



# ON THE RIGHT TRACK

## MISSION STATEMENT

OUR MISSION IS TO PUBLISH A NEWSLETTER AND TO MAINTAIN AN INTERNET HOMEPAGE.

THE ASSOCIATION WILL USE THESE PUBLICATIONS TO INFORM ITS GENERAL MEMBERSHIP ABOUT EVENTS WITHIN THE ASSOCIATION AND ABOUT CURRENT OR PROPOSED LEGISLATION THAT MIGHT AFFECT VETERANS OF ALL WARS.

MEMBERS OF THE ASSOCIATION WILL STRIVE TO PRESERVE THE MEMORY OF THOSE WHO SERVED IN THE "ICHIBAN" BATTALION AND TO PUBLISH ONLY THE FACTS CONCERNING ANY PARTICULAR BATTLE, PERSON OR SITUATION.

## From the Editor



ROBERT MELLENDEZ

Recently, I hosted a small reunion in Austin, Texas for those veterans of the 1st of the 50th now living in Texas. Attendees included Bill Hayes and Pete Tovar (both from Dallas), Joe Torres (Houston), Jeff Felder (Lake Charles) and Russ Roth (Vancouver, Washington--- the only one from out of state).

There were many stories exchanged and the many photos shared brought laughs & even a few tears. Weekend highlights included a trip to Ft. Hood where we visited the 1st Cav. Museum. We also had a small slide show which featured images of Binh Dinh Province complete with mountain, bridge, beach and base camp scenes.

As with the other larger reunions, this mini reunion's best part was the fellowship which occurred between we veterans. And yet there was an additional, unanticipated and unforeseen occurrence: that was the reaction of my wife. I was fascinated as I watched my wife's reaction as she listened to the veterans' stories. Since she has not attended any of the reunions, this Texas "mini reunion" was her first exposure to other people's Vietnam experiences other than my own. As a result, she began to understand my experiences better and gained a deeper appreciation of their lasting affects through the re-telling of the other veteran's memories.

She talked about how she could see the emotional affects of these events in our faces and heard their impact in our words & stories. It was evident, she said, that these stories were not dreams nor fantasies but real events which happened to real people. She indicated that our very act of remembering and recollecting gave "life" to the stories, meaning and intensity which could not be gained had the stories been told by non-participants.

So, reunions can be beneficial not only for the veterans but for family members as well. They can gain a deeper understanding of their Veteran loved-one.

I urge all members to gather all the 1st of the 50th veterans in their area together and hold a "mini reunion." If possible bring your spouse and other family members.

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## "RETURN TO BINH DINH" - Preparations Continue

By Dick Guthrie

The trip squad will depart the West Coast on 20 October. After landing at Tan Son Nhut we'll spend a couple of days getting acclimated and visiting the capitol city of Saigon (now known as Ho Chi Minh City). Then we'll fly to Qui Nhon (landing on the runway of what used to be Phu Cat Airbase), and establish a patrol base in that port city where the ICHIBANS first unloaded the ship in 1967. Retracing the steps our Battalion took so long ago, we'll drive QL 19 to An Khe to see what remains of the once sprawling First Cav Base camp. Then, for the next four days we'll visit those places in the old Area of Operations that are of most interest to us. These will include LZ's ICHIBAN, UPLIFT, ENGLISH, and also Phu My, 506 Valley, Bong Son, the Tiger Mountains, the "Crescent", and the coastline.

The tour price of \$2,375 will cover all lodging, meals, water and transportation for the twelve days (bar tabs are on your own account). Once you have registered you will receive an orientation packet with details on areas of interest such as: packing, medical concerns, currency exchange. The tour organizers will handle visa stamps in passports, about 60 days out. Anyone interested in getting a registration packet should call 1-800-839-1888 soonest.

The tour organizer, Dave Gallo is a former member of the First Cav as well, and has run ten other group tours since 1994. If you have specific questions, call him at the number listed, or call Dick Guthrie at (831) 646-8217. Dave Baker and a cameraman will be along to record what we see and how we feel about it. Dave hopes to make a documentary.

We currently have a dozen Association members, friends and family who indicate a firm commitment to make the return trip this fall. There are half a dozen more who have expressed interest as well.

CHAPLAIN'S  
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R  
Toby Jordan

Hello to everyone, I hope the summer's heat hasn't gotten you fellows down. It's been dry here in southeast Missouri along with the heat.

