

# KHE SANH

## U.S. Army Air Defenders Defend Besieged Marine Combat Base



Story and Photos by Bruce Geiger

*"Khe Sanh Combat Base, site of the most famous siege and one of the most controversial battles of the American Vietnam War, sits silently on a barren plateau surrounded by vegetation-covered hills often obscured by mist and fog. It is hard to imagine as you stand in this peaceful, verdant land that in this very place in early 1968 took place the bloodiest battle of the Vietnam War. . . But little things help you picture what the history books say happen here. The outline of the airfield remains distinct (to this day nothing will grow on it). In places, the ground is literally carpeted with bullets and rusting shell casings. — Vietnam, A Lonely Planet Travel Survival Kit"*

"There is no feeling in the world as good as being airborne out of Khe Sanh", wrote Michael Herr in *Dispatches*, one of the Vietnam War's most celebrated books, but that was thirty years ago. Today, travel guides beckon tourists to visit Khe Sanh Combat Base. It's one of several abandoned combat bases, including Con Thien, Camp Carroll and the Rockpile, that you can visit as part of a day trip, provided you have a good four-wheel drive. Buy a travel permit for ten dollars at the Quang Tri Province Tourist Office in Dong Ha and follow National Highway 9, which parallels the old DMZ, west out of Dong Ha toward Laos. Turn northwest at the triangular intersection just before you reach Khe Sanh Town. The base is on the right-hand side of the road, two and a half kilometers from the intersection.

Thirty years ago, I led a column of Dusters and Quad 50s out of Khe Sanh at the end of a 75-day siege. Most Vietnam vets who were fortunate enough not to have left the combat base in body bags probably figure their one trip to Khe Sanh was enough to last a lifetime. But I'd love to drive a Jeep Cherokee up Route 9, stand in the middle of the abandoned combat base and remember that "I was a soldier once and young.

My route to Khe Sahn was a circuitous one that started in a Nike Hercules fire control center and led to a Duster turret. My military career began during the summer of 1966 when I received my commission at the U.S. Army ROTC training facility in Indiantown Gap, Pennsylvania, after I graduated from Rutgers University. I embarked on active duty in October 1966 as a second lieutenant at the U.S. Army Air Defense Artillery School, Fort Bliss, Texas. Upon completion of the Officers Basic Course I was assigned to the Air Defense Artillery School Battalion as a battery commander and served for about six months while eagerly awaiting orders to a Nike Hercules unit at some exotic destination in Europe.

In July 1967, after a Pentagon advisor assured me that I would remain in my current duty assignment for the duration of my two-year active duty commitment, I received my orders to Vietnam. Five weeks later after completing a thirty-day crash course in ADA automatic weapons, I was still in shock. I took a thirty-day leave to visit with my family before reporting to Fort Lewis, Washington, in early October 1967 for debarkation to Vietnam.

I arrived at Cam Ranh Bay and made my way north over the next few days to Dong Ha on the DMZ, where I reported for duty with the 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery (Automatic Weapons/Self-propelled). I was assigned to



***At left, a Duster crew prepares for a convoy escort mission. At right, the ammunition dump at Dong Ha explodes in geysers of flame and smoke after a direct hit by a North Vietnamese Army rocket.***

Bravo Battery as a platoon leader and spent most of the remainder of 1967 with Duster sections or squads at Marine firebases at Con Thien and Cam Lo.

Although the purpose of this article is to recount ADA unit involvement during the siege of Khe Sanh, it is important to note that some of the heaviest combat engagements of 1967-68 took place in and around the hill at Con Thien. For those of us who fought at both combat bases, Con Thien was in many ways a more hellish and miserable place than Khe Sanh. Duster sections from Bravo Battery played a significant role in the defense of Con Thien and operations to support the firebase.

Early in January 1968, I was reassigned to Alpha Battery. I remember spending a couple of weeks in Dong Ha where we were placed on air defense alert after intelligence reported that the Chinese were scrambling Russian Illutian fighter bombers to test our air defenses on the DMZ. The thought of tracking state-of-the-art jet aircraft with our twin 40mm guns was quite sobering, and I remember being very relieved when we stood down from our air defense mission.

