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(Excerpts from “Enduring Vietnam” and a chapter titled “Getting Out of This Place” by James Wright. Used with authors permission.)



Larry E. Boyer

"At times I wish we never would have grown up," wrote Sandy Boyer of her older brother Larry. Larry Boyer died on May 25, 1969 just ten days away from his twenty-third birthday, while on a patrol up on Mutter's Ridge, a steep, dark, forbidding hill in the northern reaches of South Vietnam, near the Demilitarized Zone.

Larry Boyer was from Ellwood City, Pennsylvania, and had been in Vietnam for four months when he was killed by small-arms fire during Operation Herkimer Mountain. His good friend Byrle "Beetle" Bailey, from Omaha, Nebraska, was killed in the same incident. Bailey had turned nineteen. Boyer was the squad leader and Bailey was walking point when they came across some Vietnamese words carved into the bark of a tree.

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Right beyond that, near the top of the ridgeline they made a sharp turn on the trail and ran into a North Vietnamese Army outpost. Bailey was killed at nearly point-blank range, and when Larry Boyer ran up, he was shot and killed. Navy corpsman William Denholm scampered in to try to aid them, only to discover it was too late. Denholm was shot in the arm while trying to assist them. Following a firelight, the NVA withdrew and the bodies were placed under a tree they had passed was later interpreted as a birthday greeting to Ho Chi Minh. He had celebrated his seventy-ninth birthday the previous week.

Larry Boyer was considered an all-around great kid growing up. Described as good-looking and generous, he was a very good baseball player.

Bailey and Boyer were among the 43 Americans killed in Vietnam on May 25, 1969. Of these, 37 were born in 1946 or later. Of the others, four were senior NCOs and 2 were young officers born in 1945. It was now clearly the baby boomers' war. Despite Sandy Boyer's regrets about the consequences of doing so, they had grown up. Over 80 percent of those killed in May were born in 1946 or later—the baby boomer cohort. This percentage had risen over the 50 percent mark in 1967. The postwar generation assumed the burden of the Vietnam War. By May 1969, it was a war in transition—although few in Vietnam would have recognized this at that time. What was clear was that the enthusiasm—even more important, perhaps, the optimism—of the spring of 1965 had eroded. The war that had been widely embraced as an American responsibility to the world and a necessary step in the country's own defense had become a political burden from which an exit needed to be found through negotiations rather than military means. In the meantime, the military effort needed to be sustained while being reduced. This meant a steady stream of young Americans were deployed to Vietnam—and several streams were coming home. The numbers in the latter group would increasingly exceed those in the former.

In the first four years of the war, the ramp-up years, as the numbers of troops had increased in Vietnam, the logistics of bringing men home became more complicated. In many ways it was more challenging than rather straightforward pipelines that brought replacements into the country. Basically, there were three ways to leave Vietnam. The largest number of troops came home on charter planes as part of regular rotation. By May 1969, more than 40,000 a month were rotating out of the country, around 1,300 a day. The second-largest group that month, 4,334, came out on medical flights. And finally, 1,455 men came home in body bags in the hold

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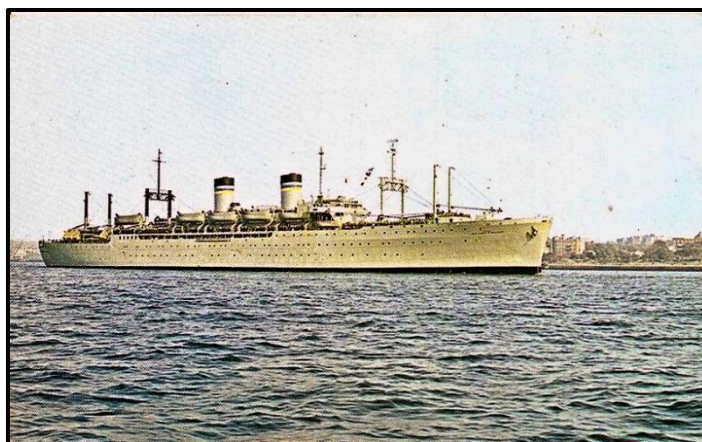
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of the charter flights or in designated cargo planes heading for Washington, California, or Dover, Delaware.

Not all of the troops were fortunate enough to travel by air. PFC Lawrence Kent Hubbell, from Coos County, Oregon traveled to and from Vietnam by troop transport. PFC Hubbell, Co. D. 51st Infantry Division, were among some of the earliest troops to arrive in Vietnam to provide protection for the new Phan Rang Air Base. He describes



U.S. Naval Ship General Simon B. Buckner

the United States Naval ship General Simon B. Buckner (T-AP 123), one the globe-circling fleet of Navy and commercial ships operated under the Military Sea Transportation Service, as looking a little like the Queen Mary, but it's not as comfortable as it looks.

Certainly, the troops deploying to Vietnam were nervous and uncertain. After all, they were going to a war zone. But there is at least anecdotal evidence that the men and women waiting to rotate home at the end of their tours had some apprehension as well. For many, "reentry was surreal, jarring, and difficult . . . I think it was quite common for Vietnam veterans to feel an unfathomable anger after we came home. We had risked our lives for nothing, and of course many lost theirs. In addition to the common wartime nervousness about adjusting to home and family and the uncertainty about next steps in their civilian lives, there was by 1969 also a concern about confrontation. The American public's support for the war had soured even more, and in Vietnam many heard that the antagonism now was also directed toward those who served there. One returnee's "biggest fear was coming home, because we knew that if the war wasn't popular, we weren't going to be popular. That was a tough time. Nobody knew how to handle that." A soldier warned, "You don't want to go through California." This was the state where protesters were allegedly spitting on returning veterans. On the other hand, some soldiers weren't concerned because, after all, their brothers and sisters and friends were all going to these antiwar protests.

