



Fall 2001

~~Rear Security~~

25th Div LRRP - Co F, 50th Inf (LRP) - Co F, 75th Inf Ranger

LRRP
LRP
Ranger

I hope each and every one of you and your families enjoy one of the happiest, most peaceful seasons ever.

HAPPY HOLIDAYS

I have had a few questions lately about whether or not I was going to create a new Christmas card this year. I began looking at things and decided a newsletter may be a more worthwhile effort. Lots has happened since November of 2000 when I last issued one of these. The army issued black berets to everyone and Rangers got a tan one, we found a few people who we had been looking for, etc. And its time to start thinking about our reunions again. In this holiday season, that seems very appropriate. Damn, it's important!

Equally important is our heritage. I asked Captain Ponzillo (our first CO) to document our beginnings. That story begins on page 3.

Bill Mrkvicka

TROSTEL FINALLY GETS PINNED

Submitted by Dan Nate

Thirty-two years following his departure from Uncle Sam's vacation-land in the sun, one of our own, Butch Trostel, was awarded his due in the form of a medals award ceremony conducted by members representing the body of the membership of the 75th. In an unprecedented ceremony conducted Memorial Day weekend at "THE WALL", he was "pinned" with his full complement of Vietnam War medals he'd earned but had never received, nor requested from St. Louis. Surrounded by a compliment of 15 LRP/Rangers, the F co. Sgt. stood at attention while CPT (ret) Mark Ponzillo read aloud the orders as Trostel's wife received the medals from Dan Nate and individually positioned them on his shirt. The award medals themselves were provided by former Team leader, Sgt. Tom Besser, a close friend and previous "fellow 'nam LRP". According to Butch's wife, Ann, he was truly surprised, and most appreciative of the respect and recognition bestowed. I would like to add that this was the first visit to the War Memorial, and THE WALL for each of them. Welcome Home, Butch. On page 3 are letters from Sgt. Trostel and his wife in which they

describe their feelings and events that led to this "special day".

Reunion 2002

The 75th Regiment Associaton reunion is quickly coming up. It is tentatively scheduled for July 8 - 12, 2002. It will be held in Columbus, Ga. We normally have a contingent of 45 to 60 guys who attend. In order to attend, you have to be a member of the 75th Ranger Regiment Association - cost is \$25 per year. The reunion registration fee is in the range of \$50 - \$75 per person - that fee usually includes the banquet and a t-shirt. If you need information, application forms, etc, contact Bill Mrkvicka (716-247-7257) Joe Little (623-877-3797) or Emmett Hiltibrand (706-323-5426).

Check out the report on the next page. Tom Schommer writes of the midwest reunion held about two months ago.

On Memorial Day weekend 2002, we will have our tenth annual mini-reunion at the Wall in Washington DC. Fifteen to twenty of us meet at the Wall on Friday, Saturday and Sunday. If you can be in the vicinity this coming May, stop in and join us. This get together is informal. We go out to eat one night as a group. The rest of the time we hang together, visit the monuments and make a few trips to the Wall to look up the 39 names that belong to us.

To those of you interested in old buddies, we now have a roster that includes 778 names. We know the whereabouts of 399 of those on the list. That includes 39 whose names are on the wall and 29 who have died since returning from Viet Nam. We are still searching for 331 of the guys - some whose first names we don't yet know. If you want a copy of the roster, let me know and I will get a copy to you. Contact me at:

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Email: wmrkvick@rochester.rr.com

Tom Schommer (Dec 1969 to Dec 1970) did the following report on a reunion some of the guys held

AAR (After Action Report): On Thursday October 11, 2001 a light recon team from Co. F 75th INF comprised of Tom Schommer, Frankie Hamilton, Ben Welsh, Bob Gericke and Mike Rohly inserted into the Bettendorf Triangle (Bettendorf, Iowa). Having run into an overwhelming enemy force of Miller and Budweiser they were re-inforced the next day by Steve Davidson, Tim Welch, Elias David, Jim Kivipelto, Charles Vanneman, and Mike Zamjahn. With complete disregard for their own personnel safety these Rangers of Co. F continually assaulted beer cooler after beer cooler leaving nothing but devastation in their wake. The locals in Bettendorf, Iowa were shocked by the carnage and ferocity displayed by this HEAVY Ranger team. A spokesperson for the local aluminum recycling center told of being inundated with empty aluminum casualties as the Ranger raid continued through Saturday and ended around checkout at 1200 hours on Sunday.