I just read the message about the passing of Ken's Father. And the note Ken wrote about keeping in contact with family and friends. How true, life is so short and it seems we're too busy to do a lot of the things we want to do. But the one thing we must remember is, even though life is short we need to take the time and share it with our loved ones. May God bless and keep you safe.

**The Gourmet Corner** The next time you're in MacDonald's, remind yourself how good the simple things used to taste, like peanut butter on crackers or a mixture of instant creamer and sugar. Ahhh, those were the days. Now, where is my P-38?

**MEAL, COMBAT, INDIVIDUAL**  
Spaghetti W/ Ground Meat  
B-2 UNIT

- One Spaghetti W/ Ground Meat
- One pecan nut roll
- One peanut butter
- One B-2 unit (crackers and chocolate bar)
- One plastic spoon
- One accessory packet in aluminum foil



**MEAL, COMBAT, INDIVIDUAL**  
Beans, W/Frankfurter Chunks  
in Tomato Sauce  
B-2 UNIT

- One Beans, w/Frankfurters Chunks In Tomato Sauce
- One peanut butter
- One date pudding
- One B-2 unit (crackers and chocolate bar)
- One plastic spoon
- One accessory packet in aluminum foil.



**Accessory Packet**

- One cigarette box  
(Marlboro OR Salem)
- Matches
- Chewing gum
- Toilet paper
- Instant coffee
- Coffee creamer
- Sugar
- Salt.



## FACELESS CASUALTIES OF THE VIETNAM WAR

DAVID LOWERY

AUSTIN AMERICAN-STATESMAN

He seemed older, in his late 20s maybe. His face was contorted from unimaginable pain, blood trickled from his nose and bubbles of blood-flecked spit blossomed on his lips as he fought for breath. He was dying on a dirt road off Highway 13 somewhere west of Ben Cat, South Vietnam, in 1969. The motorbike he was riding, when he had been hit by a low-boy truck, lay crumpled nearby. The truck driver and his shotgun rider were leaning against the truck fender when I pulled up in a jeep with the company commander. The captain, not happy with the situation, told me to radio for a dust-off and to pop smoke when I could hear the chopper. I waited a lifetime, squeezing the smoke grenade and straining to hear the thump-thump of the rescue helicopter. The broken Vietnamese man, dying in the road, moaned and rattled as he slipped in and out of consciousness. When the chopper landed on the road, I ran up to tell the medic inside what I knew. Before I could say a word, he tossed a stretcher out the doorway and turned back. Aren't you coming? I shouted over the roaring blades. Just throw him on, he shouted back. Several soldiers were sliding a rubber poncho under the injured man as I ran up with the stretcher. Each time he was jostled, he would moan and whimper. Grab that corner of the poncho, one of the GIs told me, and we'll lift him onto the stretcher. But my hand slipped from the slick poncho when I lifted. The battered man rolled and screamed, a sudden, awful sound coming with his final burst of energy, spewing blood and phlegm as it came. He was surely dead when we got him on the chopper. I cursed at the medic for not helping. He gave me an irritated glance and bent to look at the corpse he was escorting. "Just another dead gook" someone said. A dink. A slant. Not a man with a mother, father, sister, brother, son or daughter. Just another casualty of war.

How could an upstanding man like Bob Kerrey -- Navy SEAL, Medal of Honor winner, former governor, U.S. senator and presidential candidate -- live with the truth that he'd killed women, old men, even children? Because they were the enemy, too. They were gooks, VC, Cong and Charlie first and people second, last or not at all. We had thoroughly dehumanized them. You learned that in the first months of training ("What's a bayonet for?" "To kill."), in the extra week of weapons instruction for the Nam-bound, during jungle school in-country and in the days, weeks, months and years on the job in a strange and messy war. Vietnam existed in a gray area, somewhere between the places most Americans have it situated in their minds. It was not a moral holy war to halt communist world domination. The regime in Saigon was too corrupt to bear that label. But neither was it the immoral exercise in futility the war protesters assumed. The American boys who were sent to Vietnam didn't go with evil intent and millions of South Vietnamese wanted to fight for freedom and against communism. Rather, it was confusingly amoral. GIs and Marines didn't hand out candy bars like Kilroy in World War II. That was a good way to get yourself killed in Nam. More likely, the kids wanted to sell you marijuana anyway or take you to the short-time girls, the prostitutes who worked any place troops were likely to be. The bright hues of good and bad, right and wrong, faded into gray amorality. Soldiers went over trained, ready and willing to kill. To make it through a tour, you hardened yourself to killing and death. Even a base camp warrior like me saw enough torn, ripped and blown-apart bodies to become blasé about, if never totally inured to, the point of the war -- the killing. Easiest of all was the short journey to disdain, even hatred, for the Vietnamese. You worried about ambushes, rockets and kids with grenades and you came to fear and detest the Vietnamese. It didn't matter that it was their country, their village, their hooch and we were sent to protect them. Life and death changed that equation in the shadows of Vietnam, where friend and enemy were indistinguishable. Historians, revisionists, anti-war activists and others with a particular point of view will try to fit Kerrey's action into their own construct of the Vietnam War. For them, it was another engagement in a war zone, a fire fight with unintended victims in a justifiable war; or it was a war crime and one more example of the evil of America's presence in Southeast Asia. But it was not that black-and-white in the deep mists of the Vietnam War. Virtually every soldier who carried a rifle at some point aimed it at a woman or child because he was startled, afraid or angry. Only someone vastly distanced from the reality of combat there would expect Kerrey and his team not to return fire into a village with women and children. Rounding up the civilians and executing them, as one member of Kerrey's team has alleged, is more difficult to comprehend. But still not impossible. America's elite warriors, fearing for their lives and wondering in the jungle dark if they would make their way back to their boat alive could have done that. They could have made the horrible mistake of thinking their victims weren't really people.