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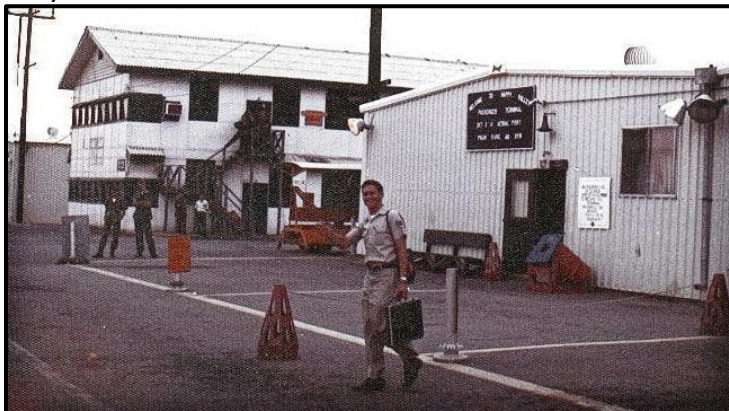
Getting out of Vietnam and heading home trumped all apprehensions. They were living the line of their favorite song, the Animals' "We Gotta Get Out of This Place." Other than career military, or some for whom an extended tour would result in a shortened enlistment or a desired assignment, there is little evidence of anyone wanting to stay in the country. On the other hand, the big moment for which they had been counting down days was subdued for most. The process of going home was bureaucratic rather than ceremonial. There was an



Freedom Bird

isolating randomness to it all. Typically, the returnees didn't know anyone else on their plane. They were quiet and tired—and eager to get off the ground. And on the return flight there was little opportunity for the extended withdrawal with others that troop ships had provided in World War II and in the Korean War. One day men were out in

the bush and two days later they were flying out of Tan Son Nhut or Cam Rahn Bay and less than twenty-four hours after that they were in Seattle or San Francisco or Los Angeles. One marine returning home from his first deployment didn't know anyone else on the plane and they didn't even talk on the whole ride home.



One happy Sergeant heading out from the Passenger Terminal at Phan Rang AB to a waiting C-123 transport to carry him on his first leg of his journey to Cam Rahn Bay where he will catch a “Freedom Bird” to the USA.

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Jack McLean had engaged in some intense combat up near Landing Zone Loon. One day, after his company boarded a helicopters for another jungle landing, he caught a mail helicopter back to Dong Ha and then on to Da Nang for the trip home. "I was so very sad. I was so very happy. Mostly, I felt very alone." When he finally got off the plane back at Travis Air Force Base in California several days later, everyone pushed off in different directions, saying good-bye to those they met on the plane. But he knew “the real parting had occurred days before, in the field, when the extraordinary Charlie Company bonds that had been forged over the past year had been broken—most forever."

Of course, for some there was a sense of elation, of conclusion. A flight attendant on one of the charter flights leaving Vietnam wrote of a young soldier in her diary: "the first guy in line at the gate, dressed in camouflage, heavy boots, jumping up and down and waving his process papers like he couldn't wait to get to the john." He had "the biggest smile on any face in all of



Typical aircraft configuration for passengers on a C-123 or C-130 aircraft. Cargo/baggage would be loaded in the center and secured by chains or straps.

Asia." He kissed her hand ten times before climbing the steps to the cabin—and also kissed the bottom step of the ramp going up to the plane. The flight attendant noted that he still smelled of the jungle. He said softly, "I'm goin' home." She learned that home was a small town in Alabama.

An army chaplain rotating out wondered if one last mortar shell would hit the plane. "I try to will the pilot to gun the engines so we can leave this dirty dangerous place called Vietnam." upon liftoff, "One hundred and seventy-five GIs let out wild cheers. The tour in hell is finally finished. We're on the way back to a world of hot dogs, mom and apple pie." This chaplain's perspective surely was neither uniquely spiritual nor was it unique.

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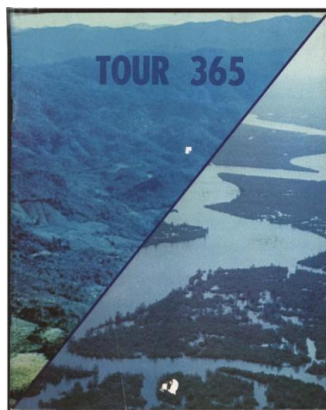
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Soldiers had been prepped for their reentry into what they called the World." Their official briefings were rarely up-to-date or helpful. The army distributed to returning veterans a publication they called **Tour 365**: For Soldiers Going Home. The magazine was updated periodically, and the "Mid-Year 1969" edition had a cover note from MACV commander General Creighton Abrams saying the soldiers completing their tour of duty "know the difficult tasks inherent in fighting to protect the freedom of peace—loving people against Communist invaders." He reminded them that they understood the task "better than many of our countrymen." Quoting all of the presidents from Dwight Eisenhower to Richard Nixon to affirm the consistency of the American assignment, General Abrams said that "people at home will want to hear your story of the war." And, the commanding general instructed, "Tell it."

The publication was glossy, with high-quality color photographs of landmarks and peaceful people. There was a review of the American engagement, with subsections. The period from 1961 to 1964 was called The Darkest Era." But then the war turned around and "1967 saw the Free World Forces tighten the screw on the enemy." The magazine described Tet as a major Communist effort in which the enemies were deprived of their every major goal, with the possible exception of publicity." Now, in 1969, the soldiers were assured that "substantive negotiations" at Paris were possible.



Tour 365 also reminded the soldiers of what were described as "The Pleasant Moments." The returning soldier had been, "much more than his counterparts in any other war," the beneficiary of a myriad of programs designed to maintain his morale and improve his general welfare." There were striking photographs of R&R at beaches, "with bikini-clad birds" along with great sightseeing and food in Thailand, Singapore, Australia, and Tokyo. They had enjoyed correspondence courses and other educational opportunities and recreational facilities and USO shows and DoD Special Services programs, led by Bob Hope's tour with his "beautiful girls to brighten the Christmas season." The soldiers had access to post exchanges with bargain luxuries and great snack bars and clubs with cold beverages, as well as movies and other entertainment. There is no record of what soldiers still carrying the red dirt of the A Shau Valley or the caked mud of the Mekong Delta thought of all of this.

