

My deeply respected, adored, Distinguished 'Troopers'-'Warriors'/'Brothers'
Chaplain / Colonel 'Brother' Billy and 'Ms.' Bettye LORD

Colonel/'Brother' Phil & 'Ms.' Blake

'Brother' and 'Ms.' Doug Warden

'Brother' and 'Ms.' Thomas Crabtree

Ladies and Gentlemen - - - - Guests

Good Evening and Welcome - - - - I'm John Gergulis

With your respectful indulgence, please permit me to take a few moments of our time together, ever mindful that:

To be seen, Stand Up // To be heard, Speak Up // To be appreciated, Shut Up!!, to share with y'all a few very personal, private, cherished, thoughts, deeply held feelings and views.

Some of y'all in attendance, for some of us more than 52 years ago, think you know a bit about the 'Brothers' of the 12th Cavalry Regiment and the 1st Cavalry Division (Airmobile) of the Viet Nam War era, especially the 1st Battalion (AIRBORNE-Air Assault), 12th Cavalry. PLEASE, permit me to share a few first-hand, 'WE were there', views and historical precedents. And, for those who may not understand, please, do not be surprised if one of the 'Brothers' corrects me on the spot if I mis-speak!

B O D Y (Come with me, if you will to - - - - -

Fort Benning History and Formation, 11th Air Assault Division (TEST), 1963 – 1965

My assignment from Korea, summer 1963 to Fort Benning (1st Battalion (AIRBORNE), 187th Infantry 'Rakkasans')) // Rank, status

Assignments within the 187th // Assigned as CO 'DELTA' Company (Diverse unit of 165 very young draftees-volunteers of various backgrounds, ethnicity, from all over our Country. Angry at themselves, the Army, the world, society in general, without focus, purpose, direction. Most were 16, 17, 18, 19 years of age, fresh out of Airborne School, few were graduates of a high school or possessed a GED certificate. These 'kids' were itching for a fight, any fight!! We were fortunate enough to have a few, very few, slightly older qualified NON-COMMISSIONED OFFICERS, some with combat experience (WW II and Korea). They were then and remain today, the bed-rock of 'Delta' Company, the 12th Cav and Our Army. Not many of us left, fading rapidly away to Fiddler's Green with each passing day. Please, permit to introduce to you, several of the 'original' 'Brothers', who joined together at Fort Benning, Georgia, time-frame 1963 – 1965:

INTRODUCE (My 'Brothers')

CSM Luther Nixon // Colonel Charles Rose // Reverend Dwight David Edwards // 'Brother' Michael Van Kirk // 'Brother' John Spranza // Chaplain/Colonel Billy Lord //and, 'Brother' Dieter Arnold, unexpectedly called 'Home' to Fiddler's Green earlier this year! He had planned on joining us here. The lesson here, hopefully, is: You never know when your number will be 'called' - - stop, don't put off calling, visiting, attending, whatever, with the 'Brothers'. There may not be a 'tomorrow'! I for one do not ever want to miss the opportunity to share with my 'Brothers', ever! Don't wait until you get the call that one of the 'Brothers' has been called home. And, in the name of Our Heavenly Father, please, don't find yourself standing at a 'Brother's' grave-site at Arlington or wherever as I have too many regretful times, mourning their passing and on a huge guilt trip for not having shared with them your close held feelings of deep respect, love and gratefulness for having been blessed to have them in your life. Too late! We never know! With that, personally, I try to seize every opportunity and, will now, again pronounce, hopefully for the world and this august body gathered to know and hear: To all my 12th Cav 'Brothers', most especially my cherished 'Delta'

Company 'Brothers', thank you for being in my life, for permitting me to stand with you, for 'accepting' me as a member of your awesome 'TEAM', for bringing so much hope, inspiration, joy and sunshine into my life, during too many bleak and tragic moments we shared. Y'all honor me with your presence. I'm honored, privileged, thankful, grateful, humbled, to have been permitted to stand and to serve with you. No one is more proud of y'all individually and collectively, that awesome Team you remain. Know that each of you will be forever deeply respected, loved, appreciated, held in high esteem and awe. Your selfless accomplishments and many sacrifices for all of us are forever etched in the annals of history. You never flinched, you never asked 'what your Country could do for you' and, you never failed to accomplish the many assigned missions that were thrown at you with abandon. It remains my fondest wish and prayer that your Heavenly Father continue to heap upon you and yours in abundance, the many joys and blessings of life on this awesome journey we all are on. Some gave some -- some gave ALL! Love you, 'Brother'. Lest together, we ever, ever, forget.

I could attempt to regale you with more stories of the 'Brothers' FIRST to put Airborne Boots on the beaches of Qui Nhon en-route to basecamp Anke on HWY 19 in the central highlands of the RVN, 1965, and their gallant, magnificent exploits thru 1966 and beyond, BUT, that simply is not going to happen. We'd need weeks for that. Some other time, perhaps. Our boys were the first IN, we stirred things up and irritated the hell out of the surviving enemy, leaving the heavy lifting to Our distinguished 'Brothers' who replaced us and followed on for too many years in the WAR that took more than 58,500 'Brothers' KIA in our fight for continued freedom, peace and security! Now, let's wrap this up - - - -

In attempting to find appropriate words to share with y'all this evening, came across several inspirational words of encouragement, spoken by several well known, successful folks that I felt were worthy of sharing with y'all:

Read and acknowledge - - - - -

4

As always, once again, this has been another outstanding gathering of the 'Brothers'. Please permit me to close out my remarks with the reading of the words of a song long ago recorded by Johnny Cash which appropriately memorializes and honors the sacrifices of Our 'Brothers'. I'm humbled to read these words:

(Patriotic music softly playing in the background)

Hugs, blessings, Boot to Boot and GOD Bless Our 'Brothers' and America !!

I walked through a county courthouse square
On a park bench, an old man was sittin' there.
I said, "Your old court house is kinda run down,
He said, "Naw, it'll do for our little town".
I said, "Your old flag pole is leaned a little bit,
And that's a ragged old flag you got hangin' on it".
He said, "Have a seat", and I sat down,
"Is this the first time you've been to our little town"
I said, "I think it is"
He said "I don't like to brag, but we're kinda proud of
That Ragged Old Flag

"You see, we got a little hole in that flag there,
When Washington took it across the Delaware.
and It got powder burned the night Francis Scott Key sat watching it,
writing "Say Can You See"
It got a rip in New Orleans, with Packingham & Jackson
tugging at its seams.
and It almost fell at the Alamo
beside the Texas flag,
But she waved on though.
She got cut with a sword at Chancellorsville,
And she got cut again at Shiloh Hill.
There was Robert E. Lee and Beauregard and Bragg,
And the south wind blew hard on
That Ragged Old Flag

"On Flanders Field in World War I,
She got a big hole from a Bertha Gun,
She turned blood red in World War II
She hung limp, and low, a time or two,
She was in Korea, Vietnam, She went where she was sent
by her Uncle Sam.
She waved from our ships upon the briny foam
and now they've about quit wavin' back here at home
in her own good land here She's been abused,
She's been burned, dishonored, denied an' refused,
And the government for which she stands
Has been scandalized throughout out the land.
And she's getting thread bare, and she's wearin' thin,
But she's in good shape, for the shape she's in.
Cause she's been through the fire before
and i believe she can take a whole lot more.

"So we raise her up every morning
And we bring her down slow every night,
We don't let her touch the ground,
And we fold her up right.
On second thought
I *do* like to brag
Cause I'm mighty proud of
That Ragged Old Flag"