Thirty-one years ago this could have been the after action report from a 3 day stand down, but now we are more mature and wiser to carry on like that. In reality the recovery time from a 3 day stand down is too hard and long for us to carry on like we did so many years ago. Remember those stand downs we would have at Cu Chi where they'd hook up a trailer, go to the PX, fill it with beer and ice and park it in the company area for all to indulge. The greatest cooks in the division would prepare the best food you could ask for in Vietnam and we'd even have a floorshow at the company bar.

Well those mentioned in the above AAR met in Bettendorf, Iowa at the Holiday Inn for a 3 day stand down/reunion this last October 11th. Nothing was planned formally, other than getting together and throwing back a few cold ones with old friends, reliving/retelling old war stories and looking at each others photo albums. Nicknames like Sham, Homer, Pops, Gross, Zam, Squeek, TC, Kip, and Funk were used again instead of surnames. The major retailer that benefited from this stand down, other than the local beer distributor, was the Wal-Mart photo copying department as we made so many copies of others pictures that the machine was continually running out of paper.

I will use nicknames from here on to protect the guilty. The favorite reproductions included Gross on shit burning detail, Midnight Phantom and the "Recon Bean" and the follow up full spew picture, Pops in his toga on a midnight raid of the mess hall, and others. Stories of the "rumble in the jungle", the staged boxing match between Sham and Homer that General Green stopped to see

what the hell was going on at 10 A.M. in the Ranger area and he ended up getting CS'ed by an anonymous Ranger. The sight of General Green stumbling around with watery eyes and snot hanging out of his nose, cursing us Rangers and vowing to get even (which he did by keeping us out in the field for a month with no more than a day back in base camp between missions) is something that is hard to forget.

Other stories that were remembered are the nude follies incident in the company bar, when a new club NCO tried to install a dress code and it was tested one night when two Rangers named Kip and EEL waltzed in clad in only in their jungle boots and the place went wild. A mission where one team had to paddle down a river in a rubber raft to see if they could draw enemy fire, which they did, one round across the bow, they turned the inflatable raft around and paddled as hard as they could to get out of there and were spinning in circles out of control. TC claims the only reason they never received anymore fire was the VC were laughing too hard at them. Gross's unique talent of being able to piss over any army vehicle length-wise was always a source of entertainment and many of his exploits were heralded again. The almost international incident at Bearcat where the second platoon was throwing white smoke grenades in the Thai area across the road from us and someone, who is still unknown to this day, threw a CS grenade not once but 3 times and finally irked the Thai's to the point where they got online with weapons locked and loaded. Luckily the situation was diffused. Eating crickets as long as a Lucky Strike cigarette pack to gross some REMFs out in a bar at Tay Ninh. These were just a few of the tall tales that were re-told and there were many more that I can't remember and will need to hear again, or that wouldn't pass censorship and are meant to be shared only at these stand downs.

The thing that amazed me at the stand down was that no one had changed much personality-wise. Most of us cast a bigger shadow now than we did 31 years ago, but I blame that on the heat and humidity in Nam that reduced most of us to a mere shadow of our former selves. The 3 days went by too fast and were a blur of stories and laughter. I can't remember when I've ever laughed so hard for so long. I felt like it had only been weeks instead of years that we hadn't seen each other. All who attended have decided to get together again in 2 years, date and place to be determined and are wondering if anyone else from the company would be interested in a 3 day stand down in 2003.

Tom Schommer

Our History

Many people have talked about documenting the history of our unit. As we talked about it, it became obvious that the place to start was "in the beginning". We asked Mark Ponzillo, the founder and first Commanding Officer of the 25th Div LRRPs / Co F, 50th Infantry (LRP) / Co F, 75th Infantry Ranger to document how we got started. "Cpt P" was gracious enough to write the following article.

Just after the 25th Infantry Division arrived in Viet Nam and set-up operations in and around Cu Chi it was decided that the efforts of a special organization to provide tactical intelligence in and around the operational area, of the division, was necessary. In March 1966 a request for an officer, schooled and experienced in Reconnaissance operations, was placed in the personal arena.