In mid January I took a section of Alpha Battery Dusters to a newly constructed combat base called A3 located just below the southern boundary of the DMZ between Con Thien and Gio Linh. A3 (or Tan An Van Giap, as it was identified on the map) was a rock-hard patch of dirt hurriedly scratched out by the engineers, surrounded by barbed wire and minefields and defended by a company of Marines, some engineers and two Dusters. As enemy activity increased with the Tet offensive in late January, we fired harassment and interdiction (H & I) missions every night into the DMZ. We also used night illumination devices to detect and target NVA infiltrators as they moved through our area of operations. Early during the Tet offensive, the Citadel at Hue and the combat base at Khe Sanh came under heavy NVA attack. As if that were not enough, the North Koreans captured the Pueblo, and several units of the 3rd Marine Division were placed on standby alert.

In mid February I was summoned back to Dong Ha where my long awaited R&R plans were put on hold. I was ordered to Khe Sanh with three enlisted men, Private First Class Arthur Mortman from my platoon and two others from the attached Quad 50s (Golf Battery, 65th Artillery), to relieve the commanding officer of the Duster and Quad 50 sections. He and several of his men had received shrapnel wounds and had been medevaced before we arrived. By this time Khe Sanh had been under siege for several weeks, and Route 9, the only road access to the besieged base, had been completely cut off. Resupply and medevac aircraft were coming under heavy fire, and only volunteer medevac missions were being flown into the Khe Sanh combat base.

After trying unsuccessfully for two days to get a flight from Dong Ha to Khe Sanh, my men and I flew by chopper to Phu Bai, just south of Hue, where we stood a better chance of getting aboard a flight into Khe Sanh. We spent three days waiting on the sweltering runway at Phu Bai before finally getting aboard a Marine CH-53 Sea Stallion flying a volunteer medevac mission to Khe Sanh. The pilot, a Marine major, and the crew chief briefed us along with nearly a dozen grunts who had boarded the chopper.

In *Dispatches*, Michael Herr described our destination:

**“Khe Sanh was a very bad place then, but the airstrip there was the worst place in the world. It was what Khe Sanh had instead of a V-ring, the exact, predictable object of the mortars and rockets hidden in the surrounding hills, the sure target of the big Russian and Chinese guns lodged in the side of CoRoc Ridge, eleven kilometers away across the Laotian border. There was nothing random about the**

**shelling there, and no one wanted anything to do with it. If the wind was right, you could hear the NVA .50-calibers starting far up the valley whenever a plane made its approach to the strip, and the first incoming artillery would precede the landings by seconds. If you were waiting there to be taken out, there was nothing you could do but curl up in the trench and try to make yourself small, and if you were coming in on the plane, there was nothing you could do, nothing at all.”**

All aircraft attempting to land at Khe Sanh received heavy ground fire, including .50-caliber machine gun, mortar, and artillery rounds. The crew chief had us lay our gear bags on the floor beneath us to shield our bodies from ground fire that might penetrate the underside of the chopper. Needless to say, we were all very nervous and *puckered* at the thought of .50-caliber rounds ripping through the thin underbelly of the chopper beneath us! We would circle down through a heavy cloud cover and have only a few seconds with the tailgate on the ground to disembark with all of our gear. As we began our descent, we saw tracer rounds streaking past the windows through the thick clouds. The crew chief shouted that we would have less than ten seconds on the deck, and we had better be off the ramp or know how to fly!

Incoming mortars and artillery rounds exploded all around the landing area. The pilot didn't even land the chopper. The crew chief lowered the tailgate to the ground as the chopper hovered and we were dumped out like a heap of garbage from the rear of a sanitation truck. We scattered like rats for the nearest trenchline or bunker and waited in sheer terror for what seemed like an endless barrage to be over. The chopper disappeared into the clouds without retrieving any of the casualties it had come for, and the incoming rounds finally ceased. We huddled for at least another twenty minutes before mustering the courage to crawl out from the relative safety of the trenches, and we made our way across the airfield. We found our gun positions along the northern perimeter of the runway and settled in with our beleaguered comrades to rest and be briefed about the situation at hand.