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## FROM THE TREASURER'S DESK.....Ken Riley



To start off with, I wish to thank those of you who have become Life members in the Association. At last count, there are 51 of you-that is almost 20% of the total membership, which is very good for most veterans and civic organizations. For those considering a Life membership, do so now and relieve yourself of one additional "thing to do" each year...pay your annual dues. Life membership is \$150.00--convenient number, huh?

Because of the recent influx of membership dues being paid by those who are behind, and those who do not wish to be behind in their dues, and Life membership applications; the treasury report at this time is outstanding. This does not mean though that if you are behind in your dues, you should not catch up, or that you do not have to continue to pay each year, for those electing an annual dues program. We continue to see an increase in costs associated with mailing, postage, supplies, and reunion expenses, and any donations are greatly appreciated to offset those costs associated with a group of this size-membership is currently at 265 and continues to grow by several each month. As a reminder, 2002 dues can be paid now...honest! They remain \$10.00 a year- so while you are thinking of it, why not just drop a check in the mail to me at this time and then you can forget about it for another year. Better yet, join up at a Life member and avoid missing out on any upcoming newsletters and directories.

We just received word from IRS that they are recommending approval of our tax-exempt status and more details on what exactly this means to each of you will be forthcoming once I have the details and paperwork in my possession. To be a tax-exempt association, there are certain rules and regulations in which we are required to follow; those will be incorporated in the soon-to-be-revised bylaws, a copy of which will be sent to each paid up member once they are approved.

As those who attended the past reunion in Las Vegas know (if they were paying attention anyhow), the next reunion will be held in 2003 somewhere on the East Coast. Currently it is between two cities-Washington D.C., and Fort Benning Georgia. Our reunion committee is actively working on those two locations right now to find us the best deals available and those details will be in the next newsletter. I want to thank all of the officers and members who have "chipped in" so far to help us to grow, to support our programs, and to better the organization as we continue into this new century. This list of "volunteer" helpers grows each month, so jump in guys... please feel free to send in your ideas, suggestions, and comments to any of the officers of the association, to the newsletter editor, or to myself. We appreciate, we want, and we need your input to help us better serve you.

As a lot of you who are long-time members are aware, several years ago I ran a "Cow Pie" raffle to raise money for the upcoming reunion-well, here we go again! But, in lieu of a "Cow-Pie" raffle, one ingenious member amongst you, and I promise not to mention Dick's name...suggested a "Chicken Chit" raffle. I am, as we speak, working out some details on this and will be getting tickets printed up shortly. Information on the raffle will be mailed separately to all members once it is available. Please help support this worthy cause, as it will help to defray many of the costs associated with the next reunion. Even if you have no desire to attend the reunion...consider this! Some lucky person is going to win a pile of money, and he will not have to do much except buy a couple of tickets, and that person could be YOU!

That's all for now, folks! Play the Game! Yours in comradeship...

Only those members paid up for 2001 will receive the new updated directory, due to be mailed by the end of September. If you have not yet joined or are a bit behind in dues, please mail in your dues and/or application to join now, so you will not be left out of further events, such as the information to come out shortly on the reunion and the new directory.

Thanks and Welcome Home once again!"