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The publication confirmed that those who had completed a tour in Vietnam surely had sacrificed: "From Valley Forge to Dak To, American soldiers have endured the hardships of a thousand battles. In Vietnam, however, unprecedented morale and welfare opportunities help make the burdens of war at least a little more bearable." The back cover of the magazine showed a line of men getting on a TWA jet with an attractive young flight attendant standing at the bottom of the stairs to greet them.

Lieutenant General Frank Mildren, deputy commanding general of the U.S. Army, Vietnam, added a note to this publication reminding the men how much Vietnam and the United States were in their debt. He said their family and friends were proud of them, and they "will look to you as an authority on what is happening in the Republic of Vietnam. This magazine, a history of this country and the year you have spent here, may help you to tell your story." It turned out that most at home did not want to hear the "story," and not many of those who returned wanted to tell it.

The informal network of those who had returned to the United States had a different theme to brief the returnees. Warnings about hostile reception and advice not to wear a uniform after landing were common. One army nurse was warned not to go out into the streets with her uniform on, which "made us feel worthless." In fact, she had no difficult encounters. At her home in upstate New York, her parents had a WELCOME HOME sign on the garage. A marine officer connecting to a flight back to Boston said that as soon as the stewardess saw him in uniform, she moved him "right up to first class." And in Boston he had "nice homecoming." A navy corpsman received a first-class upgrade as well by a grateful stewardess. At the Los Angeles airport, some people shouted at a returning soldier. Before going home the next day, he flew to Lewiston, Idaho, where he spent the night at a hotel. When he entered the hotel dining room in uniform, he received a warm welcome: "couldn't buy a drink. I couldn't buy my own dinner." Another said, "Most people didn't care a whit if you had served. I was never insulted, but was never thanked, either." A fellow returnee agreed: He acknowledged that he had no unpleasant incidents, "but nobody ever said, 'Welcome home,' or 'Thank you for your service and time and what you did for us in Vietnam.'"

Air Force Sergeant Joe Schwarzer who left Phan Rang AB had a different experience when he returned home. Traveling in his Air Force uniform he was greeted at the arrival gate by his family and a big hug from his mother. Continuing the celebration at home, Joe's family had

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banners and a cake to mark his arrival home from Vietnam. This may not have been the normal welcoming home for most veterans of the war, but most, if not all had some type of a personal low keyed welcoming ceremony.

Despite the warnings and the initial tension, most of the returnees had no real problems at the airports. Often there were protesters, but there were few serious encounters. One soldier

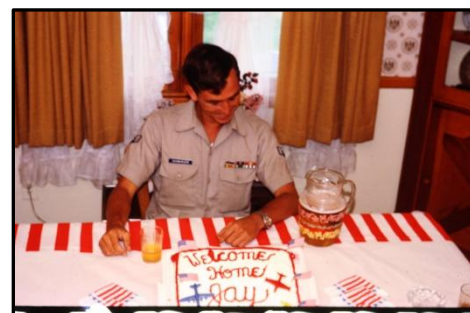
noted that the antagonism was directed toward the government and its policies rather than

with us guys who were over there." The navy corpsman who had been touched by the first-class upgrade from the stewardess said this was the only time that anyone other than family members greeted him as a "returning hero." They were warned not to wear uniforms when they got home because "you're just asking for trouble." On the other hand, the airlines gave discounts only to those in uniform. He wore his and said he had no problems.

The absence of gratitude often escalated to a more subtle indifference or, perhaps more accurately, a discomfort in discussing or even acknowledging the experience. Everyone wanted to move on. This often included the closest family members. One marine's family was "overjoyed" to see him home, but "they didn't dare ask me questions or anything. I didn't get debriefed. I wasn't in touch with anybody that I could really talk about the war with, but I was with people that loved me and accepted me." For another, who had been wounded on Hamburger Hill, the Vietnam experience



Joe Schwarzer being welcomed home by his mother at the airport.



Joe Schwarzer receiving a warm family welcome upon returning from Phan Rang.

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was a "nonsubject." After seven months in a hospital, "nobody asked questions about it. And I don't think it was out of meanness. I think it was probably just awkwardness on their part."

For one army nurse, it was only when she returned home that she had "problems dealing with my having been in Vietnam," because she had no warning about the attitudes of most people. She didn't encounter hostility but rather people who were "absolutely, totally indifferent." Her church organized a potluck supper to welcome her home, but even on this occasion, "there were very few people that mentioned anything about Vietnam. They didn't want to know anything about it." A soldier who had been drafted after he graduated from college said that while there were no unpleasant incidents, there was little warmth or interest. "My friends had all gone to grad school. They didn't quite know what to make of it. Nobody wanted to talk about it. I didn't talk about it for a long time."

One marine said, "You have survived your journey to war, and are ready to begin your journey from war . . . However, it is a very different you who are leaving. You are absolutely not the same person who started your journey to war months earlier . . . You are now back in the World, but without a real home, even in your home town. You are there, your soul isn't. And oh, the survivor's guilt. Strangely, you miss and want to be back with your Marine unit, even if it means going back to the hell hole that is the Nam."

Families and friends ignoring Vietnam was often the result of a tacit mutual agreement: Let's forget about this last year. Most men were not eager to discuss the war experience with those who had not been there. Even 50 some years later they still prefer only to talk about their experiences with someone that was there. They were not sure how to describe or explain it—and, in fact, many veterans have spent years trying to make sense of their experiences. One said, "For the most part, other than my family, nobody knew I was in Vietnam. I didn't talk about it and I didn't tell them." Another admitted, "I went in a hole. I didn't tell people I'd been there. I didn't talk about it. I certainly wasn't ashamed that I'd been there, but I certainly didn't broadcast it." A third offered his solution: "The only way to survive was to grow your hair as fast as you could, lose your tan, and don't tell anybody where you'd been the last few years."