***Dusters and Quad 50s had excellent fields of fire, commanding all avenues of approach to the northern perimeter of the combat base.***

Our Dusters and Quad 50s had excellent fields of fire, commanding all avenues of approach to the northern perimeter of the base. Our two Duster positions were well located at opposite ends of the runway with the Quad 50s placed in between but not more than one hundred meters away from a Duster. All weapons had excellent fields of fire, commanding all avenues of approach to the northern perimeter of the base. The northeast gun positions overlooked a wide open, grassy plateau, and could easily maneuver to defend the east end of the runway which sat above the edge of a steep ravine. My command post bunker was situated near the runway's east end, behind the Quad 50 position and our ammunition trailer. The base ammo dump and 105mm howitzers were across the runway about one hundred and fifty meters behind us. On the northwest end, the Duster and Quad 50 squads guarded a more concealed approach through trees and heavy brush. Our bunkers and gun revetments were well constructed and sandbagged, considering that two months earlier, the Marines at Khe Sanh were hardly dug in. Most structures had been built above ground with few trenches, and only inadequate, interrupted strands of barbed wire strung in front of the perimeter defensive positions.

First Lieutenant Lynn Grace had commanded the Duster and Quad 50 sections from late October through early December 1967. After the war, he would describe Khe Sanh to me as a "...quiet, uneventful place viewed by ADA personnel as a welcome respite from the grueling barrages at Con Thien and Gio Linh, and the daily routine of mine sweeps and convoy escorts." When the intense battles of the infamous "Hill Fights" ended in early May 1967, Khe Sanh was regarded as the closest thing to an in-country R&R center on the DMZ. At



***The Marines hurriedly dug trenches and laid rows of concertina wire. At right, truck-mounted Quad 50 crewmen check out an engine block that was zapped by a near direct hit by an NVA rocket.***

Lieutenant Grace's request, the Marine command ordered additional fortification of the northern perimeter, since only one company of Marines, two Ontos crews and our Duster/Quad 50 sections defended the entire mile-long stretch of the perimeter.

When the siege began on January 21, 1968, the Marines were ill prepared for a static defense of the base, and engineers hurriedly began to dig trenches and lay additional rows of concertina wire around the perimeter. Trenching machines were flown in to cut into the rock-hard surface before the attacks reached a peak in late January through mid-March 1968.

During my first few days at Khe Sanh, I surveyed our positions and met briefly with Colonel Lownds, commander of the 26th Marine Regiment and its attached units. In my only conversation with him during my seven-week stay, I assured him that our automatic weapons crews had the experience and the firepower to accomplish the mission of defending the northern perimeter of the combat base. There would be several occasions over the next few weeks when I would feel less confident than I did at that proud moment.

Bad weather in February and early March often left the combat base shrouded in fog for hours or even days at a time. With the fog providing cover from NVA snipers and artillery spotters, we seized the opportunity to drive the Quad 50 trucks or the Dusters for water, ammunition and C-Rations. Most other days were spent holed up in our bunkers since NVA snipers and artillery made movement above ground extremely treacherous. My survival instincts and physical senses had reached a peak, having been sharpened for months under the routine bombardment at Con Thien and A3. I was able to hear mortar, artillery and rocket rounds leaving their tubes, and could often identify the type of weapon that was fired from the sound it made. I never ignored or second-guessed my own instincts or those of others. I would hit the ground in an instant if I thought I had heard a suspicious sound or had seen a muzzle flash. At Khe Sanh, my fatigues were always dirty from diving to the ground, and my men would jokingly ask if I had been playing in the mud or dirt again.

