



# Pro Patria Press

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*Newsletter of the 31st Infantry Regiment Association*

## Reunion 2002



We will hold our next reunion from 16-19 August 2002 at the Holiday Inn Select in Oakland, PA, just outside **Pittsburgh**. For reservations call 412-682-6200 or 1-800-465-4329 and *tell them you're with the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry Regiment Association to get their special rate.* Your room will cost \$79 per night plus \$11 tax. That's just \$8 more than we paid at Columbus, GA seven years ago and about \$60 less than the hotel's normal rate, so we're getting a reasonable price. The reunion banquet will cost around \$25 per person. We'll also charge \$5 for registration to cover expenses for the hospitality room.

Plan on arriving on Friday, 16 August for registration and to meet with old friends at the hotel's hospitality room. On Saturday morning, 17 August, those who wish to do so can take a guided tour of the city on a DUKW, a WWII amphibious landing craft. The tour also takes you to the city's Korean War and Vietnam War memorials. The price is \$15 per person. Others may want to stroll through Schenley Park or visit the Phipps Observatory or Carnegie Museum, all just a few minutes walk from our hotel. Saturday evening we'll have our reunion business meeting and raffle, always a fun occasion. On Sunday, 18 August, we'll walk across the street to the Soldiers and Sailor's Memorial to visit the museum and hold our memorial ceremony and give our special thanks to our 4<sup>th</sup> Battalion's soldiers who fought in Afghanistan. You can tour the Soldiers and Sailors museum for \$3 per person. On Sunday evening, we'll have our memorial banquet at the hotel.

The hotel is 18 miles (about 35 minutes) from the airport. There is an airport shuttle bus for \$32 round trip (call 412-321-4991) or taxi for around \$35 one-way. If you're driving, enter the city on any interstate highway and connect to I-376. From I-376, take the 5<sup>th</sup> Avenue exit north to the University of Pittsburgh. The Holiday Inn Select is adjacent to the University at 100 Lytton Avenue. This may be our last East Coast event for several years so please mark your calendars and call for your reservations now. We look forward to seeing you there.

## Polar Bears in Combat in Afghanistan

*From LTC Steve Townsend, Commander of the 4th Battalion 31st Infantry, 9 March 2002*

Your Polar Bears are in combat for the first time since Vietnam. They have been involved in the most intense ground fighting of the war to date. As some of you know, we deployed more than once over the past five months but it is certainly more serious now. Of course, you have been following the news of what is happening and it is fairly accurate. At the end of this note, I'm including a summary of our involvement in the war. Please keep us in your thoughts and prayers as Polar Bears again defend America's freedom.

The Polar Bears of the 4th Battalion really appreciate the Association's support with our artist's print "Pro Patria" including the advertisement in a special edition newsletter and COL Carlson's reminder plug in that issue. We are now about \$200 from paying the artist in full. The response from association members has been terrific. Some members sent \$120 checks to pay for a \$20 print—thank you all! We're very proud of that print and it definitely takes on new meaning as a

fifth generation of Polar Bears finds itself at war. If you don't have your print, we still have them available. Contact Lieutenant Tim Carignan at 315-772-7516.

### **Summary of the 4th Battalion's Involvement in the War on Terror**

On September 23, in the midst of the Association's 2001 Reunion at Ft Drum, the Polar Bears launched the 10th Mountain Division's first response to the war on terror. On only four hours notice, C Company deployed by Blackhawk helicopters to Aberdeen Proving Ground, MD as part of Operation Noble Eagle. For six weeks, they protected sensitive facilities until relieved by the National Guard. On September 28, the division commander directed the battalion to form Task Force Polar Bear, a provisional combined arms force to respond to other potential terrorist attacks.

On October 2, Company A, the Mortar Platoon, and Company B's 3d Platoon conducted the 10th Mountain Division's first overseas deployment of the war, deploying to Kuwait and Qatar. For over five months, these Polar Bears protected war-related facilities in those countries. On October 4, the Antitank Platoon, attached to the 1-87th Infantry, deployed to Uzbekistan to secure an airfield in preparation for subsequent US operations against terrorists in Afghanistan. The Antitank Platoon later provided security for the first allied troops to arrive at Bagram Air Base, Afghanistan. On December 19, C Company deployed to Uzbekistan and then to Mazar-e-Sharif, Afghanistan to assist with the detention and screening of captured terrorists. Directed to pack and then stand down in November, the rest of the battalion once again began preparations to deploy as January 2002 came to a close.



From 5-13 March, C Company and the AT Platoon participated in Operation Anaconda in eastern Afghanistan, attached to 1-87 Inf. They operated at altitudes over 9000 feet for nine days. C Company made contact with Al Qaeda on at least three occasions, killing 9, capturing 1, and suffering no casualties. A Company participated in Operation Harpoon (13-16 March), attached to the 3d Battalion, Princess Patricia's Canadian Light Infantry. They cleared bunkers and caves on a terrain feature called the "Whale". A Company made contact with Al Qaeda, killing 1 and suffering 2 non-battle casualties due to altitude sickness.

