

TIGER TRACKS



Summer 2008

The Newsletter of the Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association

77TH ARMOR MARCHES INTO THE FUTURE

A group of Veterans of 1st Battalion, 77th Armor, assembled out of the past to attend the June 24th Change of Command ceremony of "our" Battalion, at Ft Bliss, Texas. The day would be warm, near 100 degrees F, but we were there with the troops before the 8:30 start of the ceremony. Our local guide, Honorary Command Sergeant Major of the Regiment, CSM (Ret) Joe D. Offutt, led us for a short tour of new and refurbished facilities at Ft Bliss to the Post Parade Field. He commented, "The Army didn't have barracks like this when I was still on active duty." A special "Thank you" to Jean Offutt for the special arrangement she made for us "old soldiers."



This was a mass change of command for "our" Battalion, together with six other battalions and the commander of the 4th Brigade Combat Team, 1st Armored Division. The sight was impressive, all those young, big, strong soldiers, the mixed colored guideons, and the National, Division and Brigade Colors covering the entire field. "Our" Battalion was in the center, and earned the honor of furnishing the Color Guard for the day. Behind the field were older barracks that dated back to the days preceding tanks, back to the mounted service of Cavalry. And, forming a beautiful backdrop, was the end of the mountain range, with white clouds tumbling over and lots of deep blue sky. Association VP Gerry Dubois started looking for the Reenlistment Office when the Post Band played the stirring music of military marches.

This event reminded VP Membership Tom Miller about his change of command when he left the Battalion in Vietnam 39 years ago. The ceremony there was small, simple and short, but there was the passing of the Colors and a clean tank platoon on parade line in the background. Current Association Chaplain Jerry Brown, arranged everything, and was also with us at Ft Bliss. As the Vietnam ceremony ended, the tanks turned to leave, and a track broke. Nothing like that happened at Ft Bliss, as COL James D. Nickolas departed for the US Army War College, and LTC James J. Gallivan took command. The Battalion was still being issued tanks and other equipment that was totally refurbished, as they would immediately begin training for the unit's third deployment to Iraq in early 2009. In fact, by the highly prejudiced eye of Association President Chuck Winslow, the tank battalion was the best marching unit on the field that day.

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77TH ARMOR ASSOCIATION BOARD MEMBERS

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77TH ARMOR ASSOCIATION SECRETARY'S NOTES

There will be two Steel Tigers' meetings at this year's reunion. The Executive Board will meet first beginning at 4:00 pm on Friday, August 29th. There will be a business meeting for the general 77th Armor membership beginning at 1:00 pm on Saturday, August 30th. Our meeting will follow a similar meeting conducted by the Society of the Fifth Division (10:00 am - 12 Noon).

We have a number of important items to make decisions about and they are listed below. The saddest is to nominate and elect a new Sergeant at Arms to complete the term of our late brother Mike Leone who passed away last January 3rd. Other items include:

1. 2009 Reunion Planning.
2. Begin the process of selecting a new Colonel and Sergeant Major of the Regiment. As you recall Carmen Milia told us at the last meeting that he would not accept a second term and Joe Offutt is already in his second term and cannot be re-nominated.
3. Amend Article IV (C) (2) of our Constitution. Its present content is stated below:

"Vice President: The Vice President shall perform the duties of the President in the absence of that official, and shall serve in any administrative capacity designated by President. In the event of the death, resignation, or incapacity in other matters of the President, the Vice President shall succeed to the office of the president and continue in the office until the next election. He will lead, plan, and execute the duties of the Reunion Committee."

The amendment proposed will eliminate a constitutionally authorized "Reunion Committee" and reestablish the reunion planning and execution authority to the Vice President solely while granting him the latitude to convene a committee to assist him if he desires. The proposed wording of the last sentence is:

"... He will lead, plan, and execute the Association's periodic reunions. He may create a committee to assist him."

Looking at the calendar, I noticed that it has been 40 years since we deployed from Fort Carson to Vietnam. Having had the opportunity serve with you then and renewing our bond at the reunions is a high point for me.

Don Cummings

77th Armor Association Secretary

2008 REUNION BUSINESS MEETINGS

Executive Board:
Friday, August 29th at 4:00 pm

General Membership Meeting:
Saturday, August 30th at 1:00 pm

Location to be announced.

77TH ARMOR MARCHES INTO THE FUTURE

The Division Commander was the Reviewing Officer, and he saw "our" battalion had the best fighters and were proud of it. Congratulations to the company commanders and all their mounted soldiers of 1 - 77 Armor.