I remember moving cautiously through the trenchline one clear morning when a careless young Marine stood up and walked across an open stretch of ground between unconnected trenches. In an instant he was



***F-14 Phantoms, Puff the Magic Dragon and B-52s made the area surrounding Khe Sanh the most bombed, strafed and pulverized place on the planet. At right, a Quad 50 lights up the night sky.***

struck in the side of his face by a sniper round. Fortunately the round went through his cheek and out of his mouth, knocking out a few teeth, but otherwise leaving him in relatively good condition. After some dental work and a few stitches, he'd be back on line and good as new. The incident reinforced my resolve to crawl or *scurry on all fours* when moving across open ground in clear weather.

Although we did our best to keep our bunkers clean, we fought an endless battle against the infestation of rats. As any Vietnam veteran will tell you, these were not ordinary rats. They often grew as big as large rabbits and were extremely cunning. After weeks of setting traps to no avail, I finally got fed up and decided one night to take serious steps to annihilate one particularly persistent pest. I climbed into my upper rack, and tucked a flashlight and a loaded 45-caliber pistol under my sleeping bag. After my section chief had gone to sleep, I lay awake waiting for the telltale scratching sounds of our nightly intruder, and I was not disappointed. I followed the sound of his movement to the baited traps on the floor across from my bunk.

I silently lined up my pistol and flashlight in the direction of the sound and waited for the complacent invader to begin chowing down. At the moment of truth I simultaneously switched on the flashlight beam and emptied an entire clip of 45-caliber rounds in the direction of the monster rat. My section chief bolted from the sleeping rack below, certain we were under attack. I quickly quieted him and assured him that all was okay, pointing confidently toward the array of triggered rat traps in front of us. The rat's carcass, however, was nowhere to be found, and the sergeant was not amused.

We never did get rid of those critters. When the B-52 strikes left large numbers of NVA dead around the base perimeter, the rats began feeding on the decaying corpses. A major panic took place when the doctors at Charlie Med identified rats infected with bubonic plague and began giving booster shots to large numbers of Marines. Most of my men and I braved the hazardous trek across the runway to get our booster injections.

NVA gunners had the airstrip zeroed in, and few fixed-wing aircraft were able to land without being hit or destroyed. My bunker was only a few yards off the edge of the runway, and every landing and takeoff was a nerve-wracking adventure. One quiet morning, I had my 35mm camera in hand as a C-130 Hercules landed and rolled toward the turnaround ramp at the west end of the runway. As I watched in horror, incoming rounds slammed into the runway and apparently struck the C-130's left main landing gear, causing the aircraft to swerve and smash into a forklift waiting nearby to unload the cargo. The wing tanks burst into flame that quickly engulfed the aircraft, as the courageous fire crew unsuccessfully fought to extinguish the flames. I ran down the runway toward the aircraft, capturing much of the action on film. Runway personnel had rescued the crew, who escaped with only minor injuries, but the aircraft and its cargo were totally destroyed.



***Struck by incoming rounds, the C-130 smashed into a forklift and burst into flames***

With landing and takeoff of fixed-wing transports becoming too dangerous, the Air Force attempted delivery procedures known as LAPES and GPES. Under LAPES (Low Altitude Parachute Extraction System) the aircraft made a low-level approach and a parachute dragged the cargo across rollers and out the rear doors. Under GPES (Ground Parachute Extraction System), the aircraft came in low to snag an arresting cable, which in turn yanked the cargo out of the rear. Both procedures were highly risky for the aircraft and ground personnel and were finally discontinued when runaway cargo pallets crashed through bunkers at the west end of the runway, killing several Marines. Thereafter, most resupply was made by parachute drop from C-123 or C-130 transports over the northwest perimeter of the combat base.

During good weather, tactical aircraft flew extensive missions, dropping napalm and high explosives on enemy positions across the hills and the plateau in front of our northern perimeter. Some strikes were so close

***Five-hundred  
pound bombs fall  
on NVA trenches  
at the northeast  
end of the Khe  
Sanh runway.***



to our positions that the intense heat from the napalm was enough to singe our eyebrows. In March, under cover of fog and darkness, enemy troops dug a network of tunnels and zigzag trenches within a few meters of the perimeter wire on the east end of the runway. They went undetected until the weather broke the following morning, when F-4 Phantoms resumed tactical operations and spotted them from the air. The NVA had evidently hoped that they could tunnel under the wire and the runway to plant mines or explosives that would destroy inbound aircraft and/or the runway surface. Had penetration of the perimeter from this unlikely approach succeeded, our gun positions on the east end would have been the primary weapons responsible for repelling the enemy assault.

