

Richard Colburn – One Man's Story

When Richard Colburn arrived in Vietnam for his second tour in December 1970, I was still in the bush dealing with the leaches, mosquitoes, miserable heat and the heavy pack on my back that Richard would have experienced back in 1969 on his first tour with the 35th Infantry division.

In Feb I was reassigned to the rear as company mail clerk. The job I really wanted was to be company armor. I wanted to learn more about the weapons and to be able to repair the guy's weapons in the field. The job of Company Armor would also allow me to visit my buddies more often.

When the Company Commander approved my request, I was introduced to the Battalion Armor, Sgt Richard Colburn. Richard and I hit it off right away. Although Richard was more than 2 years younger than I, his knowledge of weapons was extensive and eagerly offered to teach me.

April 1971 was devastating for Delta Company of the 2nd/8th Cav and especially Range Platoon, but many of them are not aware of the part Richard played and how he impacted me personally and many of Range Platoon as well.

I had just returned from a Hawaiian R&R flying pretty high!

While I had been gone the Battalion Rear had been moved from Firebase Mace to the more secure Bien Hoa.

I set to work building a secure Arms Room and installing some electrical wiring in our new company digs. I also spent time with Richard improving my weapon repair skills.

On April 20th those of us in the rear got the devastating news that the Platoon I had served with had been ambushed. 4 men had been killed in the initial action and at least 6 more men had been wounded.

The battle continued through the 21st and 22nd. Finally, on the 23rd, after three long days of battle, Delta Company was finally able to reenter the kill zone and retrieve the bodies of the men killed in the initial contact.

That day I headed out to the forward Fire Support Base Fontaine with the company supplies and a few spare parts to meet the company, not knowing what shape the men or equipment would be in when I saw them. I stowed the supplies and waited for the company to arrive.

Delta company arrived on Fontaine about 4:00 PM that afternoon. I was shocked at what I saw. I talked with some of my buddies who were still very distressed.

After visiting for a while, I went to check out the weapons from the ambush, which were really a mess.

I got the weapons inventoried and labeled, so I could make a damage report to Richard, my Battalion Armor, when I got back into Bien Hoa.

On the morning of April 24th, I was feeling overwhelmed as I began working on the damaged weapons. I would do my best, but was not sure that my best was going to be good enough.

Then, much to my surprise I looked up to see Richard Colburn, from the Battalion arms room, and W.J. Brooks from 27th Maintenance Battalion. They had left the relative security of Bien Hoa and come out to the forward fire support base for the express purpose of helping me with the daunting task of repairing the weapons. *(add that he came out to help the guys recover from the devastation of the ambush?)*

Richard had also brought spare weapons and parts. He encouraged me and worked alongside me most of the day, hand carrying me through the more complicated repairs. Before the day was done, all weapons were repaired and once again functioning properly for the men of my platoon who relied on them for their own safety.

As evening approached, Brooks, Colburn and I headed to the helicopter pad. We were all three on the manifest to return to Bien Hoa. I was trying to express to them how much I appreciated all the work they had done.

At the last minute, the loadmaster tapped me on the shoulder and told me that I had been bumped and would not be riding on the helicopter with Richard.

I shook hands and waved goodbye to Colburn and Brooks, watching them as they boarded the helicopter and it took off heading back to Bien Hoa.

I continued to watch it, as I reviewed in my mind how much their presence that day had blessed me as well as the men of Delta Company.

As I stood there watching, the Chopper suddenly *(fell out of the sky here?) (and)* dropped below the tree line. Word came that the Helicopter had crashed and we all ran as fast as we could to the three Helicopters that had been left on the landing pad for a Quick Reaction Force. A Cobra gun ship and Rash birds were on station, over the crash site in what seemed like only seconds, to guard the downed bird *(change term to helicopter)* and its passengers. We got off the birds and started doing whatever we could to secure and clear the crash site.

There were 11 souls on that chopper. The Pilot, Co-pilot and Richard were killed. 8 others survived, but there were many serious injuries.

April 24th was a tragic day that will haunt me the rest of my life.

When I returned home from Vietnam, I quickly learned that no one wanted to hear about my experiences.

I spent 45 years trying to push Vietnam out of my mind, but some memories just can't be erased.

In 2015 I attended my first Angry Skipper Reunion and reunited with some of my brothers. At that reunion I began to turn a corner with those memories I could not shake.

I began to stop suppressing and begin the process of seeking some sort of resolution.

How could I express my appreciation to a man who spent the last day of his life going out of his way and putting his life on the line to help me complete a daunting task??

The answer of course is, I can't.

But maybe there are things I can do.

One thing I could do is to at least tell his story.

Maybe I could find some of his family and let them know of his generosity to a man he had known but a short time.

I could tell them of his dedication to serving his brothers in arms, even ones he did not know and would never meet.

Maybe after many, many years of grieving him I could go to visit his final resting place!

And that's what I decided to do.

This is the 4th memorial service that I have participated in. People seem confused when I tell them that it is a selfish thing I do.

This past month has been an emotional struggle for me as I prepared for this moment, but I think I have finally discovered why this visit is so important to me.

During our time in country, soldiers had no time to grieve!

It didn't matter if you were a front line grunt in the jungle or support personnel in the rear, whenever something happened, the casualties were whisked away and emotions were suppressed, because the mission must go on.

Today I came to say, Rest in Peace Sgt Richard Colburn. Thank you for your sacrifice to your Country, to the men of Delta Company and your generosity to me.

We know that we were not the only recipients of your selfless service to others, but we do know we were the last and we want to express our thanks to you.

Today we remember you and say Welcome Home

Richard Eugene Colburn

A TRUE AMERICAN HERO!

Coins at a Grave

Penny =	means you visited the Grave
Nick=	means you went to basic training together
Dime =	means you served together
Quarter =	means you were there when he died.

Agenda – Richard Colburn Celebration

Welcome:	Jim Garvin
Explanation of Coins:	
Thank You:	Donna, Lisa, Gary, Legion VFW Hinsdale, Scouts 94
Opening Prayer:	Doug Hilts
Introduction of Wolf:	Doug Hilts
Commoration:	Wolf Kutter
Time for Sharing:	Family & Friends
My Memories:	Jim Garvin
Gold Star Family:	Susan Garvin
Thank you for coming	
Invite to VFW	Kirk Davis
Benediction:	Jim Garvin
3 Round Volley:	American Legion
Taps:	American Legion