New Battalion Commander and new Command Sergeant Major cutting cake at reception

The majority of the membership of the 77th Armor Association are Vietnam veterans, and consider other veterans of that war the closest Brothers. But, like in any family, there are the parents and grandparents, in our case, from the predecessor tank units of World War II and Korea. And, there are the children and grandchildren, the "new veterans" of Kosovo and two prior deployments to Iraq. All of us, CSM Joe D., Chuck, Gerry, Jerry and myself, Tom, were all

impressed with the quality of those who are following us. They are doing a wonderful job of keeping up the stellar reputation of 1 - 77 Armor in combat. What is surprising to those of us from Vietnam is the high esteem in which they hold us, and their interest in how and why we fought as we did in those days gone by. Chuck hosted a small reception for the officers and senior NCOs the night before. The common topic was their asking us about Vietnam, and then comparing with their experience in Iraq. They showed genuine interest in "our war", not just politeness. It feels good deep inside to see these soldiers of today, our replacements, our children and grandchildren, as they march forward with our flags held high. They are proud of us, and we have pride in them, they who make us look better and better as we head towards Fiddler's Green.



Honorary Command Sergeant Major Joe D. Offutt and Lt. Col James T. Gallivan (current commander of the 1st Battalion 77th Armor).

All of us, your Association delegation to this ceremony and all our Association Members, Veterans, Retired and Active, wish the very best as this new group heads towards our Nation's battles. We look for academic success for the most recent past Commander, COL Nickolas, at the Army War College. And we know that the newest Commander, LTC Gallivan, will show his wisdom and experience as he leads and trains "our" Battalion preparing for the next opportunity to defend the honor and safety of our great USA. Congratulations and thank you to all who served, are serving, and will serve; soldiers all.

US ARMY COIN

The U.S. House passed new legislation in June 2008 that would create a silver dollar coin honoring the U.S. Army Infantry and the National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center. The bill, H.R. 3229, entitled National Infantry Museum and Soldier Center Commemorative Coin Act would have the U.S. Mint issue 350,000 silver \$1 coins in the year 2012. The coin legislation has moved to the Senate. Should it pass there and then receive Presidential signature, the bill would become law.

In July 2008, the President signed the American Veterans Disabled for Life Commemorative Coin Act directing the Secretary of the Treasury to mint and issue \$1 silver coins emblematic of the design selected by the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation for the American Veterans Disabled for Life Memorial, in commemoration of disabled American veterans. The Act limits the period for coin issuance to the calendar year beginning on January 1, 2010 and imposes a \$10 surcharge per coin, to be distributed to the Disabled Veterans' LIFE Memorial Foundation for the purpose of establishing an endowment to support the construction of American Veterans' Disabled for Life Memorial in Washington, D.C.

Please remember to lend your support to the proposed legislation sponsored by US Senators Daniel K. Inouye (D-HI) and James M. Inhofe (R-OK) that would authorize the minting and sale of commemorative coins to honor the "United States Army and its traditions, history and heritage." These would be the first US coins ever issued to celebrate and honor the US Army as a whole.

Visit <http://www.armyhistory.org/armyhistorical.aspx?pgID=1063> to see a sample letter for your representatives in Washington. You can say this in a telephone call or put it in the form of a letter. Either method is effective.

VIETNAMESE CHILD WITH CLEFT PALLET

A US Army Captain, I was the Battalion Civil Affairs Officer, S-5, of the 1st Battalion 77th Armor, 1st Brigade 5th Infantry Division (Mechanized), in the spring of 1970. I was dealing with programs for the assistance of local civilians in Vietnam. Over the years, I have related stories about things that happened during my time in Vietnam. Anyone who has known me since about 1970 has probably listened to my tale about the Vietnamese child who had a cleft pallet.



15 April 1970 Captain Floyd Robertson w/Vietnamese Dai Uy (CPT) rank insignia

This child, Tran Van Xung, lived in the Duan Kinh Hamlet, a part of Hai Xuan Village, in Quang Tri Province, approximate coordinates YD409538. This hamlet can be found on USGS map sheet L701464421, Thon Ngo Xa Dong, most of which is ocean. It does have a stretch of beach containing the Wunder Beach heavy vehicle landing location, and a short piece of the north end of highway 555 (really a dirt road at the time), marked on some maps as ‘Street Without Joy.’ The map shows a narrow roadway nearby, alongside an irrigation canal.

My notes from the time show that I took an S-5 operation (a MedCap, Newsreel, and Movie) on 16 March 1970 to the Tra Loc Hamlet, located on that roadway at YD405542, where I found the child, age 8, with a severe cleft pallet. His mother brought him to me from the Duan Kinh Hamlet, just a short distance

away. Both Hamlets were part of the Hai Xuan Village. His upper lip was missing; he had no front teeth or the supporting structure for them.

As a result of this deformity, the child could not speak; air just whooshed out the gap where his front teeth should have been. A day or so later, I described this deformity to a US Navy Doctor at the Quang Tri Province Hospital (not an American hospital) in Quang Tri City, which was about 6 miles away. That doctor told me that, although he had never repaired such a cleft pallet, he knew what to do, as he had studied it in medical school.

I returned to the hamlet with an interpreter, and explained to the mother what had to be done. She cried and cried as I drove away with the child in my jeep. Alternating teams of two doctors each flew to the Province Hospital daily from the USS Sanctuary, the only offshore hospital ship left after departure of the USS Repose from Da Nang, coincidentally on 16 March 1970.

