



**Motto of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry "The Stallions"**

## **Commemoration of Sergeant Richard Eugene Colburn**

**24 February 1950 – 24 April 1971**

**Dear family members, friends, and fellow Vietnam Veterans. We are here to honor the service and sacrifices of Sergeant Richard Eugene Colburn, who answered the Call of Duty of our nation in the darkest hours of our Vietnam Conflict, 1969 and 1970, when the American public and media despised those that served in Vietnam.**

**We also want to recognize the many family members that he left behind that grieved for him and for the memories that were never created in his short life.**

**Richard Colburn joined the Army in 1968, straight out of High School. He attended Kendal Central High School, NY. where he played soccer and managed the school's band. After completing basic and advanced infantry training, he was issued orders for Vietnam and became a member of one of the premier Infantry combat organizations – the 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry. His battalion, the 1/35<sup>th</sup> Infantry, was part of**

**the special Brigade Task Force that had been deployed from Hawaii to the Highlands of Vietnam and then came under the control of the 4th Infantry Division in 1969. The 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division called IVY, has a very proud fighting tradition – especially in WWII when it fought from the beaches of UTAH in Normandy through the Hurtgen Forest.**

**From May to November 1969, Richard served in the Reconnaissance Platoon of Echo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry and earned his Combat Infantry Badge - the hard way - through firefights with North Vietnamese forces that were highly active in the Vietnam Central Highlands. The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion 35<sup>th</sup> Infantry saw very heavy combat actions throughout 1966-1969 and received Valorous Unit Award Streamers, Meritorious Unit commendations, and Cross of Gallantry Medals.**

**As some of you can appreciate, being part of a Reconnaissance Platoon, Echo Company RECON, entails scouting at the behest of the Battalion Commander and Battalion Intelligence Officer where the enemy is – and is not – so that the rest of the combat forces can be deployed effectively and quickly. When in a Reconnaissance unit – all specially selected soldiers - and Richard was one of those, rely on each other for their survival by being stealthy, skilled with weapons, and have proven practical experience in ambush and counter ambush tactics.**

**The picture we have of Richard in December of 1970, with the IVY Patch on and his Combat Infantry Badge, seems to highlight the respect that he earned through combat actions with the Reconnaissance Platoon of Echo Company, when General Glenn D. Walker, then commander of the 4<sup>th</sup> Infantry Division had Richard at a special ceremony in a division base area – before Richard went off to join Co C, 124<sup>th</sup> Signal BN, 4th Infantry Division. In the following year, after he had re-enlisted, he had a short stint in Germany, before returning to Vietnam for his second tour, as a Unit Supply Sergeant ( MOS 76Y40).**

**When he got back to Vietnam in December 1970, he was assigned to the 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry Division. The Division would also be selected in the coming months to pull out and return home to the United States, as part of the President Nixon Vietnamization program – by turning part of its assigned area, in the 3<sup>rd</sup> Military Region area of operations over to the Vietnamese.**

**Richard was initially part of the 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry, and when the 3rd Brigade, 1<sup>st</sup> Cavalry (Separate) was stood up on 26 March 1971 as the principal combat force to protect Bien Hoa and Long Binh area – Sgt Colburn was reassigned from the Headquarters 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 12<sup>th</sup> Cavalry to the Headquarters Company of 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion, 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. There he was the Supply**

**Sergeant and principal Battalion armorer – to fix and maintain weapons.**

**He knew how to fix weapons and his talents were sought after by the subordinate armorers in each of the Infantry Companies of the Battalion – especially those units that had just been in major fire fights with enemy forces.**

**Shortly after his transfer to his new unit, his presence had been requested by Delta Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry to come to the forward location of the battalion at Firebase Fontaine. Firebase Fontaine was located to the South- East of the Vietnamese city – Xuan Loc, along Highway 1.**

**Delta company, otherwise known as the Angry Skippers, had been in a three-day fire fight a few kilometers North of Firebase Fontaine. The company had run up on a major, heavily defended bunker complex, most likely the 33<sup>rd</sup> North Vietnamese Regiment. Range Platoon had taken heavy casualties in this major firefight with the North Vietnamese forces. From 20-22 April 1971 the Angry Skippers orchestrated massive artillery and airstrikes, and after a period of additional artillery and airstrikes, the mopping up of the complex.**

**Due to the combat action – weapons became overheated from the extensive firefights, needed repairs and or replacement. It was a gargantuan task beyond the company**

**armorer – Jim Garvin – who appreciated Sergeant Colburn's expertise and talent in restoring the weapons to full combat function. So, Sergeant Colburn came forward to Firebase Fontaine on 24 April 1971 to repair all the weapons that needed to be fixed.**

**That evening, with the work done on behalf of the Range Platoon combat soldiers, he was on the last Logistics Bird that was headed back to the Bien Hoa Rear – the location of Headquarters Company , 2<sup>nd</sup> Battalion 8<sup>th</sup> Cavalry. The helicopter, a UH-1, crashed shortly after takeoff from Fire Support Base Fontaine.**

**Upon reflection, it has been fifty years since the premature death of Sergeant Richard E. Colburn when he died in the late afternoon helicopter crash on 24 April 1971 in Military Region 3, Long Khanh Province, South Vietnam - some four months into his second tour in Vietnam. Vietnam did change all of us that served there, especially for those of us here – that had served in close infantry combat.**

**For some it was a life changing experience, for others they came home with hidden scars. Some were bitter scars in the body and the mind. Much later were we to learn how deadly Agent Orange is. We had operated in some of the defoliated areas and drank the ground water out of necessity. The scars of our minds, however, were another thing, especially PTSD.**

**So, when you hear a Vietnam veteran talk to another Veteran – you will hear “Welcome Home brother. “ No one welcomed us home. Compare that to what you hear at the airports today: “Thanks for your Service.” It was the generation of Vietnam Vets who made sure our troops that served in Iraq and Afghanistan received the Welcome Home they deserved.**

**Periodically we have had reunions at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial – the mystical black granite wall that has all the 58,000 names inscribed who had fallen in Vietnam – among them is Sergeant Richard Eugene Colburn. His name is forever enshrined on Panel W-3, Line 7. He is also honored on the New York Virtual wall where is remembered by the people of New York, for this service with honor in the US Army – and the thought - that his sacrifice serves as a positive example to inspire all of us, and when we work together – we can help one another.**

**Sergeant Richard Colburn, this Band of fellow Combat Brothers from Range Platoon and Delta Company, the Angry Skippers, salute you at your final resting place. It is our honor to thank you for your service and sacrifice to the nation. And, when it is our turn to join you in the Lord’s embrace– we want to hear a loud “Welcome Home Brother.”**

**Wolf D. Kutter**

**Angry Skipper 6, Colonel USA, (Retired)**