Europe. This month, thousands of active-duty soldiers and veterans are gathering at Fort Campbell, Ky., to honor the 101st Airborne Division that was created by the military 70 years ago, even as its current soldiers prepare to leave for Afghanistan. Military officials at first weren't so sure the 101st "Screaming Eagles" would find success. And the day Shames first saw combat turned out to be one of the most crucial in U.S. history -- the D-Day invasion of France. On August 16, 1942, the Army created the first paratrooper divisions, with the nation still reeling from Japan's surprise attack on Pearl Harbor. The 101st Airborne Division and the Fort Bragg, N.C.-based 82nd Airborne Division would go on to redefine war strategies from World War II to Vietnam to the Middle East. The Week of the Eagles is commemorating that legacy with games, a concert, an air show and memorials to the fallen, with each day dedicated to the major wars that have created the unique legacy of the Screaming Eagles. The event culminates with a division review on the parade field. The first commanding general of the 101st, Maj. Gen. William C. Lee, said his men had no history but had a "rendezvous with destiny." The Army wanted physically fit, aggressive young men who were a "cut above the rest," said the division's historian, Capt. Jim Page. Among them was Shames, of Norfolk, Va. He and other paratroopers from the 506th Parachute Infantry Regiment earned their tough reputation by making daily road marches up Currahee Mountain in Georgia. "A 25-mile march for us was just like a Sunday stroll," said Shames, who now lives in Virginia Beach. "We had to walk 10 to 12 miles to get to our training area at Toccoa and then train all day and walk back 10 or 12 miles back to camp every day." He recounted D-Day, as the Allied planes crossed into Normandy and started taking heavy artillery fire. "You could hear the shrapnel hitting against the side of the plane and when we jumped out, you could hear the bullets coming through the parachutes," Shames said. Expecting that the paratroopers would get scattered, the division's regiments drew playing card symbols -- the spade, the club, the heart and the diamond -- on their helmets so that they could identify each other once on the ground. The 101st lost about a third of its men in only about six weeks. The division then went on to suffer more casualties in Operation Market Garden in the Netherlands. Herbert Suerth II joined the Easy Company, whose exploits have been made into books and a TV series, as a replacement soldier right before the division went on to fight in the Battle of the Bulge. When the Germans demanded that the division surrender after surrounding the town, Brig. Gen. Anthony McAuliffe responded with one word: "NUTS!" After the war ended, the division was deactivated in 1945 as the Army shrunk to a post-war size. The division was reactivated as a combat unit in 1956 at Fort Campbell. It would not again see combat again until the Vietnam War, although one of its current units served in the Korean War. Today, the 101st remains the Army's only air assault division.

Atlanta



2012



Brothers Go Fishing: A group of 2/1 Infantry soldiers opted to take a short fishing trip and spend some time together. They had an invitation from Terry (Foxhole) Loyd. Foxhole lives in southern Indiana. Four of his friends from Vietnam took him up on fishing in a pond in front of his home. Posing for a group photo are from left to right; Chuck Holdaway, Harry Humbert Terry Foxhole Loyd, Michael Frenchie Kosteczko and Bruce Nielson. All fished at Foxhole's home in southern Indiana.



Time to Make Arrangements for the 2012 ADVA Reunion: Times *awaistin* for making plans for the 2012 ADVA reunion in Atlanta, GA. This note is intended to alert you to join us for a most anticipated "Hot" time in "HotAtlanta". The ADVA staff is working to make this year's event one that everyone will long remember. We are scheduled to participate in the dedication of the Americal Division monument in the "Walk of Honor" near the newly opened National Infantry Museum at Fort Benning. As part of this memorable event the attendees are invited to eat lunch at the 2/46th Infantry Regiment Mess Hall. What a treat this will be for the ladies who have seldom had the opportunity to dine in this fashion. The lunch may even be an experience for all of us "Grunts". An application is part of your latest Americal Journal. You can also find an application via our Chapter and ADVA WEBSITES. Make your reservations early. Let's make this another banner reunion. Our annual membership meeting will also be conducted at this time. We're adding a "Hospitality Room" for Chapter's use during the reunion. Look at our Chapter website for additional information or go directly to the Americal Division Veterans Association website <http://www.americal.org/programs/reunion.html>. I have recently returned from a site-seeing visit to Fort Benning, GA., my home for almost 5 years. I was personally amazed by the changes that have occurred over the years. My last recollection of Ft. Benning was in 1978. Fort Benning is now called "The Maneuver Center of Excellence" now that the Armor school and tactics have been incorporated in with the Infantry. I also visited the Infantry Museum located just inside the Main Gate off Victory Drive. I am so proud of the work performed by the National Infantry Foundation in bringing about this magnificent structure and exhibits within. The ADVA Monument has been erected and ready for our dedication. I am confident you will be as proud as I was to see the Monument be a part of its creation and presents on the grounds of the "Walk of Honor" just to the rear of the Infantry Museum.