When I next stopped by the hospital, the mother was there, having walked there with a small bag of belongings. The doctor, a Navy Lieutenant, performed some corrective surgery, then additional surgery on his next rotation. The doctor told me that he would not have time to complete cosmetic repairs, because he would soon leave permanently. However, he did assure me that the child would be able to learn to speak after these corrections.

I have wondered for the past 37 years about that child. I hope he made it. Helping him was the one most useful thing I knew of that I had a hand in during my year in Quang Tri Province. I don't seem to have a photo of the child, unfortunately. It probably did not occur to me at the time to take one.

A former Commander, Tom Miller, and members of my former Battalion planned a ‘return to Vietnam’ trip, scheduled for October 2007. On learning of this story, the tour director told me on 18 August 2007 that it might be possible to locate the boy with the detailed information I provided.

BY FLOYD ROBERTSON

I was very surprised and pleased when, on 9 September 2007, I received an following email from Vuong, the 16 year old daughter of Mr. Tran Van Xung informing me that her father was alive and well, living in the Duan Kinh village, Hai Xuan commune, Quang Tri province. Her email went on to thank me and invite me to her family home in Vietnam.

The message from the Vuong really made my day. I have no idea how much cosmetic correction the Navy doctor was able to do 37 years ago, but it looks like the child I tried to help did survive the war, and continues to be a survivor today.

As unbelievable as it seems, a new development about this came on 13 September 2007, when I received by mail a hand written note from Mr. Ed Garr, Captain USMC (Retired) regarding his visit with Mr. Tran Van Xung at his home in Duan Kinh Hamlet on 30 August 2007, along with 2 print photos. (Mr. David Wall later provided 10 digital photos.) I had no idea he would follow up on this so soon, and follow my instructions right to the home in Vietnam. Mr. Garr is a Tour Director at Military Historical Tours, Inc, which operates out of Alexandria VA.



The child is holding the picture of me that I sent to Mr. Ed Garr

In an email forwarded, Mr. Garr had more comments. He told me that the boy I remembered had survived the war, married, and had four children. His mother died in 1999 but he does remember the S-5. He also told me that 1-77 Armor group would not be able to

go to his location in October due to time constraints, the farmer's unavailability and accessibility into the area.

We decided to ask Military Historical Tours about the possibility of joining my old unit, the Steel Tigers, on their tour. Incredibly, through the efforts of MHT personnel and Vietnam Tourism, Clarice and I had our Vietnam Emigration Department authorizations for Visa on Arrival, as well as air tickets on Korean Air by Thursday afternoon September 20. With only days to plan, we arranged to fly to LA on Friday, September 28.



Mr. Tran Van Xung w/photo of his mother.

We met the small group of 23, including 4 wives and 4 tour company personnel, in LA. There, I checked email at the last minute, and discovered a message from the teen-age Miss Vuong, who said her father wanted the date he should go to HaNoi to meet me. That is more than 600 kilometers, or 375 miles for him! I wrote back to say that we would be in Dong Ha, only about 16 miles from his home, and that I would tell mister Garr, who had her phone number.

Finally, on Thursday, October 4, Mr. Tran Van Xung walked into the restaurant where we had just started dinner. He had ridden his bicycle to Dong Ha from his home in Duan Kinh village. At the home of his brother in law, he changed into very smart dress clothes for the occasion.

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VIETNAMESE BOY WITH CLEFT PALLET STORY CONTINUED



Tran Van Xung, and Floyd Robertson October 4, 2007 in Dong Ha

I had not realized for these many years that he wondered about me, as I did about him. It was a very pleasant evening, conversing through interpreters. Xung announced to the group that he wanted to 'thank this man for my smile.' I certainly felt honored by his

comments. Finally, on October 10, the teen-age daughter Vuong and her very capable 'aunt' Minh Tam arrived by motorbike to join us for dinner in Ha-Noi. We had a very pleasant evening, talking over tea after dinner.

This whole experience was nothing short of awesome. It seems that this trip was 'meant to be'. And the military area and bases tour with the Steel Tigers group was great, answering many questions about half recalled events and places. We have a new perspective, with about 700 photos of a country making great progress, and a beautiful, warm, friendly, and generous people.

Just one final note: Xung has asked for information about the Navy doctor from the USS Sanctuary. I hope that he will be recognized by someone, and that he will contact me. It would be great to share this story.

Cut along the dotted line to mail form

2008 Membership/Change of Address Form

- New/Renewal Membership Address/Information Change
 Donation

Select Membership Type

All Association members receive newsletters and a Reunion Registration discount. Membership period: January-December.

Price

- | | |
|--|---------|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Veteran | \$20.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Active Duty Army
(includes free Steel Tiger hat) | \$20.00 |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Charter Members | \$20.00 |

Total: _____

Email

Service Dates & Company (if you remember)

Method of Payment

- Check Visa
 Please make your check payable to "Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association."
 MasterCard
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Credit Card # Exp. date

Signature

Please mail this completed form to: Robert Basner, Steel Tigers 77th Armor Association, 7966 Maple, P.O. Box 38, Birch Run, MI 48415



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