

Boot to Boot

COMPANY D
1ST BATTALION
12TH CAVALRY
VIETNAM, 1965-1972



FOR HE TODAY THAT SHEDS HIS BLOOD WITH ME SHALL BE MY BROTHER FROM THIS DAY TO THE ENDING OF THE WORLD

VOLUME 7 ISSUE 2

APRIL 2022

LZ Bird 1966: Revisited a Half-Century Later

Cavalry Veterans help NVA Veterans find the resting place of their Fallen Comrades

1966 The story of LZ Bird begins in 506 Valley, on the 17th of December, where the 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, fought a bitter battle with the NVA's 18th Regiment. The 18th was to attack Bird, but losses at 506 Valley caused that mission to be assigned to the 22nd Regiment, its sister Regiment (along with the 2nd VC) in the 3rd "Sao Vàng" [Yellow Star] Division, Peoples Army of Vietnam (PAVN). This change of plans was to have significant impact on the Battle for Bird.

Major Tin Phuong, commander of the 22nd "Quyet Tam" Regiment was twice forced to delay the attack due to tardy movement of its 8th Battalion, and then the 7th, dealing with high water of a wet monsoon season and unfamiliarity with an area of operations usually the responsibility of the 18th.

The 22nd was a tough bunch, well trained and well equipped. Major Phuong's unit was formed and trained in the North, then infiltrated in September 1965 when it became one of the three infantry regiments of the newly-formed 3rd Division. The 22nd consisted of three infantry battalions, each counting about 450 men.

"After nightfall on the 26th, soldiers of 22nd Regiment had crawled silently up to the claymore mines in front of the perimeter, disconnected them from their firing wires, and were within 10 meters of the unsuspecting soldiers of C Company, 1st Battalion (Airborne), 12th Cavalry, defending Bird that night. The 9th Battalion was poised to push through the [Cavalry's] 4th platoon from the northeast, the 8th Battalion was in position to attack the 1st platoon from the east, the 7th Battalion would police up weapons and ammunition, and occupy a blocking position to the west. Over 750 PAVN soldiers faced the American company, without its 2nd platoon and two squads on patrol more than three kilometers away. Charlie counted just 84 infantrymen, including 3 officers," writes Doug Warden, Historian of Company C, "Even with the addition of the 112 artillerymen, it wasn't much of a force with which the defend a bad piece of ground against a regiment."

That same evening of December 26th a Delta (Continued on page 4)



LZ Bird in 1966 - at oval center left

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THE SIXTH REUNION OF THE VETERANS OF
 D COMPANY, 1ST BATTALION, 12TH CAVALRY (VIETNAM)
 LAS VEGAS, NEVADA
 OCTOBER 3-5, 2022

South Point Casino Hotel & Spa

This 2,100 room resort south of the Strip is a complete Las Vegas destination, with a Spa & Salon, Pool, Multiplex Cinema, Bowling Center, 11 Restaurants, 5 Bars, and Showroom entertainment.

Each non-smoking room includes Complimentary High Speed WiFi, 24 Hour Room Service, Coffee Maker, Hair Dryer.

The price of the reunion and a 3-night hotel stay is up 15% from last year. Including resort fee and tax, our hotel has increased \$12 per night, from \$83 to \$95. Reunion registration is up \$20, from \$128 to \$148 (\$128 for guests). Like similar organizations, we're switching from "a la carte" to an all-inclusive registration, which is much easier for us to manage.