Editor's Note: I have added several pages to this edition of the Chapter Newsletter to allow us to read of the 2nd Battalion, 1st Infantry during the last days of our involvement in the Vietnam conflict. The excerpt was taken from the August 2012 issue of the Veterans of Foreign Wars monthly magazine. Jim Gales, a Chapter member, had a part to play in this episode. He wrote to me shortly after the magazine went to print exposing his thoughts about his experiences. His thoughts will be printed in future Chapter Newsletter.



My Letters From South Vietnam

I recently ran across some letters I received while in Vietnam that brought a smile to my face and, a couple of times, a laugh out loud enough to cause my wife to ask me what was so funny. During December 69', I received several letters from some 6th graders who attended St. Malachy school in Brownsburg, Indiana. One of my best friends, Charlie Hart, was an English and History teacher and a coach at the school and, as a sidelight to his English class, asked the students if they wanted to write some letters to his friend serving in Vietnam. These are some excerpts from the letters I received just before Christmas and I hope you enjoy the humor and thoughts of these 12 year olds. The main common threads were the salutation of "Dear Chuck", a mention of my wrestling career in high school, AAU, and Indiana University and a wish for a Merry Christmas; other than that the comments ran the gamut.

From Dan Duffin: "Hi, Ralph Williams here, no, not really" ... "it is very cold and there is a lot of snow on the ground." ... "You probably wish we could send you some of our cool air over there, I hear it's really hot." Dan also included a joke about the woman who asked her milkman for 60 gallons of milk for her milk bath and when he asked if she wanted it pasteurized, she said "No, just up to my neck."

From Judy Overdorf: "It must be a hard life over in Vietnam. By what the magazines and newspaper articles say it must be terrible unless you are one of those people who makes everything look beautiful, I'm not one of those people." ... "I also hear you are unmarried. I've got 5 single cousins just in case you are interested."

From Dwayne Tri: referring to not liking to play basketball with "Mr. Hart" ... "if you played with him and guarded him you would have some sore buns from pinching you so much, so he can get the rebound."

From Mark Wesling: "I hope you are not shot up by the time this letter reaches you." ...

From Pat Hauck: "Christmas Eve at midnight Mass this year the 7th & 8th grade are going to sing. I'll probably end up sound asleep because I have had a hard enough time staying awake other years just attending Mass. Boy, you should hear us, we're just fabulos(!)! It kinda sounds like a hog calling contests. I guess we need practice. I'd better finish up so I won't be late for Science (don't believe it, I wish I could skip the whole mess)."

From Will Richer: "I know you want to go back to college to study, go on dates, etc., etc., etc. The etc.'s come under going on dates). HEE HEE! (dirty old man)."

Some Post scripts from the kids were priceless too. "I sure hope you get out of commie country. soon" "I think its great that you helped us to win another battle." "please send me a letter back if your still alive."

And last but not least: "If the enemy catch you with this letter eat it."



Woody Collins, Sgt. Larry Corpuz, Sgt. Clint Vogel, Jim Gales, Al Homer and Frank Hagen of the 81mm Mortar Plt., B Co., 2nd Bn., 1st Inf., 196th LIB, await their last flight on a Huey helicopter from the chopper pad on Observation Post 56 in June 1972.

LAST DAYS OF THE INFANTRY IN VIETNAM, 1972

By the final full year of the war, American grunts were a rarity in the field. The last of them would die by enemy action in early June. For light weapons infantrymen and their constant companions—mortarmen, combat medics, armor recon and crewmen, artillery forward observers and their field radio operators—it was a lonely end. It was the same for a handful of Special Forces advisers. Three task forces would close out GI ground operations.

