

# AVEL VIETNAM

Newsletter - March 2019

## Top Hits Of 1966



At the start of 1966 there 184,300 American troops in South Vietnam. Major troop build ups continued throughout the year. The 1st Division, 2nd Brigade of the 5th Division, 25th Division, 1st Cavalry (Airmobile) Division, 101st Airborne Division and 3rd Marine Division had been deployed in 1965.

4th Division, 9th Division, Americal Division (Formed at Chu Lai from units already there) and the 1st Marine Division arrived in 1965. From here on in, all troops arriving would be replacements for casualties or those who completed their tour and were going home.

1966 was a very active year in Vietnam. By the end of the year there were 385,300 troops in South Vietnam. In 1966 there were 6,143 war related deaths and 30,093 wounded.

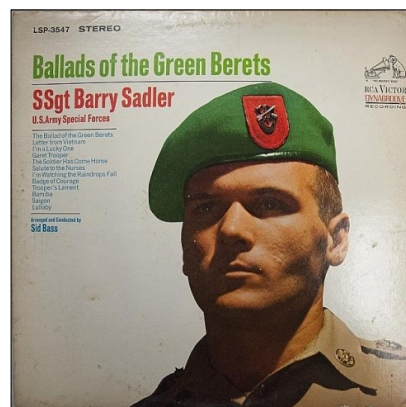
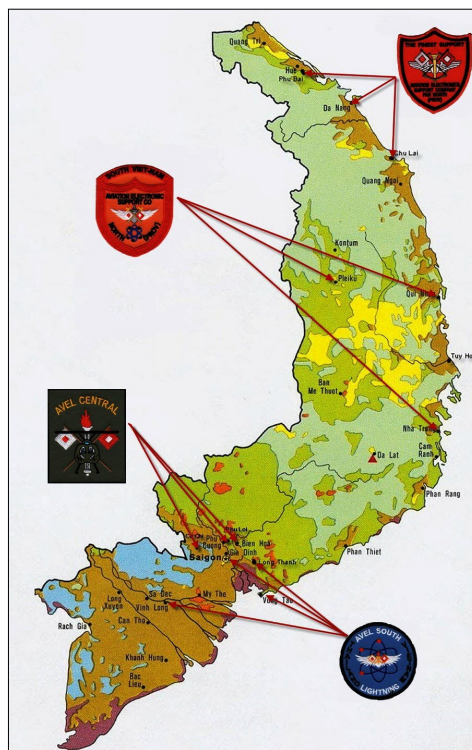
As we all know, music was a big part of our tour in Vietnam. Certain songs will play and you are instantly transported back to Vietnam. Two sounds act as a catalyst: music and the sound of a Huey.

Check out the Top Ten songs of 1966!

- #1 "California Dreamin" by The Mamas & the Pappas
- #2 "96 Tears" by ? The Mysterians
- #3 "What Becomes of the Broken Hearted" by Jimmy Ruffin
- #4 "Last Train to Clarksville" by The Monkees
- #5 "Reach Out I'll Be There" by Four Tops
- #6 "These Boots Are Made For Walkin" by Nancy Sinatra
- #7 "Cherish" by The Association
- #8 "Strangers in the Night" by Frank Sinatra
- #9 "Kicks" by Paul Revere & the Raiders
- #10 "Ballad of the Green Berets" by SSgt Barry Sadler

What about the top selling albums of 1966? It is interesting to see the contrast.