Airport Shuttle and Free Parking are included in our room-

block rate of \$70, \$14 Resort Fee, and 13% room tax, a total

of \$95 per night Sunday-Thursday, October 2-6. Book direct at 702-797-8901 or on-line at

<https://tinyurl.com/Delta-Room-Reservations> Group Code: **D00923 (DELTA REUNION)**



Monday 3 October

- Hotel Check-in begins at 3:00 pm
- Delta Registration Table 3-7 pm outside South Point's Brunswick Room
- Welcome Reception 4-7 pm Brunswick Room *(All Delta events are in the Brunswick Room)*

Tuesday 4 October

- Hospitality Suite opens at 1:00 pm and remains open as long as veterans want to congregate. Suite number provided at the Registration table. Open daily. Closed during other events.
- Enjoy Las Vegas - see a Show, Shop, Golf

Wednesday 5 October

- Memorial Service - 9 am Remembering the 84 Brothers who did not return.
- General Membership Meeting – 10 am
- Reception – 5 pm
- Banquet – 6 pm *Due to this year's special entertainment, we've added a "Banquet-Only" option for friends and families. Cost and a registration form are on Delta's website.*

Thursday 6 October

- Hotel Check-out (or stay another night, same rate)

Special Show Planned for Delta's 2022 Las Vegas Reunion



Las Vegas entertainer William Patrick Johnson brings Bob Hope's Vietnam USO Shows to life for Delta at its Reunion Banquet. Bill has performed as Bob Hope across the US and the South Pacific to rave reviews, including at The National Infantry Museum, Fort Hood, the WWII Museum and scores of USO Shows of his own.

Appearing as Ann-Margret is Amber Averill, from Phoenix, Arizona. Raised in a musical family, with four sisters and two brothers, Amber has been singing all her life. She's recently settled in to sacred music as a Praise and Worship leader. Happily married to a veteran, she is honored and excited to be portraying Ann Margret in this recreation of Bob Hope's Vietnam Shows.

Joining the stars on stage will be a surprise "Old Soldier" who will be our guide through our Vietnam years. Thanks for the Memories.



BILL JOHNSON AS BOB HOPE

AMBER AVERILL AS ANN-MARGRET



First Commander's Corner

Happily we have not learned of the passing of any more of our brothers since our last newsletter.

Last year in Las Vegas, I said, "We're here to have fun!" And so it is again, and in spades. As much as brother Gary DeRigne inspired and informed us last year—thank you Gary—this year we're going in a very different direction at our banquet. It's the Bob Hope USO Show, coming to you from Vietnam (Ok...actually from the Infantry Museum Fort Hood, and other William Patrick Johnson shows)...from over a half-century ago! And with

Ann-Margret joining Bob for some song, dance, and banter, too! It wouldn't be a Bob Hope show without a beautiful lady joining Bob, would it? So, be there in Las Vegas for yet another great Delta Reunion. I'll see you by the pool.

The feature story in this newsletter tells how our own Brothers helped find the remains of our former enemy at LZ Bird. Thanks to the Brothers who demonstrated respect and reverence for all soldiers who served and fought honorably. Stay in touch with each other, and please visit your Delta website from time to time. We love you, Brothers!

"ONCE A SOLDIER, ALWAYS A SOLDIER"

Blessings & "Out to Out"

Johnny Bergulis

The 1st Cavalry Division Association 2022 Reunion at Dayton, Ohio, 6-10 July 2022.

Information at: <https://1cda.org/annual-reunion/>

The 12th Cavalry Regiment Association Reunion, 7-11 Sep 2022; Reunion Information

Tom Paoli, 630-802-1950 or <https://www.12thcav.us/>; Hillside Hotel, Branson, 800-808-9355

BIRD (Continued from page 1) Company Long Range Reconnaissance Patrol (LRRP) comprised of Team Leader John Franks, Stephen Chestnut, Enrique Martinez, Bruce Reppert, Javier Casares and Eddie Parker approached LZ Bird. With reports of numerous NVA in the area, the 12th Cavalry surmised that “something was going to happen,” so it was decided to bring the patrol in. Initially ordered to LZ Pony, but unable to cross the flooded Kim Son [river], it was diverted to Bird. As Franks and his team started up the slope below the LZ they were fired on by the defenders, twenty of whom were “new guys” just arrived in the two previous days. PFC Stephen Chestnut hit the ground, making himself as small as possible. The team radioed the battalion at Pony, which in turn contacted Charlie Company at Bird. The defenders, told they were engaging “friendlies,” ceased fire and passed the patrol into the perimeter. Lucky that none of the patrol were injured, but to be on Bird that night, not so much.

