

# AVEL VIETNAM

Newsletter - December 2015



**MERRY  
CHRISTMAS**

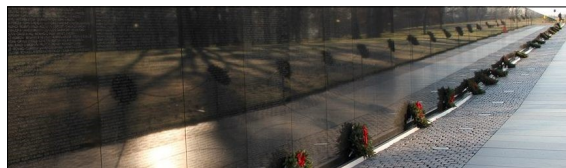
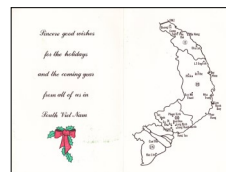
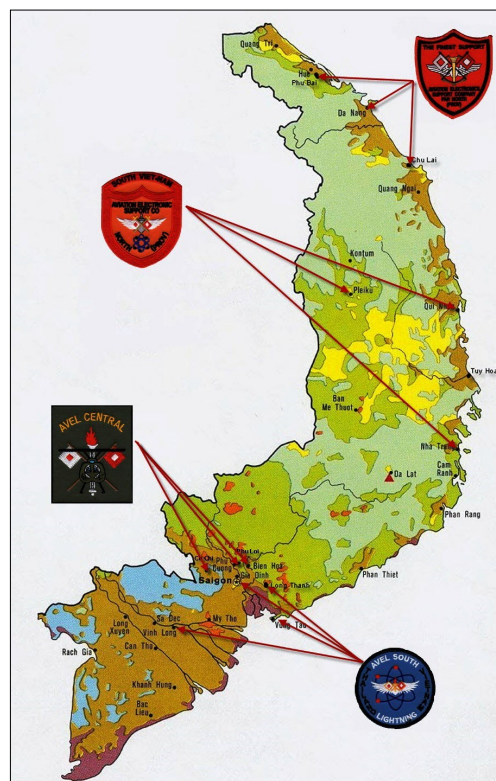


As the year comes to a close and we approach another Christmas it is important to remember what the season is all about. With all the turmoil in the world today it is easy to forget the reason for the season. It isn't about eating, drinking or partying too much.

"And there were in the same country shepherds abiding in the field, keeping watch over their flock by night. And, lo, the angel of the Lord came upon them, and the glory of the Lord shone round about them: and they were sore afraid. And the angel said unto them, Fear not; for, behold, I bring you tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people. For unto you is born this day in the city of David a Savior, which is Christ the Lord. And this shall be a sign unto you: Ye shall find the babe wrapped in swaddling clothes, lying in a manger. And suddenly there was with the angel a multitude of the heavenly host praising God, and saying, Glory to God in the highest, and on earth peace and goodwill towards men."

**"This is what Christmas is all about"**

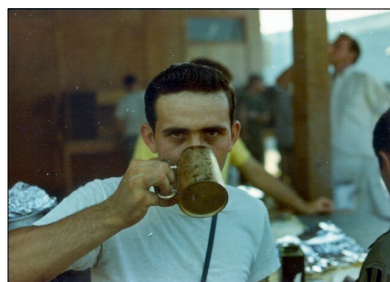
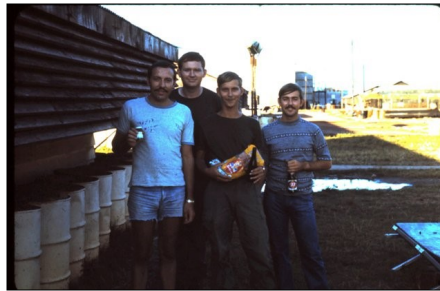
We all spent at least one Christmas in Vietnam. Some spent several. Take a look back at some photos of those Christmas' so long ago.



Don't forget to join us on Facebook. Search for the group: AVEL Vietnam.









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## NEW AVEL, AVIONICS AND VIETNAM VETERANS REGISTERED

**Quillen, William (Bill) (SP/4)**

218 Spartz Drive  
Jefferson Hills, PA  
412-708-7977

*539th Trans. Co., Phu Loi and 56th Trans. Co., Long Thanh North & Bearcat: Oct. 1970-Oct. 1971*

[quillen218@comcast.net](mailto:quillen218@comcast.net)

MOS: 67N20

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### TAPS

None Submitted

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### PHOTOS

None Submitted

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#### Marine gets upgrade to Navy Cross 46 years later

First, an ancient tape surfaced, then a letter that had been locked away for 40 years. Finally the full picture of Marine Sgt. Kenneth Altazan's bravery on a harrowing day in Vietnam began to emerge.

But it would be six years before the retired farmer got the call from a major at the Pentagon.

“He said, ‘I assume you’ve gotten our letter by now,’” Altazan recalled in a phone interview with Stars and Stripes. “I said, ‘No sir, I haven’t got your letter.’ And he said, ‘Let me be the first one to congratulate you — your Silver Star has been upgraded to the Navy Cross.’”

Altazan, of Baton Rouge, La., was being recognized for pulling injured Marines off a battlefield in Quang Nam province under intense fire and bringing them to the CH-46 helicopter where he served as crew chief. The Navy Cross is the highest honor bestowed on Marines and seamen by the Navy, second only to the Medal of Honor. He received the award Tuesday.