There has been a great debate about the level of hostility the returning soldiers encountered at airports and elsewhere. Although many experienced no antagonism, some recalled very unpleasant incidents. Protesters did come to the gates of the major airports. One medic

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mentioned "jeers and threats" at Los Angeles International. An army nurse described her sadness and pain when she realized that many were making more than antiwar statements; they were directing "venom" toward the returnees. The parents and three sisters of a sailor who was a riverboat veteran on the Mekong Delta met him with **WELCOME HOME** signs while protesters were shouting that he was a "baby killer" and a "baby burner." A navy officer who arrived at San Diego heard people screaming. He looked behind him to try to figure out who it was they were yelling at, and he realized they were yelling at him.

Some veterans reported that they were spat upon. One recalled several men and one woman shouting and spitting at them at Seattle-Tacoma airport. A chaplain in uniform reported being spat upon. A wounded veteran came into New York and rode in an ambulance to St. Albans Hospital. The ambulance had screens on the windows to protect against thrown objects, and when he left the hospital someone spat at him. His father showed him a WELCOME HOME sign they had removed from the house because people were vandalizing it. Most people didn't know what to say to him. And others were "real assholes." He just started hanging out "with the hippies."

A combat veteran came into Travis Air Force Base in the Bay Area and went to see some friends enrolled in the university at Berkeley. While they were there, Governor Ronald Reagan sent the State Police and the National Guard to remove the protesters at People's Park. The authorities used tear gas against the demonstrators. Just two weeks earlier, this soldier had been on a difficult mission and the Americans had used CS gas to clear the area. That smell and that experience stayed with him. So as soon as he saw the canisters, he told his friends he was "getting out of here!"

Even nonviolent hostility left its mark. One serviceman tried to cash a U.S. government check at a New York bank. They refused to cash it. "I am sure part of that was that I was a soldier and that the people behind the counter didn't have a very high regard for soldiers." An Indiana marine married his high school sweetheart in 1970, six months after he returned. This was in Crawfordsville, where "you could not get any more Middle America, more patriotic." The minister at the local Methodist church initially refused to marry the couple if the groom wore his uniform, but finally relented: "I think that says more about how the attitude in the country had changed in those few years toward the war."

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Even as the war angered or numbed the country and its capacity to welcome veterans home, some veterans found each other. One soldier who arrived at the San Francisco airport had to wait overnight for a flight to the East Coast. He was wandering around the airport in dress uniform with a rucksack and an SKS—a Soviet carbine—souvenir. He was apprehensive about encountering protesters when he saw walking "toward me was somebody in a field jacket—beard, beads, peace symbols—and we're just walking toward each other." He expected a difficult confrontation. "I'm deciding what I'm going to do if this son of a bitch starts giving me some shit—and the guy, as we get closer, he ambles over to me and we stop, stood there looking at each other. He says, 'Welcome home. I was over there in '66—'67 with the 173rd.' We shook hands, and he went on his way and I went on mine."

As those men and women returned to the States and had their separate encounters, there was another group coming home, less visibly, on medical transport planes. In May 1969, nearly 10 percent of the returnees, 4,334 Americans, were flown out of Vietnam to various hospitals: some in Asia, with the primary places being the U.S. Army Hospital at Camp Zama and the Naval Hospital in Yokosuka, both in Japan; others to the Tripler Hospital in Hawaii; and many, often the most seriously wounded, directly to hospitals in the States. Patients sent to Japan were expected to return to duty within sixty days. The May medical evacuation totals were the highest monthly figures for the entire war.

Wartime medicine was about far more than dramatic treatment of serious battlefield injuries. In 1969, only 19 percent of the hospitalizations in Vietnam were for battle wounds and injuries. Approximately two-thirds of the patients were suffering from diseases and other medical problems. This was common in wartime, and by then the disease problem had been reduced in Vietnam. During World War II, 85 percent of the hospitalizations in the Southwest Pacific theater was due to disease. The major problems in Vietnam were fevers of "undetermined origin." The second major illness was malaria. The mosquito-borne disease was in some places epidemic, despite preventive medications. It was critical to control the high fevers that accompany malaria. Men were being sent back to the States in comas, in near-vegetative states, due to prolonged high temperatures. A third category was called "neuropsychiatric conditions." This was considered a nonbattle injury, though of course it was often directly the result of battlefield experiences. Throughout most of the period, diagnoses of these neuropsychiatric conditions in Vietnam had been more or less the same as for the army worldwide. However, in 1968 and 1969, while these hospitalizations increased throughout the

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army, they did so far more rapidly in Vietnam than anywhere else. These diagnoses doubled there between 1965 and 1970.

Men suffering battlefield injuries were saved in Vietnam due to several factors that had little to do with ordnance: good battlefield medicine, readily available whole blood in the field preserved in Styrofoam containers, rapid evacuation protocols, and excellent forward hospitals and surgical procedures. The immediate battlefield treatment was critical. One medic acknowledged that "while everyone was down trying to kill everyone else, I was the one up looking around for spare body parts. This bit of cynicism might be funny if it weren't so tragically true."

The army medics and navy corpsmen serving with marines had to do preventive support in the field—checking for blisters and other sores, dispensing salt tablets, urging men to change into dry socks. Some soldiers gave up wearing socks and the mesh combat boot insoles because they trapped dirt and mud, and retained water. They tried to air out their feet as much as possible when they were not on patrol. Some gave up wearing GI cotton underwear in the field in order to keep dry and ventilated. One said, "We didn't wear underwear because you couldn't or else it would rot."

During and after any firelight, army medics and navy corpsmen had a major, and dangerous, assignment in assessing conditions and stabilizing wounds, stopping bleeding, trying to comfort those with intense pain, and getting the wounded out of there. Their role was instinctively to triage the wounded. Medics acknowledged administering morphine against the guidelines when there had been loss of limbs and sedating men who were suffering great pain. Most of the time no one monitored the doses closely, especially in the midst of heavy casualties. At one hospital, when a helicopter came in with numbers of wounded, a medic gave morphine syrettes containing a hallgrani of the powerful drug to anyone who was screaming. One soldier's pant leg had four needles stuck through it. "I wondered if anybody could even survive two full grams of morphine. In training we were instructed to administer no more than two doses."