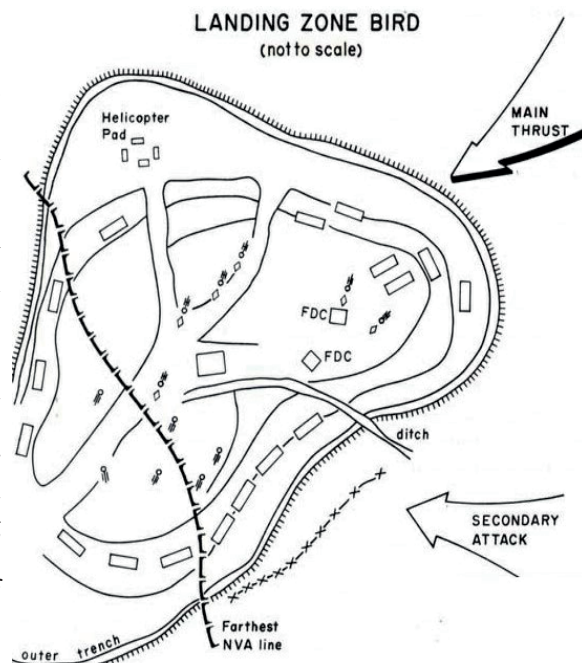
“LZ Bird might have been the worst place to defend in a hundred square kilometers. Sited at a hook in the Kim Son that from above appeared to outline the head of bird, it was dominated by higher ground in all directions. In the open itself, the area around was heavily vegetated, providing concealment to an approaching enemy. No one liked being on Bird. It was the lowest spot of topography within eyesight in any direction,” according to Warden.

The blast of the first mortar round cracked across Landing Zone Bird at five minutes after one o’clock on the morning of 27 December, 1966. A barrage of rocket and machine gun fire followed, and two battalions of North Vietnam’s infantry stormed onto the small firebase.

By morning C Company and the two artillery batteries had survived, but just. Twenty-nine American soldiers were dead, as were many North Vietnamese regulars. One Medal of Honor, two Distinguished Service Crosses, more than twenty Silver Stars, and many Bronze Stars with “V” device for valor were awarded the American defenders of Bird.

Warden sums up: “It is inconceivable that two artillery batteries would have been placed in such a vulnerable position and that commanders would have depended on a skeleton force of infantry to protect ten guns...29 men paid the ultimate price for it.”

In Vietnam there were no truces for burial details. Following a battle at a firebase, the defenders buried the opposing soldiers. There are mass graves all over Vietnam. Bird was no exception. The morning of the 27th, after the battle, US WIA's, then KIA's were evacuated. US soldiers were detailed to bring the bodies of fallen PAVN soldiers to locations where they were counted and interred. Consequently, families in Vietnam often know nothing about where or how their sons died. They simply did not return.



(Continued on page 5)

BIRD (Continued from page 4) A few years after the burial, the war was over. Excepting the Missing in Action, US veterans went home and put Vietnam behind them. Veterans in Vietnam did the same. Bird passed into history, remembered only by the few who fought there.

2021 Fifty-five years after the Battle at Bird, D Company videos attracted the attention of Vietnamese veterans who e-mailed expressing interest in our mutual history. Lexia, a Vietnamese historian, contacted webmaster Bob March and coordinated veterans and writers in Binh Dinh Province who shared stories we have posted on a new NVA/VC page of our website. Then, on January 10th, this



Fallen PAVN soldiers at LZ Bird - 27 Dec 1966



PAVN Major Dang Ha Thuy

e-mail:

"My name is Dang Ha Thuy.