As 1972 opened, only two U.S. divisions (the 1st Cav and the 101st Airborne) along with the 196th Light Infantry Brigade (LIB) fielded a total of 14 infantry battalions in Vietnam. Five of those battalions were gone within the first two months of the year. The 11th Armored Cavalry Regiment also still maintained one squadron (the 2nd) in-country. (Its G and F troops lost a total of three men KIA, all armor crewmen in separate incidents, early in the year.) America's ground war was ending, and the casualties clearly reflected that fact. Infantry KIA occurred only sporadically, mostly in the first three months of the year. Throughout 1972, a total of 16 "11 Bravos" (excluding advisers with that MOS operating with ARVN units) were killed on the ground as a result of enemy action. Fourteen, or 88%, were members of the "First Team": seven were killed by small arms and seven in explosions. The 196th's only ground-grunt KIA (two) came from the 2nd Bn., 1st Infantry, on Feb. 25-26, in two different actions before the massive NVA Easter Offensive was launched on March 30.

RECALLING THE WANING DAYS Many 196th vets recall those last days in the field vividly when U.S. withdrawal was in full swing. A squad leader in D Co., 3rd Bn., 21st Inf., Sgt. Dana Monaco remembers conducting "mostly search and destroy patrols and guarding the ridge line around Da Nang. I came home during the large-scale troop pull out in March, but a lot of my men were still there for the finale in August. These were not nice times." Terry Jordan was a mortarman with the 1st Bn., 46th Inf., based at Hill 350 (LZ Maude). In April, his unit was the farthest north, with 100 men working the bush around Charlie Ridge. "Humping 81mm mortars on top of your rucksack, weapon, ammo and 81mm round wasn't easy," he said. Jim Gales was a gunner with an 81mm mortar crew of B Co., 2nd Bn., 1st Inf. "The last few months, right up until June, we spent guarding the radar site [LORAN Station] for guiding B-52s, being out on Observation Post 56, FSB Linda and at Camp Carroll," he remembers. John Woyansky was a platoon leader in the 1st Infantry's 2nd Battalion until leaving in mid-June. "Those were tense times," he says. "We were in rolling hills southwest of Phu Bai guarding some signal/intelligence site, running patrols. Most of my platoon went to the 3rd Bn., 21st Inf. Apparently, remnants of the platoon became a '4th Platoon' in that unit. Fortunately, they all made it out alive." As the American infantry war ground to a halt, two line outfits vied for the title of "last to leave": elements of the 196th and the 1st Bn., 7th Cav, 1st Cav Division. The "First Team" missed that mark by a mere week or so, but has other claims to distinction, some unwanted. Its troopers stayed in the field, doggedly pursuing the enemy. Squad leader of an 81mm mortar crew attached to E Co., 1st Bn., 7th Cav, Sgt. Maximo Carraso arrived in Vietnam in January 1972. He was based at a mini-fire base in March and April. "During the NVA Easter Offensive," he says, "FSB Spudis was constantly hit. Even after moving back to Bien Hoa in August, we were hit by 122mm rockets. We could see them being launched; they sounded like speeding freight trains." Walter Roberts was a medic with 2nd Plt., D Co., 7th Cav, leaving the country in early June. "Our company was committed to search and destroy missions in Long Khanh, Phuoc Long and Tay Ninh provinces.

We had numerous contacts with NVA regulars who were well-dug into bunker complexes,” he recalls 40 years later. The last infantry GIs to die in Vietnam on the ground by enemy action were 1st Cav Rangers: Sgt. Elvis Osborne and Spec. 4 Jeffrey Maurer. On June 9, H Company’s Ranger Team 76, led by Osborne, conducted a recon patrol near Tan Uyen. After helicopter gunships raked the NVA bunker complex there, the team went in to assess the damage. Either rocket fire or a command-detonated bomb rigged as a mechanical ambush device claimed their lives. H Company ceased combat operations by mid-July. A month later, on Aug. 15, it was inactivated, the last U.S. Ranger unit to serve in Vietnam. It was credited with the longest continuous combat tenure of any Ranger outfit in U.S. military history up to that time. (The 1st Cav’s 34th Scout Dog and 62nd Combat Tracker platoons also were on duty until mid-August.)