In the thirty days prior to June 8, 1969, about 3.5 percent of those who returned from Vietnam came in aluminum shipping crates. In that period, 1,591 American servicemen and 1 servicewoman died in Vietnam. This understates those who were killed in the theater of operation. In the early morning hours of June 3, during an operation in the South China Sea,

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the navy destroyer the USS Frank E. Evans collided with an Australian Navy aircraft carrier, and the front section of the Evans sank within minutes in 1,100 fathoms of water. Seventy-four men were lost. These included three brothers, Gary (age twenty-two), Gregory (twenty one), and Kelly (nineteen) from Niobrara, Nebraska. The Sage brothers had requested that they serve together.

The 1,592 dead came from all fifty states plus Puerto Rico, Guam, and Washington, DC. In fact, 14 were from Puerto Rico. The most were from California, with 172. New York counted 118, Michigan 94, Texas 86, and Ohio and Pennsylvania had 75 each. The killed in action included 97 eighteen-year-olds, 214 nineteen-year-olds, and 421 twenty year-olds. One hundred forty-four were over age twenty-five-83 percent of those killed were baby boomers.

The postwar generation that served in Vietnam in 1969 was basically born in the presidency of Harry Truman (1945-1953). But there were a few casualties who were Eisenhower babies. Dan Bullock was one of these. The youngest serviceman to die in Vietnam, Bullock, a black marine, was fifteen years old when he was killed on June 7, 1969. Born in North Carolina, he was eleven when his mother died, and his father soon remarried and moved to Brooklyn. He did not like the city, and at age fourteen, with an altered birth certificate, Bullock, who was large for his age, joined the marines. He started boot camp at Parris Island in September 1968, and by May 1969 he was in Vietnam. Stationed at An Hoa, on the night of June 6 he was on guard duty on the perimeter. During an NVA attack, Bullock was killed in a firefight. A marine who served with him said, "He did everything we did except he was killed the first time in combat." Newsweek magazine, in its profile section, included brief stories on Dan Bullock and Sharon Lane.

Body bags and ponchos covered the dead, rendering them almost anonymous, abstracting them as numbers rather than young men. The mangling nature of lethal ordnance, the missing body parts and faces all amplified the distancing. But it was hard to separate oneself from the cost of it all when bags containing bodies were lined up and stacked up for processing. The industrial scale of "processing" did not negate the individuality of human tragedy. In his powerful novel *The Quiet American*, capturing the war shifting from the French to the Americans in the middle 1950s, Graham Greene described a bombing in a Saigon square that left many dead. His main character, Fowler, was stunned by the attack and looked closely at some of the bodies. He reflected, "Suffering is not increased by numbers; one body can contain all the suffering the world can feel." One naval officer out on the hospital ship *Repose* off of I

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Corps was overwhelmed by "the body bags lined up on the ship to be sent back to the U.S. with eighteen- and nineteen-year-old kids in them." It was a haunting sight—"the carnage of those young people in this completely surreal environment."

Soldiers regretted that there was no time to memorialize the lost men. And there wasn't, at least not out in the bush. Memorials could come back at base camps later. If it was often impossible to grieve in the field, it was also impossible not to grieve the loss of a friend—or even those who were not close friends but were part of a unit. One chaplain wrote, "Today I conduct the memorial service for K. He hadn't been in the unit long enough to make friends." But they all gathered for K, who had been shot by a sniper while walking across a bamboo bridge?

Sometimes the cruel sequencing of war made grieving difficult. Tom Martin, a young schoolteacher in New Jersey, was drafted and found himself in the assault on Dong Ap Bia. He was wounded by friendly fire on May 11, and a week later he was in Japan recuperating. On that day, a good friend of his, Lenny Hickson, was killed on the hill. A Navajo Indian from Window Rock, Arizona, Hickson with his brother and sister were the first Navajo triplets to survive birth. His niece described him as the "shining star" of the family, "the one the relatives wanted to take care of, very athletic, handsome, charismatic, funny. When he signed up, he went to do his part, and although a fear nickered at his spirit, he went. He became one of the best soldiers—ever according to his army buddies. They said he was young. He was strong. He was handsome. He was the platoon's combat star, and without knowing it, he trained all his life to go to war. The heartache of his twenty-two years of life is just that—he only got twenty-two years."

His death was devastating to his family and to the people on his reservation. And it was devastating to Tom Martin. He wrote to Lenny Hickson's parents, a letter subsequently published in the Navajo Times, about Lenny, "a buddy of mine in Vietnam." He told them how Lenny helped him to "adjust to the world of the jungle," sacrificing his own rest to help Tom. The two of them often did night guard duty together, keeping each other awake when both of them were so tired. Lenny was an M60 machine gunner, requiring him to carry not only the twentyfive-pound gun but also extra rounds of ammunition. While most carried two hundred rounds, and a few could take the extra weight of four hundred rounds, Lenny carried eight hundred rounds. When Tom Martin was wounded, Lenny Hickson ran out of his own cover to

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help his friend. "What a privilege to have known such a man."

Memorial services were typically held when the units returned to a fire support base or elsewhere in the rear area. They followed a standard protocol: Someone would read the name or names of the men who had been killed, with a rifle stuck in the ground with its bayonet and a pair of boots for each of the dead. Sometimes the CO or another man from the unit offered a few words. A chaplain would make a few comments: "We give him to God and pray for them. We'd pray for their families . . . very brief—always very brief." There was customarily a calling of the roll of the dead. This chaplain said that "the men usually didn't want to talk much about it. They showed great respect and all. But you know, going through their mind—they were thinking, 'I'll probably be the next one.'" And another chaplain underlined why caution was so necessary. Following one of his memorial services, as the company was moving out to the perimeter, one man stepped on a mine and was "blown to bits. One leg is located about fifty yards from the site of explosion. His other leg is never found."