I am a former soldier in Binh Dinh province. I am looking for information about the mass grave of my comrades buried by the US military. When our unit ambushed the Xuan Son-LZ Bird artillery base at dawn on December 27, 1966, many comrades were sacrificed.

I am older and have been looking for this job for many years. All information is valuable.

This has spiritual significance for Vietnamese people.

1/12th battalion defended this base and directly participated in the battle.

I apologize if this bothers you. Our veterans look forward to helping American veterans.

Regards!"

Certainly this was a worthy cause. The battle of LZ Bird is seared into the memory of all who lived it. Doug Warden and C Company's Thomas Crabtree identified survivors who might know where the grave sites were. In emails, Warden explained the purpose of the project. With that introduction, I contacted Comar Johnson, who directed the bulldozer, Ivory Whitaker and Crabtree, who helped bury the bodies, Spencer Matteson, who witnessed the burials, and Kin Lo, wounded on Bird and medevac'd before the burials. Delta Company's Stephen Chestnut was a witness to events. (Continued on page 6)

Secretary's Report

Well Boys, spring is here and I hope you and your families are enjoying the change in the weather. As you know our next reunion is scheduled in Las Vegas from October 3rd thru the 5th. I have two suggestions for you:

1. Attend (It's just a good time)
2. Reach out to someone you served with (phone numbers and email addresses appear in the roster on our website)

Why? Because you can, and you owe it to the guys that you served with to thank them for getting you thru Vietnam. Don't say, "I will do it next year." Next year may never come. Need help? Call me at 347-853-1281.

GOOD HEALTH

Fred MacLennan

April 2022

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BIRD (Continued from page 5) All were willing to help and provided important information about the burials. Some said, “If I could, I'd go help dig myself.” Veterans of elements of 1/9th Cavalry and 1/5th Cavalry who into Bird the morning after the battle also provided information.



LZ Bird in 2022

were using the area for farming or for family graves. Some denied there were mass graves on Bird at all. Bird is now overgrown with little trace of the former landing zone, but the land contours—the slope of the hill and its surroundings—remain essentially unchanged. Tree lines to the west and east remain.



VTV's Linh at Dig Site

I sent the summarized information of these veterans to Major Dang Ha Thuy. who was able to show the local authorities sufficient information from first hand witnesses to justify a search at LZ Bird. The military in Binh Dinh Province added its support. Work at Bird would begin after the Têt holiday.

But where to dig? Actually determining the boundaries of Bird is important to finding the grave site. After 55 years, many things have changed at Bird. Veterans associated the location of the grave to features of the firebase, such as, “just outside the perimeter” or “next to the resupply point”

Complicating the problem, Vietnamese living nearby



LZ Bird Dig Site

The challenge was to accurately position the old LZ Bird in today's coordinate system. By lining up satellite photos taken within a few months of the battle with current Google Earth positions, a relatively accurate position for Bird was established. Then, using cell phone GPS, a shovel can be placed in the right spot. Architect Thang, a Vietnamese knowledgeable in the use of such technology, helped line up the positional data.

Major Thuy, in his extensive research, had collected photos and information about LZ Bird that he forwarded to us for review, and which we carefully examined. Early discussions of grave location was contradictory and confusing. Some of our veterans felt strongly about the location of a mass grave in the north part of Bird. Others felt equally strongly about locations to the west. At first I attributed

differences to memories more than 50 years removed from the battle. But our soldiers were located in different areas on LZ Bird; thus the divergence of opinion. Some saw one grave, others saw another. One was outside the perimeter to the west, the other just outside the north defensive perimeter.

In March the dig began, immediately encountering remains where the American veterans had suggested. After 55 years in moist soil, even skeletons disappear, but scraps of uniforms, buttons, combs, wallets,

BIRD (Continued from page 6) and bone fragments were uncovered. An on-site shrine was built in which to temporarily house the recovered remains.