TASK FORCE GIMLET: 3RD BN., 21ST INFANTRY When the 196th LIB left Vietnam in early June, the 3rd Battalion, 21st Infantry, stayed behind to protect Da Nang Air Base. Along with B Btry., 3rd Bn., 82nd Field Artillery, it formed *Task Force Gimlet* (the 21st’s nickname) on June 15. The task force’s normal routine was punctuated by a tragic accident on July 7. While in a night defensive position, four men of 1st Platoon of A Company were killed by “friendly fire” from an artillery round fired by B Battery based on Hill 260. “I was the radio-telephone operator (RTO) on the gun (#2) that fired the friendly fire round and was stationed with the RTO who called in the mission for the platoon,” remembers Ron Fox. “I refused to fire the round because I knew something was not right. I made Fire Direction Center (FDC) re-plot the data three times and required the FDC officer to give me a direct order to fire the gun.” John Rieu was a medic attached to that six-gun battery, which was ordered to fire a high-explosive round, and was down in the parapet during the fire mission. “The mistake was either made by the grunts in the field or the tactical operations center personnel,” he says. “The gun battery crew entered the coordinates provided to them correctly and was not at fault.” In early August, Lt. Col. Rocco Negriz stood before the specially handpicked men of D Co., 3rd Bn., 21st Inf. “No taking chances. No heroics,” he told them. “This is our last patrol.” For three days, Aug. 8-10, the grunts beat the bush in the Da Nang “rocket belt.” Several were wounded by booby traps. Spec. 4 James McVicar stepped on a half-buried c-ration can, which exploded, spraying him with shrapnel. Evacuated to the 95th Evacuation Hospital in Da Nang, he was the last line infantryman wounded in the war. Six men of Fire Team Bravo, 2nd Squad, 3rd Platoon, D Company, led by Lt. John Vermilion, were the last to be CO lifted out of the field by helicopter on that history-making mission. When the entire operation was completely done, Sgt. Al Alcalá exclaimed: “God, I can’t believe we’re finally going home—that it’s over!” CBS reporter Phil Jones accompanied that final patrol. “For the grunts,” he proclaimed, “the Vietnam War is over.” But it had been hard slogging to get to that juncture of history. Roger Drouet was among those extracted from the field on Aug. 10. An M-60 machine gunner, he participated in 25 aerial missions from January through July. “We stayed in the jungle two weeks at a time,” he recalled, “sometimes inserted by helicopter into hot LZs. We set up listening posts on trails outside night defensive positions, which were often probed by sappers. Memories of the sounds, sights and smells of these operations never go away.” Rich Wengatz arrived in Vietnam on Jan. 1, 1972. An 11D20—armor recon specialist—he started out with the 2nd Sqdn., 11th ACR at Pho Loi. On May 28, he went to the 2nd Bn., 1st Inf., and finally C Co., 2nd Bn., 21st Inf., from June 15 to Aug. 12. His path to Vietnam was unique. “I was a Department of the Army volunteer who selected the option for Vietnam,” he said. “On the last night my unit was in the field, my squad drew the short straw and set up along a known NVA trail with an OP and tripwires/Claymores.” Also arriving in January, Rich Waldrop ended up in the mortar platoon of HHC in battalion headquarters at the base of Hill 321. He clearly remembers the last stand down: “As I stood in the final formation where we furled the colors, I realized I was part of a historical moment in the Vietnam War and was proud to have served.” Gun bunnies of B Btry., 3rd Bn., 82nd Field Artillery were part of that history, too. Ron Fox vividly recalls the final mission: “The battery stayed out for another day to cover the infantry as they pulled out of the field. There was a massive fire for effect, all six guns firing 20 to 30 rounds each and then Gun #4 fired one final round. The U.S. flag that flew over the firebase was taken down and so ended the U.S. artillery’s role in Vietnam.” George Whitehouse was the section chief of the Fire Direction Center. “That final, ceremonial round went off of Hill 260 at 1100 hours on Aug. 10,” he says. “I remember thinking this is really it for me [he had been with three other artillery units that stood down], and we are really going home. But it was five weeks too late for the four troopers who died on July 7. I carry their names around in my wallet to this day. May we never forget the sacrifices they made.” Even after *Task Force Gimlet* ended some grunts were still serving in Vietnam because they arrived late. Tim Ingle got to Da Nang on March 9. Starting off with C Co., 2nd Bn., 1st Inf., he eventually wound up in B Co., 3rd Bn., 21st Inf. “We mostly tromped around in the rocket belt outside Da Nang and suffered the elements,” he said. “Most men were worried that they would be the last American killed in the war.” But he, like a few others, was destined for a longer stay. “Those of us who were left in my unit beyond August were sent to F Trp., 8th Cav, 1st Avn. Bde., to work security from Marble Mountain, a miserable place,” Ingle recalled. “I finally left Vietnam on Nov. 12, 1972.” By the fall, only three rifle security companies remained behind—in Long Binh and Qui Nhon—as part of the U.S. Army Support Command, and they were all gone by Nov. 26. However, seven air cavalry troops were there until Feb. 26, 1973. The Infantry Security Force (Special Guard) stayed until the very end in March 1973. The first U.S. infantry unit to arrive in-country, it was composed of specially chosen soldiers lifted out of the field by helicopter on that history-making mission.