In July 1969, the first troops returned home as part of the drawdown marking Vietnamization. Unlike the individual returns, this involved a unit returning as a group. There was a parade in Seattle marking the return of the 3rd Battalion of the 60th Infantry Division to Fort Lewis. They were welcomed home "by bands, beauty queens, flowery oratory, and some tears." Children of base personnel were there with WELCOME HOME signs. There were protesters as well. A band played "When Johnny Comes Marching Home." And a woman "circled around the troops showing a picture of her son and asking if they knew him." She told them he had written on July 14, 1968, sending the picture and writing on the back that he would be home soon. He was killed the next day." She hoped to learn from them more about her son, Robert Hickox. None of the men she approached knew him.

There was a sense by the summer of 1969 that the war was changing if not ending. With the drawdown and the drawing back begun, the accounting for the war and the assessment of results had commenced in earnest. When President Nixon made a surprise visit to Vietnam in July, he said at Di An, "I think' history will record that this may have been one of America's finest hours, because we took a difficult task and succeeded." Most critics were dismissive of the Churchillian description of the American hour. And "success" was elusive and still to be determined. It was clear that the goal was shifting. Max Frankel, a reporter for The New York Times, filed a report from Saigon pointing out that this presidential visit had none of the "come

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home with that coonskin on the wall" language of LBJ in 1966. One of the president's aides told him that "in a normal war the military factors are always dominant, but this is not a normal war."

The men in the field certainly didn't need to be told that. Among the files of official photographs of President Nixon's visit is a picture of him standing on the hood of a jeep, wearing a suit and white shirt and tie, and reaching up to shake the hands of a soldier who is leaning over from an armored personnel carrier to greet the commander in chief. Spray-painted on the side of the military vehicle, just next to the hands locked in a handshake, were the words MAGICAL MYSTERY TOUR.

(**Jim Kucipeck** wrote after reading this chapter: "...“Getting Out of Vietnam”. It is still 1969! Of course, politics played a significant role again. Now the Nixon administration is winding down the war, and Vietnamization is starting to take place. The “grunts” want to get out alive and how they were treated when they did come home (of course we know that because that happened to some of us)! When the bodies of our brothers were sent home and how their parents were notified is heart rending.”)

Col. Henderson Completes 300

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, September 26, 1968)

Lt. Col. James D. Henderson, a B-57 Canberra pilot with the 8th TBS, recently completed his 300th combat mission in Vietnam.

The Colonel has seen action throughout Southeast Asia. His most exciting mission was flown earlier this year west of Dong Hoi, a city in the southern panhandle of North Vietnam. It was a night mission against enemy truck traffic on the infiltration routes.

“We had seven 37 mm antiaircraft gun sites firing at us on each pass,” the Colonel said. “In spite of the heavy fire we managed to destroy ten trucks and were credited with six secondary fires and five secondary explosions.”

Colonel Henderson indicated that the pilot cannot let the anti-aircraft fire interfere with the mission.

“Sometimes when you are working on the target,” he said, “the FAC will ask whether you want to go after the guns that are firing at you. You must stay with the trucks though, because destroying trucks is the mission, the reason you are there. You can’t let the ground fire interfere with your work or you won’t get anything done.”

During his combat tour of duty in Vietnam, Colonel Henderson has accumulated more than 700 combat hours in the B-57. He has high praise for the bomber.

Additional information on Jim Henderson

- **Retired Col. Jim Henderson started the Tennessee Maneuvers World War II Museum in 1991 at Cumberland University.**
- **Until about 1995, the museum display sat in a corner at the Cumberland University library. Students were invited to come see artifacts from the war, such as a tablecloth taken from Hitler’s bunker at the end of the war.**
- **In 1996, Henderson started looking for a new location for his display, as he wanted more people to be able to experience some of the artifacts. What he found was a small house in Fiddlers Grove with no electricity.**
- **“I spent about \$900 getting electricity put in that building, but it was well worth it,” said Henderson.**

Henderson reappointed Tennessee American Legion historian

Staff Reports • Updated Aug 8, 2013

Retired Lt. Col. Jim D. Henderson, of Lebanon, was reappointed historian for the Tennessee Department of the American Legion.

Henderson has served in that capacity for several years and will continue to do so under new Commander George Harper, of Memphis.

The American Legion national headquarters in Indianapolis certified Henderson’s appointment.

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As historian for the state, Henderson is responsible for Tennessee American Legion history, and helps the department and post historians coordinate, unify and promote their work.

The office of historian is of growing importance, Henderson said. A portion of his responsibility is the preservation of historical records and artifacts, The state historian also serves as chairman of the Tennessee Department of the American Legion’s award committee, including determining recipients of the Legionnaire of the Year, JROTC class of the year awards and many others.

Henderson is a 31-year veteran of the Air Force, Army, National Guard and reserves and holds master’s in business administration and bachelor’s degrees. He is semi-retired and works as a lecturer on military history, including former director of the Tennessee’s 50th Commemoration of the World War II era, with an emphasis on the maneuvers, or war games, involving more than 800,000 personnel.

Henderson is curator and director of the World War II museum at the James E. Ward Center in Lebanon, which is open to the public by appointment and during the Wilson County Fair from Aug. 16-24.

DEAR BALDY

DEAR BALDY,

Do you think it would be possible for the NCO Club to obtain the services of a metal worker to correct their “refreshment” can openers. Not that I lose too much liquid that way, but I get tired of constantly wiping my chin and having the stuff dribble onto my shirt. If the openers can’t be repaired, do you think the club could issue bibs?

SGT. DRIBBLECHIN

DEAR DRIBBLECHIN,

I see no reason why your request should not be granted. I do, however, see that it will not! !

DEAR BALDY,

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I've been in-country for eight months. I go on R&R next month and will meet my bride of ten months in Hawaii. Today I received a letter from my parents. They want to meet me in Hawaii also!! What do I do?

FRUSTRATED

DEAR FRUSTRATED,

The situation facing you sound like about as much fun as a shivaree on your wedding night! I suggest changing your R&R to Kuala Lumpur and telling your folks you've been declared "mission essential" and shipped up-country.

BALDY

(Phan Fare, The Happy Valley Weekly, September 26, 1968)

C-130 Unloading

(A sketch by SSgt. Ronald Dreher)



One of the many sketches by SSgt. Ronald Dreher, 35th Supply Squadron, 4/69-4/69. Ronald sketches include scenes from Phan Rang AB and the surrounding area. He even sketched on his letters home to his parents and these will be featured in future issues of the Phan Rang Newsletter.