While on my way from the 10th Special Forces Group (in Europe) to the 5th Special Forces Group (in country) I was pulled from the replacement station, in Saigon, late one night and sent to the 25th Infantry Division without explanation. When I got to the division base camp, at Cu Chi, I was met on the helipad by the division commander (MG Fred Wynhan [SIC]). He said "welcome, I'll talk to you tomorrow about why you're here" [or words to that effect] and had me taken to a GP Medium (officer's tent) somewhere near the division CP. As there were no orders assigning me to the division, no one knew who I was or why I showed-up at dark-plus-30 minutes. I wasn't sure why I was there. (Note: I wasn't too happy when I was informed that there were no Airborne slots in the unit.) The next morning the CG introduced me to the division staff and told them of his plans for the creation of a "Recon" unit. He further said that he personally requested a Special Forces Officer for the job.

After sitting around for a few days without orders (on paper or otherwise) I started to ask about the division's current recon unit/organization. All I got were blank stares. I then realized that the division did not have anything organized for division level recon operations. I was assigned to the division headquarters company and detailed to the division G-2. He said, "...go organize a Long Range Patrol unit and keep him informed of your progress." As an aside I was directed to be up-and-running by the 1st week of June, 1966.

I drew a weapon and a Yellow Legal Pad, from supply, and wrote-up a concept based on the Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol operations that were being conducted in Europe and which I had personal knowledge of and recent experience in that program. My plan was approved and I was given carte blanche to get things moving. I met the commander of D Trp 3/4 Cav and explained what I was attempting to do. He had all of the tactical airlift I needed therefore, I needed him and his unit. After confirming that I was under division orders to create a recon unit, he (the troop commander) lamented to my presence in his area and my forthcoming requirements for his organization.



The first thing I had to do at D Troop was to meet the pilots, so I moved in with them. I observed who seemed experienced enough and willing to get involved with the unique aspect of what would be required to support inserting and extracting LRRP teams. I gave several classes/briefings and requested volunteers (pilots) who wanted to do the over-and-above flying requirements.

I was now ready to recruit volunteers for the operational teams that would conduct the LRRP missions in enemy controlled areas while out of fire support range during day and night operations. Initially, I traveled to all of the combat-arms units, in the Cu Chi base camp and requested the services of volunteers for special duty. (Note: I got some real good people right away. I also got some people who couldn't find their way around Cu Chi, in the daylight.

The initial group had the hardest job(s). We had to clear an area for living and training, in the troop AO. We needed shelter and basic equipment. We started acquiring equipment, without paperwork, and building a unit that no one knew what we were up to.

To this day I don't know how I got my XO. He

showed up one day, with a ranger tab and a request to join the unit. He was a God-send. After he and I culled the herd of those first volunteers who just didn't fit the mold, he went and got some people he knew. As I didn't know anyone in the division I got permission to hang around the division replacement detachment and look for potential candidates for the LRRP company (Provisional). (Note: This drove the G-1 crazy because we were not TO&E or TDA.) Finally I just posted a handwritten sign that said "Volunteers Wanted for Hazardous Duty." I figured that anyone that would go for that pitch would be a good candidate for what we were about to do.

While all of this personnel activity was going on, we started a training program aimed at small unit (team) operations. We also started a PT program primarily consisting of running. LRRP operations require the ability to run to live if detected by the enemy. We used to run very early in the morning to stay away from the heat. We ran close to and around the division headquarters so the staff couldn't sleep without being aware that there were real (crazy) soldiers, at work.

Some of the potential team leaders, my XO and myself got to the LRRP unit in the 1st Infantry Division. They were having success, and divisional support. I wanted our senior leaders to see an actual operating unit. They were very good to us and gave us our first special unit identification - "Bush Hats". They looked good and were functional in the bush, for a lot of reasons/purposes.

We needed some complete immersion training, before actual operations, so I sent a group of approximately 20 NCO's to the 5th Special Forces "Delta" project which was presenting/conducting the forerunner to the Recondo School program. 5th Group gave us 100 sets of "Tiger Suits". Great for morale and unit identification. Our division commander liked what we were about. The division staff was getting a bit wary about our special status, needs and requirements.