Honor Guard Carries Remains to Memorial

The work at LZ Bird was soon in every newspaper and on VTV nightly news (Vietnam’s national television network). It was becoming a minor sensation across the country. The Vietnamese were pleased that American veterans were helping them. As the project began to get media attention across Vietnam, I received an e-mail from Linh, of VTV. He began conducting Zoom meetings with our American veterans to get first hand observations timely to the ongoing digging. These meetings were conducted over several nights, about 14 hours total. Linh also recorded individual interviews with me, Thomas, Crabtree, Comar Johnson, Spenser Matteson, and Ivory Whitaker. The Vietnamese team took us on a video

tour of Bird. People were carefully filtering dirt, like any archaeological project. Linh translated our English comments to the onsite military supervisor, Major Tan. He asked questions; our veterans did their best to help. Linh is producing an English language documentary about the exploration of LZ Bird, to be published in July.

The Americans who helped were invited to attend a dedication ceremony at LZ Bird on April 16, followed by the interment of the remains at a nearby National Cemetery. None of us were able to attend. Unfortunate, since it’s been 50 years since any of us got a free trip Vietnam. In lieu of our presence, I wrote a short speech to be delivered on behalf of the veterans who helped.

I believe that though one grave has been found, another, dug by the bulldozer, has not. The site outside the perimeter to the west was excavated. The other is on the north side just outside the defensive perimeter. We will continue to gather and analyze supporting information for them.

Bob March with Tom Kjos & Doug Warden



National Cemetery Wreath Laying

Editor’s Note: The Veterans of the 12th Cavalry are pleased to have shown respect for the fallen of the Democratic Republic of Vietnam. We hope as time passes the Socialist Republic of Vietnam will build on the improved respect shown in recent years for our brothers, the fallen soldiers of the Republic of Vietnam. -TWK-

Website Update

Recent photos from Steve Kuckelman (68-69), and Ron Redalen, (67-68), have been posted. A new set of photos from Bret Rogers, the son of Roy Rogers, should be up on the website soon. Check them out. Photos index page on www.cattrack6india.com

The Firebase Pace page has been updated with information received from the artillery men who manned Pace. Check that out under the “Firefigths” index.

Delta videos total views since the last reunion: 1,340,000.

TAKE CARE, DON’T WALK ON TRAILS, AND BRING PLENTY OF AMMO.

CATTRACK6INDIA...OUT

Bob March (360) 627-0918

April 2022

Veterans of Delta Company
1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry (Vietnam)
9817 W Mockingbird Drive
Sun City, AZ 85373-2136

Delta Company Contacts and Addresses

President		
John Gergulis	(803) 764-3335	whip6k1vn2@yahoo.com
Vice President		
Walter Wilczak	(201) 317-0547	wwilczak@msn.com
Treasurer/ Newsletter Editor		
Tom Kjos	(480) 352-2583	tomwkjos03@gmail.com
Secretary/Outreach		
Fred Mac Lennan	(347) 853-1281	fredmac166@outlook.com
Webmaster/Historian		
Bob March	(360) 627-0918	delta@cattrack6india.com
65-66 Era Representative		
Jerry Fell	(512) 923-4232	hometoo@sbcglobal.net
Kirk Knight	(813) 777-8222	kirkknight@earthlink.net
67-68 Era Representative		
Doug Christ	(714) 865-3467	dfchrist3@gmail.com
Ron Redalen	(651) 274-9052	rrredalen@hotmail.com
69-72 Era Representative		
Paul Marling	(518) 789-4648	paulmarling@aol.com

Mail for the Website

Bob March
1509 Sawdust Hill Road NE
Poulsbo, WA 98370-9127

Mail for Veterans of Delta

(Including Newsletter)
Tom Kjos
9817 W Mockingbird Drive
Sun City, AZ 85373-2136

Website Address

<http://www.cattrack6india.com/>