On May 9, 1969, Altazan was serving with the Marine Medium Helicopter Squadron 364 “Purple Foxes” when they were dispatched to what they knew would be a hazardous mission: 10 wounded Marines spread over several rice paddies were under heavy fire and needed to be evacuated.

“With complete disregard for his own safety, Sergeant Altazan boldly leaped from his helicopter, ran to the side of the wounded man, lifted him to his shoulders, and fearlessly moved back across the fire-swept terrain toward his CH-46, all the while assisting another evacuee across the perilous open area,” according to Altazan’s original citation.

But the narrative in the original citation, remarkable as it was, understated Altazan’s actions. Altazan had actually left the helicopter multiple times despite the danger. At one point the wounded man he was carrying was shot, sending Altazan sprawling and severely injuring his knee. He not only got up and took the man to the chopper but continued to pick up the injured despite being in excruciating pain.

“I learned in boot camp to react — you don’t think, you react,” he said.

The full story came out after a chance meeting at a reunion of his Vietnam comrades brought one of Altazan’s friends in contact with the surveillance plane pilot who was monitoring the battle from 1,500 feet above. After being accused in an earlier friendly fire incident, the pilot had started recording the audio of all of his missions. He still had the tape of the battle and provided it to Altazan.

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Then, the Navy corpsman aboard Altazan's helicopter remembered a letter he had written his wife right after the battle detailing the entire mission, complete with maps. She had saved all of his war correspondence, and the corpsman got in touch with another old squad mate of Altazan's.

Once the Pentagon had all of the new evidence, it took six years before they approved the upgrade. Altazan was in the Marine Corps for four years before returning to Louisiana. He said he struggled with his experiences after returning from Vietnam, bouncing from job to job before finding his calling as a crawfish farmer. Now 69, Altazan has since retired. At a ceremony Tuesday in Baton Rouge, he was awarded the Navy Cross in front of his wife, children, grandchildren and more than 100 well-wishers, including some of his old squad mates.

"It was truly a humbling experience," he said.

## Winnebago County, Illinois unveils Agent Orange Victims Memorial

The Winnebago LZ Peace Memorial in Rockford, Illinois honors citizens of the county that died in Vietnam and those that have died as a result of Agent Orange since the war. It is the first Memorial in Illinois honoring those that died from Agent Orange illnesses.

Right now the Agent Orange victims names are engraved in black granite. Unfortunately names will be added as time goes on. A plaque will soon be added.

The Memorial was dedicated this fall.



## Three U.S. Army Soldiers Lost in Vietnam War Laid to Rest

Three U.S. Army soldiers, Maj. Dale W. Richardson, 28, of Mount Sterling, Ill.; Staff Sgt. Bunyan D. Price Jr., 20, of Monroe, N.C.; and Sgt. Rodney L. Griffin, 21, of Mexico, Mo, were buried with full military honors in Arlington National Cemetery, Va. October 20, 2015.

The soldiers were missing since the Vietnam War and were identified by the Department of Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency (DPAA) using circumstantial evidence and forensic identification tools, to include mitochondrial DNA, matched with their siblings.

Richardson, Price, and Griffin, all assigned to 2nd Battalion, 34th Armor Regiment, 25th Infantry Division, were passengers aboard an UH-1H Iroquois (Huey) helicopter that was in route to Fire Support Base Katum, South Vietnam, when it was diverted due to bad weather.

After flying into Cambodian airspace, the aircraft came under heavy enemy ground fire, causing the pilot to make an emergency landing in Kampong Cham Province, Cambodia.





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Richardson, Price, and Griffin died at the site of the crash during a fire-fight with enemy forces. Their remains were not immediately recovered.

The Huey's four crewmen and its four passengers survived the landing.

One crewman was able to evade being captured by enemy forces and later returned to friendly lines.

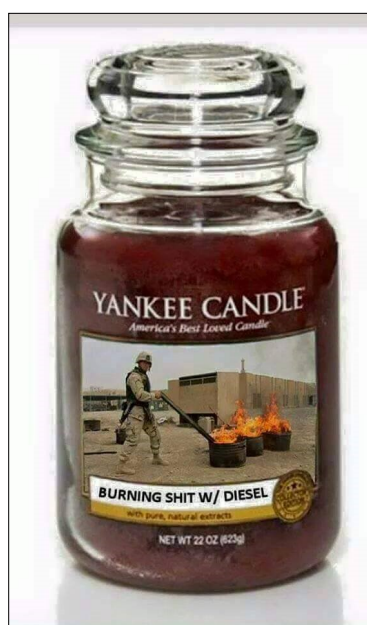
The other three crewmen and one passenger were captured. The Vietnamese released two of the captured crewmen in 1973, and the remains of the other two captured men were returned to U.S. control in the 1980s and identified.



After a 20-year joint investigation by the U.S./Kingdom of Cambodia (K.O.C.), the human remains and military gear were recovered from a single grave.

Today there are 1,626 American service members that are still unaccounted for from the Vietnam War.

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VIETNAM VETERAN!**

**While supplies last!**



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