The F-4 Phantoms immediately launched heavy air strikes with napalm and high explosive ordnance to destroy the trenches. F-4 Phantoms and “Puff the Magic Dragon,” a DC-3 with machine guns and a Vulcan cannon in the doorway, made multiple sorties. Poor visibility, however, often limited tactical air strikes, leaving the air support to the B-52 Stratofortresses. Under the code name “Niagara,” General William Westmoreland personally directed the activities of the Strategic Air Command, which flew numerous sorties around the clock, dropping unprecedented tonnage’s of explosives in defense of the base. The area around Khe Sanh would soon have the unenviable distinction of being “the most bombed place on earth.”

We would often be alerted by coded radio message to shore up our bunkers and take cover at a predetermined time. The B-52s would on these occasions be targeting dangerously close to our perimeter, and in a few instances, within the allowable minimum safety range. Despite the eerie sounds of the bombs whistling overhead and the thunderous concussions as they rained down on the target areas, it was very reassuring to know that the B-52s were there. The intense carpet-bombing took an incredible toll on the large NVA force surrounding Khe Sanh, and in hindsight can probably be credited with preventing the base from being overrun by the enemy.

Duster and Quad 50 crews were restricted from routine H&I fire missions to avoid being targeted by the surrounding NVA artillery pieces dug into the hills. Although we had more than a normal supply of ammunition for all of our weapons, our tenuous circumstance dictated that we conserve ammunition in the event resupply became impossible. We relied heavily on the big 175mm guns at Camp Carroll and the Rockpile to lay in their fire missions at predetermined coordinates and suspected NVA positions. Our guns fired only at identified targets of opportunity, or in support of friendly operations around the perimeter.

On one sunny morning around mid-March, Duster squad leader Sergeant James “Smitty” Smith and I were scanning the plateau with our binoculars when we spotted movement at the edge of the ravine about a mile in front of our Duster position. We watched and waited to confirm what had appeared to be an NVA soldier’s pith helmet moving back and forth just beyond the drop-off to the Rao Quan River ravine. The soldier, who evidently thought he was hidden from view, presented an inviting target, and we knew there had to be a concentration of NVA troops at that spot. I made a decision to engage the target before they had a chance to disperse. Sergeant Smith and I quietly alerted two crew members, and we slipped aboard the Duster to man the twin 40mm guns. We carefully traversed the turret and elevated the guns to engage the last known position of the target. When the helmet reappeared we fired and laid approximately eighty to one hundred rounds directly on the target area, obliterating everything within a 100-meter radius. The dry brush burned for several hours reminding us that at least one of our enemies from the north would not be zeroing in on us ever again!

Throughout late February and March, the NVA answered the air bombardment with daily barrages from artillery dug into the hills surrounding the combat base. On some days the base would receive a thousand rounds or more, with an average of two thousand five hundred rounds per week. Morale remained miraculously high, however, considering the circumstances. My men and I were always nervous about the inevitable necessity of manning our exposed gun turrets during one of these barrages should the base come under ground assault. In addition, we faced the prospect of defending against the Soviet PT-76 tanks that had been deployed to overrun the nearby Special Forces camp at Lang Vei in early February.

My worst experience came on the evening of March 22, 1968. It had been rumored for weeks that the NVA would launch a ground assault against the base to coincide with the anniversary of the March 1954 assault on the French stronghold at Dien Bien Phu. At about 2100 hours the NVA began an intense artillery, rocket and mortar barrage. The concentration of incoming artillery and mortar rounds was the heaviest I had ever experienced, and we feared that the NVA would launch a ground assault under the cover of this barrage.

