



Bill McKeown, right, from Plover hugs Larry Holder from Charlotte, N.C., on Thursday during the Vietnam veterans reunion at the Radisson Hotel & Conference Center in Ashwaubenon. The two spent most of their lives thinking the other was killed in the war. PHOTOS BY EVAN SIEGLE/PRESS-GAZETTE

Reunion gives company a chance to reconnect

Vietnam vets meet in Ashwaubenon this week

By Nathan Phelps
Green Bay Press-Gazette

ASHWAUBENON — Yellow and black decals featuring the horse head of the 1st Cavalry Division adorned vehicles in the lot of the Radisson Hotel & Conference Center.

A few cars sported stickers depicting the yellow, green and red service ribbons given to Vietnam veterans.

They're small signs of the coalescence of veterans here as the Green Bay area this week hosts the reunion of C Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

The event drew dozens of veterans together to catch up with old buddies, talk about their time in Vietnam and remember the guys who didn't come back.

"We're all brothers," Ronald Anderson of Harvard, Ill., said. "You were relying on someone else to help save your life, and they were relying on you."

Anderson went to Vietnam with the unit in 1965.

The reunions, started in 2006 and annually draw between 50 and 100 members to restore bonds forged more than four decades ago.



Vietnam veteran LeRoy Burgess, from Donna, Texas, is a member of C Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division.

"Most of us haven't seen each other in more than 40 years," said LeRoy Burgess, a Donna, Texas, resident who served as an M-60 machine gunner with the unit in 1966 and 1967. "I have a patch that says 'We went over as strangers and came back as brothers.' That's the honest truth."

The unit lost 141 of its members during the Vietnam War. Those soldiers are central to the reunions, held twice a year.

"Every day," Larry Holder of Charlotte, N.C., said when asked how often he thinks of the guys that didn't come back. "There's not a day that goes past that Vietnam does not enter my mind for one reason or another."

"Most of us have (post-traumatic stress disorder) and you try to live with that daily. It just never leaves us," he said Thursday morning as members of the unit gathered in a hospitality room in the hotel. "You've just got to put one foot in front of the other and just keep stepping."

Holder, a medic, joined the company in July 1966 in Vietnam and was wounded in combat in December of that

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year. Others in the unit were told Holder had died.

About three-and-a-half-years ago Holder, who became a firefighter after the war and had four kids and 10 grandchildren, reconnected with Bill McKeown of Plover, who believed Holder was dead. Holder had saved McKeown's life when he was wounded in Vietnam.

"He called me and we talked for almost two-and-a-half hours on the phone," Holder said. "We finally connected. Ever since then he's been part of life by phone and Internet."

McKeown showed up at Holder's surprise 65th birthday.

"That really meant a lot to me," Holder said.

The company's combat history is long and includes action in places like Dak To, Khe Sahn, the Ia Drang Valley and Hue. Unit members served in Vietnam from 1965 to 1972.

The unit traces its early history to 1963 when the military was looking



Vietnam War veterans of C Company, 1st Battalion, 12th Cavalry, 1st Cavalry Division, gather for a group photo Thursday during their reunion at the Radisson Hotel & Conference Center in Ashwaubenon. PHOTOS BY EVAN SIEGLE/PRESS-GAZETTE

at the feasibility and best way to use helicopters in combat — something that would become a hallmark of the Vietnam War where helicopters and heli-borne troops became ubiquitous.

"We took the whole thing to Vietnam and made it work," Anderson said. "We built it from the ground up. Everyone said you couldn't use helicop-



Life magazines on display Thursday during the veterans' reunion at the Radisson Hotel & Conference Center.

ters in combat. ... We proved the concept would work."

Green Bay resident

and unit member Robert Roeder lobbied to hold the convention in his home city.

He and other members of the company said the city and area businesses have welcomed them with open arms, donating food and other items.

A pair of Green Bay teens, Liam Ledford and Curt Caspersen, played taps Thursday night at the

unit banquet.

"I have never seen such a city open up its arms. Everybody here has been fantastic to us," Burgess said.

Bill Lindquist took the unit to Vietnam in the late summer of 1965 as the company commander, a little more than a year after assuming command. He said there's a lot packed into the reunions.

"It's extremely important the guys get together and talk about old times.

PHOTOS ONLINE

To see more of the reunion of Vietnam War veterans, click on this story at greenbaypressgazette.com.

We lost a lot of people in Vietnam and a lot of the troops here are very emotional about seeing some of their buddies that were killed or wounded," the Hartwell, Ga., resident said. "It's therapeutic for the troops to get together and talk about the things that happened and to try to ameliorate some of the mental wounds that have occurred.

"But it's a good time for everybody, getting together and seeing each other after all these years," Lindquist said. "When you come and see the guys the age just kind of disappears ... it's the same personalities, and the same exuberance they exhibited back in those days."

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