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



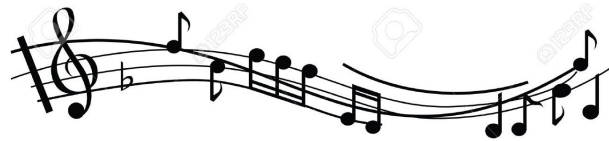
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### Top Albums of 1966

- #1 "Pet Sounds" by The Beach Boys
- #2 "Revolver" by The Beatles
- #3 "Blonde on Blonde" by Bob Dylan
- #4 "Aftermath" by The Rolling Stones
- #5 "Fresh Cream" by Cream
- #6 "Parsley, Sage, Rosemary and Thyme" by Simon & Garfunkel
- #7 "Freak Out" by The Mothers of Invention
- #8 "Roger the Engineer" by The Yardbirds
- #9 "A Quick One" by The Who
- #10 "Face to Face" by The Kinks



What songs do you immediately associate with Vietnam? Send them to me so I can put them in the next newsletter. Email me at [jmccabe51@gmail.com](mailto:jmccabe51@gmail.com)

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## WAR IS HELL

*Toxic chemicals from the 20 million gallons of Agent Orange continue to pollute soil, water and food*

United States aircraft sprayed more than 20 million gallons of herbicides, including dioxin-contaminated Agent Orange, on Vietnam's rain forests, wetlands, and croplands. The whole purpose of Agent Orange was to defoliate the thick jungle vegetation concealing Viet Cong fighters. It also destroyed a portion of the country's food crops.

Agent Orange was a combination of two herbicides, 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T, neither of which persist longer than a few days or weeks in the environment when exposed to sunlight. However, during production of Agent Orange, a toxic byproduct formed: dioxin TCDD, the most toxic of the dioxin family of chemicals.

Once dioxin TCDD gets into the environment, it can stick around for **decades or even centuries**. It attaches itself to organic matter and clay particles of the soil and can then be passed into the food chain. It was absorbed by trees and shrubbery and making its way to the soil surface. **The chemical is still entering the human food supply 50 years later.**

Incineration of contaminated soils and sediments is the only way to remove the chemical from the ecosystem. 'While incineration is the most expensive technology currently available, it would eliminate dioxin rather than temporarily store it in a landfill, and incineration would not require future maintenance or treatment.'

Incineration is one of the most commonly used technologies, having been used to treat soils at more than 150 superfund sites, and is a mature and tested technology.

Researchers found ten hotspots of the chemical around ex-US airbases. These old airbases are surrounded by millions of Vietnamese inhabitants - with the long-term health impacts of prolonged exposure to the potent chemical still unknown. The worst dioxin-contaminated site in Vietnam is the old Bien Hoa airbase, which is 30 miles north of Ho Chi Minh City.

Existing Agent Orange and dioxin research is primarily medical in nature, focusing on the details of human exposure primarily through skin contact and long-term health effects on US soldiers. At least those of us who are still alive.

After President Nixon ordered the US military to stop spraying Agent Orange in 1970, this is the site where all the Agent Orange barrels remaining in Vietnam were collected. The barrels were processed and shipped to Johnston Island in the Pacific Ocean, where they were incinerated at sea in 1977.

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VA has recognized that certain birth defects among Veterans' children are associated with Veterans' qualifying service in Vietnam or Korea. For male veterans the only recognized illness is *Spina bifida* (except *spina bifida occulta*), a defect in the developing fetus that results in incomplete closing of the spine, is associated with Veterans' exposure to Agent Orange or other herbicides during qualifying service in Vietnam or Korea.

VA recognizes a wide range of birth defects as associated with **women Veterans'** service in Vietnam.

Covered birth defects include, but are not limited to, the following conditions:

*Achondroplasia*  
*Cleft lip and cleft palate*  
*Congenital heart disease*  
*Congenital talipes equinovarus (clubfoot)*  
*Esophageal and intestinal atresia*  
*Hallerman-Streiff syndrome*  
*Hip dysplasia*  
*Hirschprung's disease (congenital megacolon)*  
*Hydrocephalus due to aqueductal stenosis*  
*Hypospadias*  
*Imperforate anus*  
*Neural tube defects*  
*Poland syndrome*  
*Pyloric stenosis*  
*Syndactyly (fused digits)*  
*Tracheoesophageal fistula*  
*Undescended testicle*  
*Williams syndrome*



I don't know about you but this scares the hell out of me.