## IN VIETNAM, POWELL DENIES ROLE IN MY LAI COVERUP

**HANOI (Reuters)**- U.S. Secretary of State Colin Powell, wrapping up his first trip back to Vietnam since his wartime service, denied Thursday he had any part in covering up the most notorious U.S. massacre of the conflict. Speaking at a news conference in Hanoi, Powell defended his handling of a letter from soldier Tom Glen in 1968 complaining of routine mistreatment of civilians, including murder and torture.

Powell was asked he felt the My Lai massacre would have become known earlier if he had investigated the letter more thoroughly at the time. "The...letter has been used over the years to suggest I was responsible in some way for covering up this incident," he said. "I was not there, I came months later. And the letter that I received and acted on made no reference to any particular place or any time or any date or any particular unit and that's the way I handled it..."

At the village of My Lai on Vietnam's central coast on March 16, 1968, marauding soldiers of the 11th brigade of the Americal Division, in which Powell served, killed as many as 504 civilians, most of them women and children.

### 'HE WASN'T TALKING ABOUT MY LAI'

Powell was not in Vietnam during the massacre, arriving for his second tour 10 weeks later. He said he had heard from Glen in recent years, "frankly to put the letter in perspective, and he wasn't talking about My Lai." Powell said, it was not until "months later" that he realized something might be amiss, when he was visited by an investigator from the military's Inspector General's office. "That's the first time I ever had some inkling that something had happened and that turned out to be My Lai and that was another year before I discovered that's what it was he was looking at." "My Lai was not known to any of us," Powell said. "We just didn't know that anything like that had happened."

In his autobiography "My American Journey," Powell says he did not learn of the massacre until the autumn of 1969 when news of it broke, but he has been accused of failing to investigate properly the December 1968 letter from Glen. According to the 1992 book "Four Hours in My Lai" by British journalists Michael Bilton and Kevin Sim, Powell concluded in a memo in response to Glen's letter: "Although there may be isolated cases of mistreatment of civilians and POWs, this by no means reflects the general attitude throughout the division. In direct refutation of this portrayal (by Glen) is the fact that relations between American soldiers and Vietnamese people are excellent."

### 'PRETTY GOOD RELATIONS'

Explaining his response, Powell told the news conference he had written to the commander of the unit concerned and received an answer saying, "We have pretty good relations." Survivors of the massacre interviewed in My Lai by Reuters this month said they were outraged by Powell's depiction of the relationship. They said he should apologize on behalf of the United States, or at least keep My Lai in mind during his visit. Larry Colburn, a former U.S. helicopter gunner now living in Atlanta decorated as a hero by both the United States and Vietnam for helping rescue victims from marauding soldiers during the massacre, told Reuters he wished Powell would address the My Lai issue, "just for respect." The United States lifted a punishing trade embargo on Vietnam in 1994 and normalized diplomatic ties a year later. But it has never apologized for any of its actions in a war that killed three million Vietnamese and 58,000 U.S. troops.

When former President Bill Clinton last November became the first U.S. president to visit Vietnam since the war, he spoke of the shared pain of the past but offered no apology.

Powell said the consistent message he had had from Vietnamese leaders, including Communist Party Secretary-General Nong Duc Manh, during his visit was that they were pleased with progress in relations since normalization. "I heard it expressed in many different ways, that the past is the past and let it be, the war is over."

"We chewed the same dirt and we did it at the same time."



**REMEMBERING  
LOST COMRADES  
John Topper**

Recently America celebrated her birthday. It was a gala event but, as always, it was a holiday to most Americans, and little more. For most Americans it is not a day set aside for the celebration of Independence--it is a day free from work. I feel confident most Americans don't take time on the 4th of July to reflect on the lives that were lost in the American Revolution to gain their independence, or the lives that have been lost since to ensure it.

There is ample evidence that we take liberty for granted. After all, what does Memorial Day or Veteran's Day represent to most Americans? Just more holidays, more days free from work. No, for most Americans these holidays are not days set aside for remembering those who have sacrificed all but are days set aside in order for us to be able to enjoy a day off from work to pursue our pleasures.

Generally, Americans do not take the time to reflect that more than a million of their fellow citizens have had their lives prematurely ended so we may live in a country that cherishes freedom above all things. Shouldn't all Americans reflect on these sacrifices? After all, those who sacrificed their lives were someone's children. They were real people. They were sisters and brothers, mothers and fathers, aunts and uncles. They celebrated birthdays with their families. They had a first day of school, high hopes on graduation day. A first haircut, a first pony ride, a first date, friends with whom they shared their dreams. Church socials and county fairs. They still occupy space in photo albums, being pointed out to children as people who died in war. They had lives when they went to war and expectations upon returning--only they didn't return.