The sergeant and I were pinned down in our bunker by incoming rounds. For a short time we maintained landline communications with our gun positions, but the landline was broken shortly thereafter. The barrage continued, and I decided to try to make a dash for the trenchline about 25 meters in front of us to check out the gun positions. I crouched in the doorway of the bunker, frozen in fear as the rounds exploded all around us. It seemed like an eternity as I waited for a lull in order to make my move.

Finally I couldn't wait any longer and took off for the Quad 50 position with the sergeant right at my heels. When we got to the bunker, we found the crew huddled inside unable to make contact by landline or radio with the other gun positions. It was critical that we coordinate our fire missions in the event of a ground assault on our sector of the perimeter. After alerting the crew of the Quad 50 to standby to man their guns, I decided to send the sergeant to the nearby Duster position with similar orders. I then began to make my way along the trenchline in the opposite direction to the distant Duster and Quad 50 positions at the other end of the runway.

I got no more than a few meters when a rocket crashed into the Charlie Company, 1/26 Marines, command post bunker about 50 meters in front of me. I raced to the bunker where I found several Marines frantically digging in the burning debris to pull out their comrades trapped inside. They had retrieved a few men, but several others were buried inside the collapsed bunker. We called for a corpsmen to treat the survivors who were badly burned and wounded, but none heard us amidst the incoming and the confusion. Without medical intervention these men would die, so I made the decision to run across the runway to retrieve medical help from "Charlie Med." I climbed out of the trenchline and ran for the runway. In the darkness I tripped and fell several times as rounds shook the ground around me. I finally made it to the runway and across in the direction of "Charlie Med". As I got closer I screamed for a corpsmen, and a young Navy corpsmen ran toward me from his bunker. He and another Marine followed me back across the runway to the burning bunker where they began administering aid to the wounded. Leaving the demolished bunker, I made my way down the trenchline to the Quad 50 and Duster positions, where I found my squad leader, Sergeant Manuel Floyd Martinez, and both crews safe and ready to man their guns. We traced the landline back to a break in the wire that we quickly repaired so we could regain communications with all of our other gun positions.



***A crack ARVN Ranger battalion moved onto the combat base with support aircraft and equipment.***



***Alpha Battery, 1st Battalion, 44th Artillery, in formation for an awards ceremony. The heroism its soldiers displayed during the long struggle in Vietnam made the battalion one of history's most decorated artillery unit. The battalion became 1-44 ADA in 1968 when Air Defense Artillery was separated from Field Artillery and became a separate combat arms branch.***

Shortly after midnight and some 1,109 rounds after the NVA barrage had begun, it was over. This would be recorded as the second heaviest saturation of enemy rounds in a single day during the siege, and the heaviest for the month of March. It took a very heavy toll on Charlie Company, 1/26 Marines, with whom my men and I lived and shared the defense of our sector. I later found out that five Marines died in the command post bunker that night, including Captain Walter J. Egger, Gunnery Sergeant John J. Grohman, First Lieutenant Paul W. Bush, Lance Corporal Stephen C. Shannon, and Private First Class Bennie J. Sisson.

I had come to know and admire Captain Egger. He had only been in country one month, having arrived at Khe Sanh about the same time as myself. Although I was thankful that my men and I survived that night with no casualties, it would surely impact some of our lives for many years to come. I am very proud of the Bronze Star with "V" Device that I received for my actions that night, but I did no more than anyone I knew would have done under the same circumstances. The heavy fighting continued for another week or so, but by the last week in March the incoming wound down considerably.

The NVA had apparently gotten wind of Operation Pegasus, the counter offensive launched to lift the siege of Khe Sanh, and decided to cut their losses by moving the bulk of their troops out of the area. By the time the forward elements of the 1st Air Cavalry and 3rd Marine Divisions reached the combat base, the NVA resistance had become light, and the main forces had no major difficulty routing the remaining elements from the surrounding hills. The base bustled with activity during the first days of April as a crack ARVN Ranger battalion moved onto the base with support aircraft and equipment. This was the first time since I arrived that helicopters, which had been unable to operate over Khe Sanh because of the intense antiaircraft fire, landed and parked in the bays alongside the runway.