### NEW STAMP PROPOSAL

A Long Island Vietnam Vet who gave his life to save his Platoon is honored with a U.S. Postal Service Stamp. Pfc. Garfield Langhorn threw himself on top of alive grenade on MLK Jr.'s Birthday in 1969 making the ultimate sacrifice and saving his platoon during the Vietnam War.

Congressman Lee Zeldin unveiled legislation for a Garfield M. Langhorn semi-postal stamp. The proposed stamp would feature Langhorn's likeness at 60 cents a pop. The proceeds after postage would go to Supportive Services for Veteran Families, a fitting tribute to a man that gave all he had to his fellow service members.



"They put all kinds of stuff on stamps, but this is really meaningful. This is somebody who served this country and made the ultimate sacrifice," Vietnam veteran Robert Robesch said.

For just 11 cents more than a standard stamp, those who buy it would be giving back on his behalf. "They're not only keeping a very important memory and legacy of a Medal of Honor recipient alive, but the excess money is going to help a veteran in need," Rep. Zeldin said.

It was a packed house at the Pfc. Garfield M. Langhorn Post Office, named in his honor.

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Among the speakers was Doris Eve of East Patchogue. Eve's husband was in Langhorn's platoon that fateful day. "If it wasn't for Garfield, I wouldn't have the wonderful life that I have," Eve said. "We have three wonderful children. We have eight grandchildren."

One of whom bares the name of the fallen hero — 7-year-old Benjamin Rodney Garfield Eve has a special bond with the man that saved his grandfather. "I just feel like, like he's with me all the time," Benjamin said. The Eve family joined forces with the Langhorns to support the special stamp.

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## **The Secret History of a Vietnam War Airstrike Gone Terribly Wrong**

After making three dry runs over the battlefield, the Marine Corps A-4 attack jet descended to 1,000 feet above the jungle and released two bombs. It was just past dusk on Nov. 19, 1967. For the American troops below, a vicious weeklong fight that would eventually become known as the Battle of Dak To was about to take a horrible turn.

Soldiers of the 173rd Airborne Brigade were dug in on the steep southern slope of Hill 875, fighting beside napalm fires and exposed to the guns of North Vietnamese Army shooting from tunnels nearby. Among them was Specialist Jon Wambi Cook — one of his infantry company's few surviving radio operators.

Barreling in on a shallow 10-degree angle at hundreds of miles per hour, the two bombs from the A-4 hit the ground near Cook. One was a dud. The other exploded in a huge orange fireball. Cook had seen many airstrikes before, but not like this. Instead of hitting his battalion's North Vietnamese foes, the bomb struck the branches of a lone tree along the Americans' perimeter, under which the battalion's remaining officers and noncommissioned officers on the ground had set up a command post with their radio operators. It was also a casualty-collection point where the most badly wounded soldiers were being treated by medics while awaiting medevac helicopters to take them off the hill. The bomb killed at least 20 men and wounded 10 more, including most of the remaining senior leaders and medics.

Alongside the medics was Maj. Charles Watters, a 40-year-old Catholic priest who served as the battalion's chaplain. Earlier in the battle, Watters had ventured out past the perimeter several times to rescue wounded soldiers, carrying or dragging them to safety, providing first aid and administering last rites to the dying — actions for which he was later awarded the Medal of Honor. The bomb blast killed him too.

Protected by a pile of broken tree trunks that absorbed deadly fragments, Cook emerged unscathed. His radio crackled with voices. At first he thought North Vietnamese soldiers had broken through the lines and planted a bomb at the command post. "I thought it couldn't have been our guys," he said in a recent interview, "until I heard someone on the radio say: 'Stop. You're killing us.'"



The tactics for close air support in the Vietnam War had jet pilots flying several hundred miles an hour trying to put unguided "dumb bombs" beside maneuver units in the jungle. Fratricidal mishaps were a tragic feature of this manner of waging war. The errant strike at Hill 875 was one of the deadliest mistakes of its type.