It was towards the end of May [no later than the 1st of June] and we put out our first patrol and confirmed some information the G2 had suspicions about. The division seemed pleased with what we could provide in support of their operational plans.

Bottom line. Between June 1st and the end of November 1966 the 25th Infantry Division LRRP Company (provisional) acquired a lot of special communications equipment, uniforms, weapons, food and survival gear and conducted numerous successful operations, gained the confidence of the division

commander and his staff, perfected operational procedures, became part of the D Troop family, did things that others only dreamed of and brought the enemy's denied areas and movements to the table for exploitation by the division's combat units.

In November of 66 the LRRP's started the biggest battle the division was involved in up to and including that time. A five man LRRP team while laying next to a trail counted 181 NVA soldiers who passed within 10 feet of their position after midnight and were engaged mid-morning the next day. This would have never happened if it had not been for the LRRP team.

Stories will be written, tales will be told and repeated, memories will dim. But the impact of the men and operations of the original 25th Inf Div LRRP's will never be totally appreciated; except by those special individuals who created, from nothing, a unit with a lineage that lives-on in their recorded successes, work ethic, courage and combat initiatives which are modeled in current Army reconnaissance doctrine.

Epilogue: The 25th Inf Div LRRP Company (Provisional) was created from nothing to an operational unit in less than two months. Until the Army provided authorization for a TO&E Long Range Recon Company per division (insert date here) only the most very special of men were involved in all of the unique ramifications of the genesis of Army Long Range Reconnaissance and all that it entails.

LRRP1
Mark



The Old Neighborhood - beautiful suburban Cu Chi.

Ann Trostel's letter to the LRRPs/Co F.

Over the years my husband, Byrl, has done everything possible to block out the memories of Vietnam, from alcohol to drugs, sometimes disappearing for days at a time, fighting in bars, being abusive to me, and just plain hating the world and everything around him; most of all, hating himself. That war has had an affect upon every facet of his life, and mine, and our children's. We have probably spent as much of our married life separated, as we have together. I tried everything to get this man out of my head, and out of my life, but I just couldn't let go of the man that I knew was hiding, down deep; The man that I fell in love with. After three (3) heart attacks and very nearly dying, Byrl finally decided he wanted to live, and that what he and I had was worth living for. That was four (4) years ago, and we have come a long way since then.

So, the timing was nigh for us to go to THE WALL, both of us, for I too am a victim of that War, and we both needed to "heal". For me, it was an overwhelming experience. I felt an instant bonding to all the guys I met from the 75th, and their wives and families. It's like we all share a secret that we can't tell anyone, but it's OK not to tell because we already know what it is that's wrong. I feel like I could call upon any of the guys I met, if I ever needed anything.

Byrl was so surprised, first of all, that anyone remembered him, and then when I mentioned to Dan Nate that Byrl had never received any of his Vietnam medals, the next thing I knew Byrl's old friend Tom Besser had gone out and gotten them for him. The ceremony that they gave him at THE WALL blew us both away. I think for the first time since Vietnam, he felt a sense of honor and self-respect about what he did there instead of self hate. I felt a sense of pride for my husband, because I always knew what a special man he was, and having the guys acknowledge that was simply overwhelming for me.

Watching all of the wonderful guys from F Co. and the 75th, walk THE WALL and honor those boys/men that didn't come Home, was a very emotional experience. I felt an overwhelming presence at THE WALL. Perhaps it was the silent respect and grief that the 100's of people present there were radiating. The whole weekend was so awesome. Old Vets walking over to Byrl, saying "Welcome Home, Brother" and shaking his hand; young Rangers walking up and saluting him, the Rolling Thunder motorcycle parade, the 12 year-old girl who made the speech for our Vets and our POWs, the Hueys' doing their fly-by, Paul Revere and the Raiders playing their timely music, and just standing around talking to all my new friends of the 75th RRA.

Thank you just doesn't express enough the gratitude I feel toward all of you guys that encouraged us to travel to DC, and for going the extra mile in presenting Byrl with his awards. We both came away better, healthier people, and quite possibly closer than we have ever been. So to all the guys of

the 75th, thank you all for being the special people that you are. I will be forever in your debt. God bless each of you.

Forever, your friend,
Ann Trostel.