Michael J. Quarnaccio

“He is a veteran of the Southeast Asia conflict, where he flew cargo resupply missions out of Phan Rang AB for the 309th SOS.”

General Quarnaccio entered the Air Force in 1966 through Officer Training School, Lackland AFB, TX. He has served in a variety of flying, command and staff positions during his career in the Air Force and the Air Force Reserve. He is a command pilot with more than 6,000 hours in mostly cargo and troop transport aircraft. He is a veteran of the Southeast Asia conflict, where he flew cargo resupply missions out of Phan Rang AB for the 309th SOS. Under his leadership, the 433rd Airlift Wing played a major role in the Persian Gulf War, and has participated in several national and international relief missions to regions devastated by war, famine and natural disaster.

General Quarnaccio, a native of Newark, NJ, is married to the former Connie W Walker of Blackshear, Ga. They have a daughter, Pamela and a son, David.

EDUCATION

- 1966 Bachelor of Science degree in Business Administration, Seton Hall University, NJ
- 1977 Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL
- 1982 Master's Degree in Personnel Management, Webster University, Fort Sam Houston, TX
- 1984 National War College, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C.

ASSIGNMENTS

- 1. Dec 1966-Apr 1968 Student, undergraduate pilot training, Moody MB, Ga.

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2. Jun 1968-Aug 1968 Student, C-123 transport crew training, Hurlburt Field; Fla.
3. **Aug 1968-Aug 1969 C-123 transport pilot, 309th Special Operations Squadron, Phan Rang AB, Republic of Vietnam**
4. Sept 1969-Dec 1969 Student, C-141 transport crew training, Altus AFB, OK
5. Dec 1969-Jun 1972 C-141 transport pilot, later, standardization and evaluation officer, 15th Military Airlift Squadron, Norton AFB, CA.
6. Jun 1972-Jun 1973 C-141 instructor/examiner pilot, 57th Military Airlift Squadron, Altus AFB, OK
7. Jun 1973 Separated from active duty and entered the Air Force Reserve
8. Jun 1973-Aug 1976 C-141 instructor/examiner pilot, later, assistant flight commander, 300th Military Airlift Squadron, Charleston MB, SC
9. Aug 1976-Jul 1977 student. Air Command and Staff College, Maxwell AFB, AL
10. Jul 1977-Jan 1981 Air operations officer, Headquarters Air Force Reserve, Robins AFB, GA
11. Jan 1981-Jul 1981 Operations officer, 68th Tactical Airlift Squadron, 433rd Tactical Airlift Wing, Kelly AFB, TX
12. Jul 1981-Jul 1983 Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations, 433rd Tactical Airlift Wing, Kelly AFB, TX
13. Jul 1983-Jun 1984 Student, National War College, Fort Lesley J. McNair, Washington, D.C.
14. Jun 1984-Oct 1984 Assistant Deputy Commander for Operations, 433rd Tactical Airlift Wmg, Kelly AFB, TX
15. Oct 1984-Jun 1987 Commander, 913th Tactical Airlift Group; Willow Grove, PA
16. Jun 1987-May 1989 Deputy Chief of Staff for Plans. Headquarters Air Force Reserve, Robins AFB, GA.
17. May 1989-Feb 1990 Commander, 302nd Tactical Airlift Wing, Peterson AFB, CO
18. Feb 1990-Jan 1995 Commander, 433rd Airlift Wing (formerly 433rd Military Airlift Wing), Kelly AFB, TX
19. January 1995-Present Commander, 512th Airlift Wing, Dover AFB, DE

FLIGHT INFORMATION

Rating: Command Pilot

Flight Hour: more than 6,000 hours, over 900 hours combat time, 133 combat missions

Aircraft flown: T-37, T-38, T-41, C-12313, C-123K, C-141A, C-14113, C-130B, C-130E, C-5A, C-5B

MAJOR AWARDS AND DECORATIONS

Legion of Merit with one Oak Leaf Cluster

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Distinguished Flying Cross

Air Force Meritorious Service Medal with two Oak Leaf Cluster

Air Medal with three Oak Leaf Clusters

Air Force Outstanding Unit Award with "V" Device and three Oak Leaf Clusters

Air Force Organizational Excellence Award

Combat Readiness Medal

National Defense Service Medal with one Service Star

Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal

Vietnam Service Medal with eight devices

Southwest Asia Service Medal

Armed Forces Reserve Medal with two devices

Republic of Vietnam Gallantry Cross with palm

Republic of Vietnam Campaign Medal

Kuwait Liberation Medal

Michael is a graduate of Seton Hall University, South Orange, N.J., and earned a master of business administration degree in personnel management from Webster College.

Quarnaccio entered the Air Force in August 1966 and was commissioned a second lieutenant in October 1966 through the Officers Training School at Lackland Air Force Base, Texas.

From August 26, 1968 to August 26 1969 he was stationed at Phan Rang AB, flying C-123 Providers in the 309th SOS. 1st Lt. Michael received the Distinguished Flying Cross for his service in Vietnam. Many of the missions flown were fraught with danger and hardly any would have been considered routine. He recounts being diverted on final approach to an air field because they were receiving incoming mortar attacks near the end of the runway. After circling for awhile they were given the green light to land again and shortly after getting parked the mortar attack resumed and they hastily left without any damage to the aircraft.

He transferred to the Air Force Reserve in 1978 and after 31 ½ years he retired as a Brig. Gen.