The New York Times recently obtained an unredacted copy of the Air Force's investigation into the incident. Written in January 1968, it offers finely detailed insights into an agonizing error from which the remains of three American soldiers have never been found, even after a mission almost half a century later to retrieve them.

The report demonstrates the dangerous gamble of supporting troops in intensive ground combat before the era of so-called smart bombs, when the United States moved to almost exclusively using laser and GPS-guided bombs that made airstrikes much more accurate. The bombs that killed Americans on Hill 875 were 250-pound Mk-81s fitted with Snakeye fins, according to the report.

Designed three years earlier by the Navy's weapons center in China Lake, Calif., these fins popped out as the bomb fell away, decelerating the unguided bombs so that the low-flying aircraft that released them could pull far enough ahead to escape shrapnel and blast damage when the ordnance hit the ground.

At the Battle of Dak To, the sky was crowded overhead. In addition to the Marine A-4s, a pair of Air Force A-1 Skyraiders was dropping napalm — intending both to kill North Vietnamese troops and to create fires on the ground that the pilots in faster A-4s could use as reference points for follow-on bombing runs. B-52s were approaching with plans to carpet-bomb. An AC-47 gunship was circling. The job of coordinating all these varied options and attacks fell to Capt. James E. Wrenn of the Air Force, who was flying a small Cessna propeller plane.

Lt. Col. Richard Taber, the pilot who the report indicated dropped the bombs, had flown 90 hours in combat since arriving in Vietnam roughly three months before. Taber flew with the call sign Hellborne 526-1 and commanded a Marine Corps A-4 squadron in Chu Lai. He was supposed to drop his bombs directly onto one of the napalm fires, but his bombs fell about 650 feet short and to the right, a miss the investigator labeled “a short round.” It landed on Charlie Company, Cook's sister unit, which he had fallen in with amid the chaos of the fighting.

How this mistake occurred remains unclear. The report said the A-4 may have approached the target area from a direction slightly off axis from what Wrenn directed, resulting in the bombs landing downslope from the intended target. But the investigation was ultimately inconclusive, declaring that “there is insufficient evidence to determine the exact cause of the short round” before blaming “improper release conditions.” The investigator recommended that pilots undergo remedial training and that the investigation be closed, as it had revealed “no gross personnel errors nor evidence of equipment malfunction.”

Today, Cook, who is now 72, lives in Azusa, Calif., and spends his days tending to his grandchildren nearby. Dak To, he said, is never far from his thoughts. “Not a day goes by that I don't think about it, Cook said. “I've always thought about it, but to actually share it with others, that took 35 or 37 years.” In March 2017, Cook returned to Hill 875 to help look for the remains of the three American soldiers who had never been recovered: Sgt. Donald Iandoli, Specialist Jack L. Croxdale II and Pfc. Benjamin David De Herrera. The mission did not find the missing men, and Cook surmises that their bodies were vaporized in the blast. But Cook's participation in the search connected him with a military investigator who was also on the trip. “I mentioned that I wondered what the pilot felt, knowing that he was responsible,” Cook said. “It must have been hard for him to carry on.” The investigator's answer surprised him. “If you read the report,” Cook recalled being told, “you might have a different opinion.”

Cook subsequently obtained a copy of the report in 2017, which, as far as he knew, had never been publicly released. A scholar who wrote about the fight for Hill 875 in the 1980s and an author who wrote a book about it in the 1990s both told *The New York Times* that they had never seen the report before, even after searching through files related to the battle in the National Archives. Upon reading it, Cook found that instead of taking responsibility, the Marine pilot's statement to investigators criticized almost everyone but himself and his wingman. Taber blamed other pilots for being unprofessional over the radio, spoke of one pilot's “imperious manner” and called out others for being sarcastic and impatient. He did, though, praise his own skills. “I have been dropping Snakeeyes exclusively in my last 15 or 20 launches from the alert,” his statement reads. “I can recall no reported miss distance as great as 50 meters in range, and nothing approaching that in azimuth.”