For a few days the ARVN troops shared our bunkers during the evening hours before moving out with several Marine units to "break out" and link up with the approaching elements moving up Route 9 from the east. It was quite a show, and my men and I took the opportunity to get a well-earned rest after we prepared our equipment for departure. All but one of our vehicles were up and running by the time our replacements arrived from Camp Carroll on April 14th.

Charlie Company, 1-26 Marines, had pulled out before dawn, and we were the only personnel remaining in the sector when my battery commander, Captain James Bonds arrived around mid morning. We wasted no time hooking up the disabled "deuce-and-a-half" truck to a tow bar, and anxiously rolled out the gate onto the approach road to Route 9.

This was my first trip on Route 9 east of Cam Lo village. The grueling 40 mile adventure to Dong Ha took over five hours along the winding, rebuilt roads and makeshift pontoon bridges. The devastation caused by





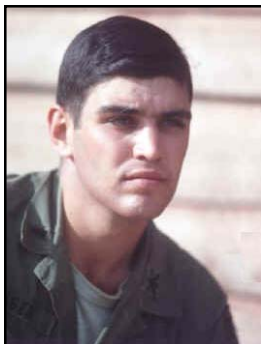
***“Some soldier’s names I no longer remember, but they are nevertheless deserving of recognition for their courageous service during the siege of Khe Sahn.”***

the continual carpet-bombing was never more evident than it was along the first five miles of winding roadway to the Marine outpost at Ca Lu. The once dense foliage was burned out or blown away for miles around the roadway, and the ground was pockmarked with huge bomb craters for as far as the eye could see. Despite this carnage, it was an exhilarating experience for my men and I, who were ecstatic to finally be out of Khe Sanh and on our way back to Dong Ha.

On a recent Veteran’s Day visit to Washington, DC, my friend and squad leader at Khe Sanh, Sergeant James “Smitty” Smith, helped me remember some of the names of the brave men who served with us during the siege. Among the names were Alpha Battery, 1-44 Duster squad leader Sergeant Manuel Floyd Martinez, who was killed in a subsequent action in early June 1968; Sergeant Dewey Thornton; Sergeant Norman Shank, Private First Class James Earl Pavey; Private First Class Arthur Mortman; Private First Class Lloyd Washington; Private First Class James J. Smith, Specialist 4 Hen and Private First Class Nelson.

First Lieutenant Lynn Grace also added a few names of men from the Quad 50 section of G Battery, 65th Artillery, who had served earlier at Khe Sanh. These names included Sergeant Hollis Ray Hale, a section chief who left the base prior to the siege only to be killed in an ambush in early February 1968; Specialist 4 Bowman; and Specialist 4 Steven Allen Guthrie Jr., who died as a result of a non-hostile weapons discharge at Khe Sanh on January 31, 1968 prior to my arrival.

My friend Sergeant Joseph Belardo and Charlie Battery 1-44th Artillery, Duster/Quad section relieved us at Khe Sanh after the siege was lifted. Belardo’s Duster track led the Pegasus Relief column onto the combat base. His Duster crew enjoyed an emotional reunion along with his platoon leader in Washington, D.C. last November. I apologize to the many other Duster and Quad 50 personnel whose names I have been unable to remember, but who are no less deserving of recognition for their courageous service at Khe Sanh.



After nearly 25 years in corporate America as a sales & marketing executive, Bruce embarked on a new career in 1993 as a 4th grade teacher in an inner city school in the New York City Public School System, retiring after 11 years in 2004. He has been married for over 50 years to his wife Dianne (also a former school teacher). Their sons, David, a Veterinary Neurologist & Neurosurgeon (MIT & Cornell) and Andrew, a Real Estate Sales Executive (Boston University) reside in San Diego, CA. Bruce has served as past President & Board Member of the National Dusters, Quads & Searchlights Association, Board Member of the Khe Sanh Veterans, and volunteer at the Canine Development Center of the Guiding Eyes for the Blind for over 20 years. Email Bruce Geiger at [BMGeiger@aol.com](mailto:BMGeiger@aol.com).