Tom Pipkin, the first soldier the 1st of the 50th Infantry lost in Vietnam, fathered a child he never saw. And, tragically, a child who never knew him. Going off to war has never been easy, but Tom didn't complain nor did he use his young wife's pregnancy as an excuse for not heeding his country's call. On a dark night, he died in a rice paddy at the age of 20, fighting in a country he knew little of and in a war he probably didn't understand. Why? Because as a good American and as a good soldier, he was doing his duty.

Those of us in the Association must remember all of the Tom Pipkins and all the other Americans who made the ultimate sacrifice. They died in places most Americans knew little about, fought in wars that they didn't start. But they knew it was important for them to be there because their country said it was important.

Those of us who have experienced combat must understand that we have an obligation to these fine young men and women. An obligation to keep alive their memories and that, in large measure, is what this Association is all about, to keep alive their memories. But we have another, greater obligation also and that is to continue to protect those freedoms they died for.

It is not enough for us to sit back with the attitude that we have fulfilled our responsibility to our country by virtue of our service. That service is very commendable, but it is not enough. That service is more than most have done. But it is not enough. Service to our country mustn't end when we remove our uniforms.

We combat veterans share an event that is not a pleasant experience to be sure but if we don't give others the benefit of understanding the horrors of combat, then our country is more apt to repeat it. Our countrymen must understand that there is a price tag attached to freedom. It comes at such a horrific cost that we must never again allow it to be jeopardized.

We come from a long line of people who have stood for what is right: from the "Shot Heard Around The World", to the schoolhouse at Appomattox, from Chateau Thierry to the beaches at Normandy, from Pork Chop Hill to the Mekong Delta, from Panama to the "line in the Sand", some Americans have died while protecting the rights of the rest of us.

Those who sacrificed had faith that what they were doing was right, faith that they fought for all humanity, faith that a Just God would grant them mercy on the field of battle. Unless we regain our appreciation of our freedom and the true meaning of our holidays, Tom Pipkin and the rest of our comrades whose memories we honor, will have died in vain. And we will have betrayed their legacy.

**EXTRA, EXTRA...READ ALL ABOUT IT...**

Officially, (26 July 2001), we received a letter from the IRS stating in part: "...we have determined you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501 (a) of the Internal Revenue Code as an organization described..." This is filed under the heading: Internal Revenue Code, Section 501 (c) (19). It further stated in the letter that: "Based on your representation that at least 90 percent of your members are war veterans and that you are organized and operated primarily for purposes consistent with your current status as a war veterans organization, donors can deduct contributions made to or for the use of your organization". What this means is that although dues are not considered a donation, any other contribution to the association will be considered a legal deductible donation according to IRS rulings as they now exist. It can further provide for the organization a larger break in postage, thus saving us considerable money, once we have the system up and running.

From the Treasurer:

Between a very aggressive work schedule, involvement in various vet's issues, and trying to find a few minutes each week to just breathe, I have neglected the majority of my real "brothers" out there and for that I am extremely sorry. This is not a good time in my life right now as I just received word that my father died on 6 July. Yes I just received word of it this weekend, on the 14th of July--too late to ever say my final goodbye, since I live in Hanover PA and he died in Dallas Texas. He was buried on the 10th of July, 14 days prior to me knowing it.

I just want to say this: If you have family scattered over the country, if you have friends, if you have relatives that you have not seen nor heard from in a while--PLEASE--please take the time to call, to write, to visit them before it is too late and then you will regret it forever as I now am. Trust me on this one, I know! The really sad thing about my father's death is that we had not spoken for almost 15 years. The woman he was living with just did not think it was important enough to call my sister or myself to let us know he was terminally ill for several weeks before his death. She told me she did not want to upset me. UPSET ME! I wonder if she thinks I am upset now, by the way I spoke to her. DO NOT let this happen to you! If you have had a fight with a loved one, if you have not called a son or daughter recently, if a friend or neighbor has moved and you have not spoken to them for a while, do it now! Make it happen. Do not think about it a minute longer...do it, and I mean now, before you regret it forever!

Sorry for even saying anything about my personal life--we all got problems --but I want none of you to ever have to go through this kind of misery if it is at all possible.

You take care, hang tough, and make that call now!

Welcome Home brothers!