“Ordnance on target,” Taber added, “has almost always been reported as 100 percent.”

What the report did not show was the chaos on the ground, the horror the bomb had created for the very soldiers it was supposed to relieve. Cook can recall it all. As the initial shock of the explosion passed, he crawled in the dark to the smoking crater where the bomb hit. “That's when you heard the moaning and the crying,” he said. “I got to the edge of the crater this bomb had made and realized it was where a lot of guys had congregated. This was where our C.P. — our command post — and all of our wounded from earlier in the day had been positioned.”

Overhead, Capt. Dick Goetze of the Air Force flew his AC-47 “Spooky” gunship in a slow circle 3,000 feet above the dead and wounded troops, while one of his crew members tossed parachute flares out the back of the plane to help survivors on the ground see in the darkness.

Goetze, his co-pilot and his navigator had all watched the bomb hit. “It was obvious when the explosion went off that it was in the wrong place,” he said in a recent interview. “We all said, ‘Oops, we just got the friendlies.’”

Earlier in the same flight, before the A-4’s Snakeyes struck, Goetze was ordered to leave the area by a different officer than Wrenn who was controlling the airspace above Hill 875 as night fell. Goetze was told that a number of “Buffs” — giant B-52 Stratofortress bombers — were on their way to carpet-bomb the area and that he needed to clear out.

Goetze, who later retired as a two-star general, disobeyed his orders. He had seen B-52 carpet-bombing missions before, and he knew they were the wrong planes for the circumstances at Hill 875. “They’d just wipe everybody out,” he said. “So we refused to get off the target for that reason. Their target area was right on top of those guys. I got my hand slapped for that.”

As a flare from Goetze’s gunship floated close to the ground, it threw enough light sideways for Cook to peer into the crater. “All you saw was parts and pieces,” he said. He found a soldier he knew. “He said, ‘Hey, can you come get me?’” Cook said. “And as the flare got closer, I could see that he had been cut off from below the thighs. There was nothing there.” As his friend bled to death, Cook came upon a medic. “He said something about his arm,” he said. “It was stuck under him. I felt for it, and his arm was shattered from his shoulder to his elbow. There was just sinew and connective tissue connecting them.” Cook crawled from soldier to soldier. The survivors had more than wounds to worry about. They assumed their Vietnamese adversaries would launch an attack to finish them off, so they stayed vigilant. “We expected an all-out assault,” Cook said. “We had our rear covered, but it was just a matter of when they were going to start coming over the berm.” But the North Vietnamese soldiers never came.

Today the investigative report has circulated among witnesses and survivors, including Stephen Greene, a former warrant officer who flew UH-1D Iroquois helicopters in the 173rd’s aviation platoon at the time of the Battle of Dak To. “The report could not show the desperation and extreme courage displayed in abundance,” he said in an interview. “And it certainly did not explain what each of the survivors must live with forever.”

Taber is now 89 and living in an assisted-care facility in North Carolina. In a telephone interview, he at first denied knowing anything about Dak To but eventually acknowledged that he flew over Hill 875 as Hellborne 526-1. Taber said that his air group commander, who was a friend of his from before that tour, grounded him after the attack. But two or three days later, he said, his commander ordered him back into the cockpit. “When I was restored to full flight duty, I took it as being absolved,” he said. Half a century after the battle, he says he does not take responsibility for what happened. “I have no way of knowing,” Taber said. “There were other aircraft on nearby targets.”

“I had prayed,” he said, “that it was someone else.”