The Battalion TAC arrived in Afghanistan in mid-March and was quickly committed to the fight. With A and C Companies, our AT Platoon, and with 81mm mortars from 1-87 Inf, we conducted Operation Polar Harpoon to clear the 10,466 foot Takur Ghar Mountain (we named it OBJ Siberia in honor of the Regiment's baptism of fire in 1919) and the Upper Shahikot Valley. The battalion cleared bunkers and caves the old fashioned way--with guns, grenades and guts...some Marine Cobra helicopter gunships came in handy too! A Company made contact with the enemy again, killing 1 while suffering one minor shrapnel wound (PVT David Vasquez, from Texas). The battalion captured and destroyed numerous enemy weapons, munitions, and equipment as well as clearing and destroying many bunkers and caves. A notable achievement was the re-capture of US weapons and equipment that had been lost to the enemy during a horrific gunfight between Al Qaeda and US Special Operations Forces early in Anaconda on what was then known as BP Ginger (that we later renamed OBJ Siberia).

In a heart-breaking twist for the rest of the Polar Bears at Fort Drum, higher headquarters determined that they were not needed here so, once again, their imminent deployment was cancelled. This was the fifth time this happened to our battalion since 9/11. But at least 4-31 (minus) is in this fight. We have troops leaving for the field now to conduct a search and attack mission. The soldiers are doing well--they have continued to train during the lulls and morale

remains high. This fight is just beginning and they know it. If you want to write to us, send your letter to “**Any Polar Bear**” 4<sup>th</sup> Bn 31<sup>st</sup> Inf, 10<sup>th</sup> Mtn Div, APO AE 09354.

### **Steve Townsend’s Ironic Journey**



In one of life’s ironies, Lieutenant Colonel Steve Townsend just returned with his battalion to his father’s homeland. Steve’s father was an Afghan medical student in Germany when he met Steve’s mother, a German art student. Adopted soon after his birth, Steve was raised by James and Geraldine Townsend, an Army NCO and his wife who were stationed in Germany at the time. Until a decade ago, Steve knew nothing of his birth father, who had become a doctor and died before his son knew of him. His birth mother contacted Steve in 1991 and told him of his ancestry. He has since met relatives who fled Afghanistan when the Soviets invaded in 1979 and now live in the US. This is Steve’s third combat tour. He served with the 82d Airborne in Grenada in 1983 and with the 75<sup>th</sup> Rangers in Panama in 1990.

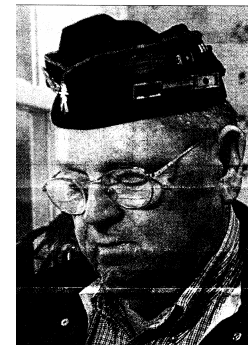
### **Belated Silver Stars**



In January, **Jim Vickers** (left) of Barrett, WV and **Tom Batts** (next page) of Rocky Mount, NC were belatedly awarded the Silver Star for their actions in North Korea’s Hell Fire Valley on 28-29 November 1950. Both were members of B Company, sent north from Koto-ri as part of Task Force Drysdale to clear Chinese roadblocks on the road to Hagaru-ri. The distance they were to walk was 11 miles and the temperature was -32°. About 5 miles from Koto-ri, the task force was ambushed and soon became surrounded.

A Chinese heavy machinegun, firing from around 1000 yards away pinned down Corporal Vickers’ platoon and was hitting men on the ground who could find no protection. Ordered by Lieutenant Bill Meanor to knock out the gun with his 57mm recoilless rifle, Vickers and his assistant gunner would have to expose themselves to intense enemy fire from heights on both sides of the road. Trying to reduce their risks, the team moved after each round they fired. During their second try, Vickers’ assistant gunner was killed. Vickers was wounded twice, once by shrapnel and later by a submachinegun. Down to his last round, a white phosphorous shell, Vickers rose, took careful aim, despite the bullets spattering around him, and fired again. This time he hit his target. Because of his bravery, some of his comrades would live to see another sunrise.

Shortly after the ambush began, a mortar round detonated between Corporal Batts, his platoon leader, and another of his comrades. Batts was knocked unconscious and the others were killed. When he awoke, he found his BAR laying across his lap. An intense battle was raging and he quickly joined in. Someone handed him a grenade and as soon as he threw it, two rounds struck his hand. Unable to use his BAR any longer, he gave it to a friend and told him to get out anyway he could. The man was killed. Batts took a pistol and crawled into a crater to protect himself. He was wounded four more times during the night, but killed 18 Chinese as they passed or approached his lonely position. When morning came, the Chinese demanded that the survivors surrender or be killed. Corporal Batts, Corporal Vickers, and Lieutenant Meanor were among the lucky few to escape.



### **Honorary Regimental Sergeant Major**



CSM (Ret) George Hamill, appointed Honorary Sergeant Major of the Regiment on 7 December 2001, is recovering from a mild stroke

and complications from diabetes which caused doctors to amputate one of his legs below the knee. He is recuperating at the Warm Springs Rehabilitation Center in Georgia. Cards or letters can be mailed to his home address: 6925 Buckhorn Dr, Columbus, GA 31904.

George served twice with the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry in 1951 in Korea with C Company, and in 1960 at Fort Rucker as operations sergeant for 2<sup>nd</sup> Battle Group, 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry. He will serve as the regiment's first honorary sergeant major, a term that lasts three years. On being sworn in, George, who once was a sergeant while his father was his first sergeant, said: "I stand before you very proud for this acceptance and very honored – the position of honorary sergeant major. I thank you for the honor. I will do my best to live up to your expectations. God bless the 31<sup>st</sup> Infantry, God bless the USA, and I salute you."