Sgt. Byrl Trostel's letter to the LRRPs/Co F.

My first trip to THE WALL over Memorial Day his year was an experience I wish I had embraced long before. I was very emotional about the whole idea of facing THE WALL and reading the names of our fallen warriors, remembering clearly the day they fell, and thinking of their families and how they

have had to endure the pain over the years ... they pay the price of Freedom every day. Their sons and daughters paid the ultimate price.



I was always a chicken about visiting THE WALL, until I was encouraged by members of the 75th Ranger Regiment to come and re-unite with the men from F Co. I was very surprised when Captain Mark Ponzillo called my

name out and asked me to stand tall for a presentation of the various medals and awards I'd earned in combat, but I had never received due to the chaotic events in 'nam. One at a time, as Cap't Mark read aloud what each award was and what it stood for, my wife Ann was handed each one, pinning them on me. I had no idea this was upcoming. I was very surprised, and what an honor!! I was moved to tears. Being with the men I'd not seen for 32 years, feeling the respect and camaraderie, changed my feelings about that terrible War. It helped me shed some guilt, shed that old feeling that somehow I should have done more, or what I could have done differently to save more of our boys from dying. My comrades made me realize we had a job to do, and that we did it to the best of our abilities. I am NOT ALONE!!

A special thanks to Bill Mrkvicka, Joe Gentile, Dave Regenthal, Dan Nate, Sandy, Joe Little, and to my good friend Tom Besser, and all of the men of the 75th.

Thank you, Sgt. Byrl Trostel, TL 2-6

In these times of uncertainty, with family members, friends, neighbors and others serving their country in Asia, may God protect each of them and may God Bless America.

Who are these guys?

Demos Johnson found some old photos from Nam. Demos served with the 25th LRRPs from December, 1967 to October, 1968. Does anyone recognize any of these three guys?



THE SNAKE

I believe that it was when we went to Nha Trang for our LRRP training when this happened. Yes, LRRP training. You see there was no Recondo school at that time. It was started officially about a month after we returned. Well, that is another story.

When we left we asked the 25th Division Surgeon to look after the python we had. Now you had to know Doc. Cassberg to understand his enthusiasm and willingness to take care of the snake. The comical part of this story was when we returned. You see Doc had his arm all bandaged up. I asked him what happened. Well, he said that the snake had bitten him. A python of course has many rows of teeth which are very small and curved back like a fish hook so he can hold his food and they also assist in pulling the food back into his mouth. Doc Cassberg's arm sure was scratched up badly and he ran the risk of a really bad infection.

It seems that the snake began to shed his skin right after we left and Doc Cassberg was going to reach in and take him out. I believe that he was going to show the snake to some of his doctor friends. The snake's eyes were clouded over as the skin was getting ready to shed. The snake could not see what was attempting to get him so he defended himself.

Needless to say Doc Cassberg never volunteered to snake sit again. When he told the story to us we all laughed so hard that we had tears in our eyes. CPT. Ponzillo laughed the hardest I believe.

That is my snake tale. I hope that some of you recall this story and perhaps some of the folks who laughed with you.

Gene Tucker (1966)

Our Wall

We have discovered that one of our own who we had not been able to locate, was killed in action in Vietnam. Charles Pekny who served with us from December 1967 until May or June 1968, left the LRRPs and went to the AeroRifles. About a month later, on July 25, 1968, Charles was killed in action.

In 1994 the Ranger Memorial at Fort Benning was completed and dedicated. The walkway to the memorial has polished marble stones on which the names of LRRPs/Rangers can be carved. In 1994, 25th Division LRRPs/Co F purchased a brick in the Ranger Memorial for each of our KIA's. We need to purchase a brick for Charles as well. The cost of a brick is \$240. We are asking for your help in funding this purchase. If you can help, please mail your contribution to:

Joe Little
10129 West Highland Ave
Phoenix, AZ 85037

In Memory

We have learned of the deaths of four of our comrades:

Larry Neal served with us in 1969 and 1970. He was from Altoona, PA. Larry died in October, 1975.

David West served with Co F in 1969. David died September 12, 1976.

Kenny Walker was with Co F from April 1969 to October 1970. Kenny died on May 15, 1988.

John Smith served with us from September 1968 to September 1969. John died January 23, 2000.