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## **NEW AVEL, AVIONICS AND VIETNAM VETERANS REGISTERED**

None Submitted

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## **TAPS**

None Submitted

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## **PHOTOS**

None Submitted

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## **CHANGE OF ADDRESS/EMAIL/PHONE**

Tom Moseley (Avel North) has a new email: [Beelybub@hotmail.com](mailto:Beelybub@hotmail.com)

*Send your change of address and email to [jmccabe51@gmail.com](mailto:jmccabe51@gmail.com)*

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## **ALL AVEL REUNION/GATHERING 2019**

### **Join us at LZ Tucson!**

Wednesday September 25th to Sunday September 29th 2019  
Homewood Suites by Hilton  
St. Philip's Plaza  
4250 N. Campbell  
Tucson, AZ 85718

***RESERVE YOUR ROOM NOW!***

### **2019 All AVEL Gathering/Reunion Itinerary**

#### **Early Bird, Tuesday, 24 September 2019**

Explore Tucson on your own

#### **Wednesday, 25 September 2019**

Reunion begins with open registration  
17:30: Hamburger BBQ on the patio  
Hospitality Room is open after dinner

#### **Thursday, 26 September 2019**

Hospitality Room open until 23:00  
Pima Air Museum and Boneyard Tour

#### **Friday, 27 September 2019**

Hospitality Room open until 23:00  
Bus tour to Tombstone

#### **Saturday, 28 September 2019**

Hospitality Room open until 17:00  
John Veers Martini Golf Outing (Course to be announced)  
Ladies Luncheon (Paid by Avel)  
Hospitality Room will be closed until 17:30 to prepare for dinner  
Group Dinner  
Hospitality Room open until 23:00

### **RESERVE YOUR ROOM**

If you think you can come please reserve your room. You can cancel anytime up to 24 hours prior to scheduled arrival. Call the hotel at 520-577-0007 and tell them the Group Code "VNR". Room rate is \$139.00/night.

### **REGISTER AT THE WEBSITE**

Once again, if you even think you can make it, please register at [www.avelvietnam.com](http://www.avelvietnam.com). We need an approximate count in order to make arrangements for group activities. **Please register!**

***Hope to see you there!***

***Group activities may change as we get closer to the reunion date!***



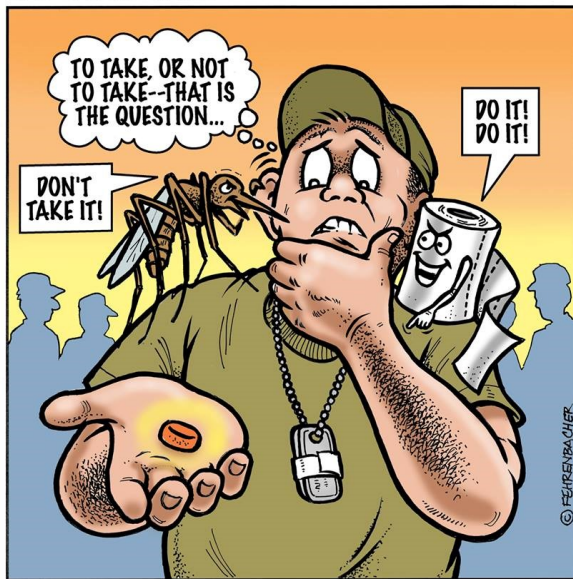


## NATIONAL VIETNAM WAR VETERANS DAY

On March 29, 2012, President Barack Obama proclaimed March 29, 2012, as Vietnam Veterans Day. The proclamation called "upon all Americans to observe this day with appropriate programs, ceremonies, and activities that commemorate the 50 year anniversary of the Vietnam War."

On March 28, 2017, President Donald J. Trump signed the Vietnam War Veterans Recognition Act of 2017. This act officially recognizes March 29 as National Vietnam War Veterans Day. The Act also includes the day among those days on which the US flag should especially be displayed.

### IN-COUNTRY



MALARIA PILL MONDAY... DO YA FEEL LUCKY?

### IN-COUNTRY



# AVEL VIETNAM



## March 2019 Newsletter