Additional media information:

- February 12, 1986. Michael J. Quarnaccio, commander of the Air Force 913th Tactical

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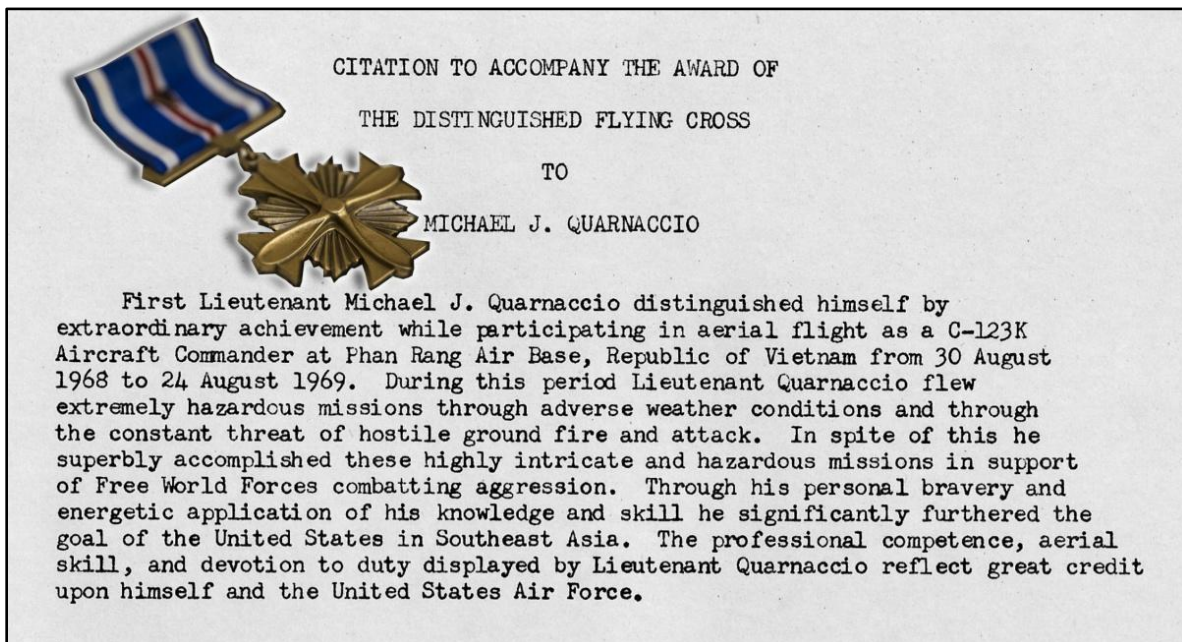
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Airlift Group at Naval Air Station Willow Grove in Horaham Township, has been promoted to colonel in the Air Force Reserved effective this summer. Quarnaccio is a graduate of the National War College and the Air Command and Staff College. (Source: Daily Intelligencer/Montgomery County Record, Wednesday, February 12, 1986.)

- 1989 Col. Michael J. Quarnaccio has taken command of the 302nd Tactical Airlift Wing, a reserve unit that flies cargo planes. (Source: Gazette Telegraph, Thursday, July 6, 1989.)
- BG Michael J. Quarnaccio became commander of 433rd Airlift Wing, Kelly AFB, TX. 4 February 1990. (433rd Lineage)
- Texas Honor Air reservists killed in crash of cargo jet the first reservist to die while aiding the cause of Operation Desert Shield. Nine Texas reservists to die were members of the 433rd Military Airlift Wing at Kelly AFB commanded by Col. Michael J. Quarnaccio. (Source: Daily Herald, Sunday, September 9, 1990.)
- 1990 "Desert stuns reserve air crews" Col. Quarnaccio (433rd Wing Commander) commented in the article about reservist, "In fact, we've had more volunteers than we can use right now." (Source: Pacific Stars and Stripes, Thursday August 30, 1990)
- 1993, January 5, Promoted to Brigadier General. (Source: Executive Calendar of the Senate of the United States.)



ANZAC DAY IN BRISBANE 2018



The days activities started at the Treasury Casino, in Brisbane where the guys assembled early and marched off at 1140 A.M. for the parade. Afterwards everyone assembled at Harlequin Jacks at the Sofitel Hotel where they all assembled and ate and drank and yarned the afternoon away. The afternoon was enjoyed by all members of No. 2 Squadron, and some of their wives and partners.



Accolades on Facebook

Randy Radar: THANKS to all those who work so hard to put together things like the newsletter (that makes us remember); the reunions (which help many to heal, and some to bond); the

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“roster” (identifying those who are on this site); as well as those who keep this site running (which serves so many purposes they are impossible to name). Thanks folks, your work REALLY is appreciated!

Ron Keith: Randy Radar is right. Everyone should thank all the people involved with this site. You may not know but this has to be the best military base site anywhere. The Phan Rang News is great. I don't know of any other base that has this. I have used it to get info on a MIA friend. The reunion is fantastic. Sounds like plenty of time to sit around and talk In addition to the Grand Ole Opry and the Banquet. Some base reunions don't have a banquet and have about every minute planed to go to different places. The Nashville reunion just couldn't be any better. Sounds like Doug Severt and his wife and two other couples spent time at the host hotel in making arrangements to bring you the best possible reunion. I am sure that there are many people involved in making the reunion great and in keeping this site going, the name Doug Severt always seems to be there. Please appreciate what all that he does and thank him. He has to be the best anywhere.

Doug Severt: I'm afraid I'm going to get a “big head” reading all of these wonderful accolades so I better say thanks and let me say a few words. I've said it and so many others have as well that our Phan Rang community is really one big family. I really believe that everyone that has ever attended a reunion always looks forward to the next one when we can all get together again. One thing that sustains us from reunion to reunion is when we can have a chance encounter with other Phan Rangers during the year. I've had so many people ask me what was planned at the reunion besides the Opry and the banquet and I just say that the most important event is going to be those conversations and just being with each other in the hospitality suite. Yes, I think our Facebook place is pretty special as well, because of all that come here to visit and just sit and listen. We are a group that really cares for each other and looks out for one another. We also share our memories, both in pictures and words and those memories are what I want to preserve by putting them in a newsletter that will be preserved for prosperity at the University of Florida. My thanks to everyone that has shared so many of their stories and my Aussie mates for helping me out with so many articles. Thanks again for appreciating and sharing in what we do here. Your comments make it all worthwhile.

Doug's Comments

This newsletter was compiled and published by [Douglas Severt](#). Previous issues of the Phan

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Rang Newsletter are available [here](#) for download.