

Fire Base Blue

Honors to Those Who Died and Those Who Came Home

By Richard Burmood

Introduction: I never set out to write a heritage story, so I will explain how this came about. I was doing some clean up on the NDQSA website and was looking at our Memorial to the Fallen Page. When your webmasters built it, the decision was to make it alphabetical so family coming here years from now could find their loved ones. I went back to look at the list we made for the brick project, which is by date they fell. There on the March 23, 1971 date were four names and I wondered why. Back to the Fallen Page and I used the link we made to their page on the Vietnam Memorial virtual Wall of Faces. All four died on Fire Base Blue. Made a phone call to our historian, Joe Belardo to see if there was a story in any of the archived newsletters or if he had any material. I got a “no” but also got useful information as we discussed the fact that Joe Parrish was wounded on Blue that day. I called Dave McCray because he and John Mowatt were closest to Joe. Two hours later I hung up and called John for another hour’s conversation. Both men had stories about Joe, but it was clear that details about the battle were avoided either out of respect or caution. I am not a historian but have chosen to serve the association by assisting our members with their stories. This is being written to honor those who lost their lives that night and preserve the story of those who came home.

Honors to the Fallen

193	2/23/1971	BEATTY	FREDERICK	SP4	16F20	B BTRY/ 5 BN/ 2 ADA	MAPLETON DEPOT	PA
194	2/23/1971	FISHER	RONALD	PFC	16F10	B BTRY/ 5 BN/ 2 ADA	AKRON	OH
195	2/23/1971	GARZA	GENARO	SSG	16F40	B BTRY/ 5 BN/ 2 ADA	SAN BENITO	TX
196	2/23/1971	HART	JOSEPH	PFC	26F10	B BTRY/ 5 BN/ 2 ADA	RICHMOND HILLS	NY



Specialist Four Frederick Lee Beatty,
Served with Battery B, 5th Battalion, 2nd
Artillery Regiment, 23rd Artillery Group,
Second Field Force, United States Army
Vietnam.

Frederick is buried at Riverview Cemetery,
Huntingdon Borough, Huntingdon County,
Pennsylvania.



Private First Class Ronald Jay Fisher,
Served with Battery B, 5th Battalion, 2nd
Artillery Regiment, 23rd Artillery Regiment,
Second Field Force, United States Army
Vietnam.

Ronald is buried next to his parents Clive
and Rita at Hillside Memorial Park in Akron,
Ohio. Sect 25, Lot 333, grave 3



Staff Sergeant Genaro Garza, Served with Battery B, 5th Battalion, 2nd Artillery Regiment, 23rd Artillery Group, Second Field Force, United States Army Vietnam.

Genaro is buried at Arlington National Cemetery

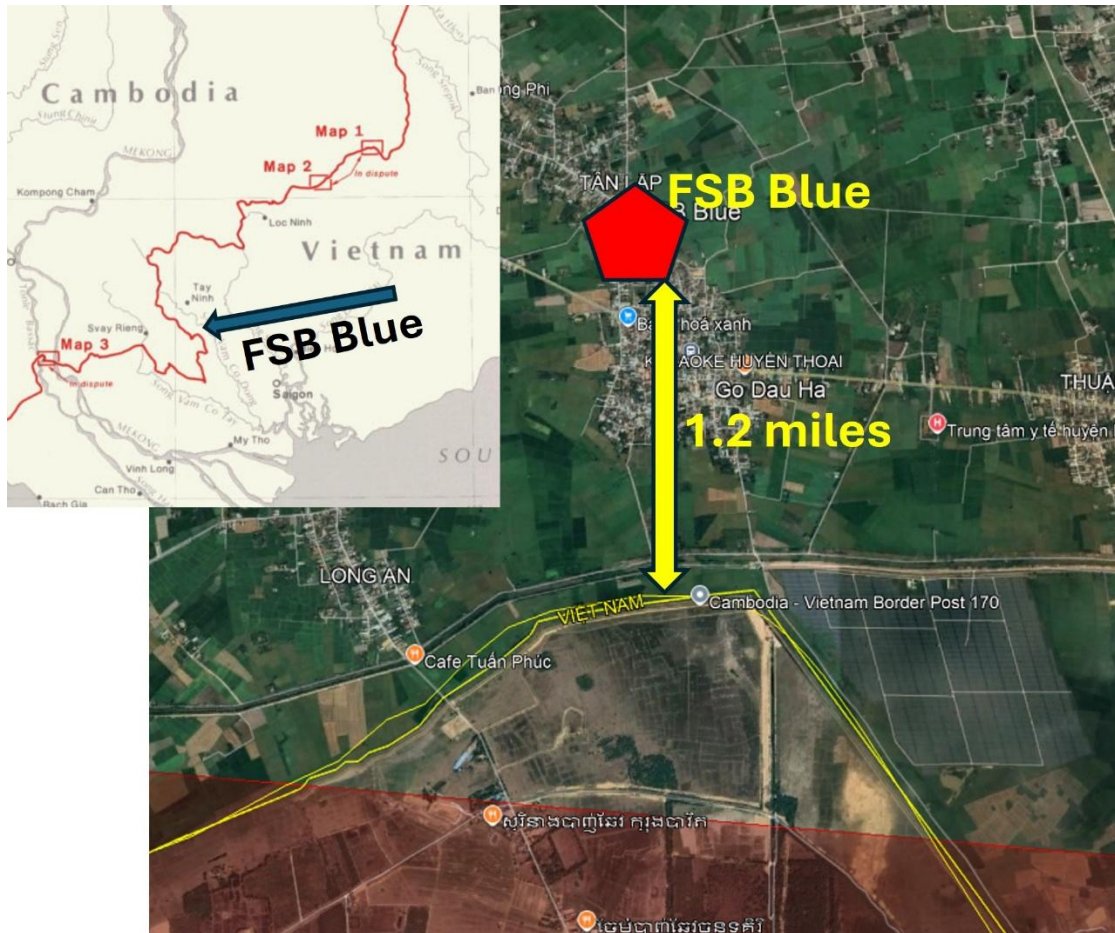


Private First Class Joseph Brendan Hart, Served with Battery B, 5th Battalion, 2nd Artillery Regiment, 23rd Artillery Group, Second Field Force, United States Army Vietnam.

Joseph is buried at Cypress Hills Nat Cem.

Fire Support Base Blue

Fire Support Base (FSB) Blue was a temporary U.S. military facility located near the **Cambodian border** in South Vietnam. It served as a strategic outpost for artillery and infantry operations, particularly during the transition period of American troop withdrawals.



Key Events and Facts (1971)

- **Attack on the Base:** On **February 23, 1971**, FSB Blue was struck by a North Vietnamese Army (NVA) sapper attack. The infiltrators used satchel charges, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), and AK-47s to penetrate the perimeter around 2:15 AM.

- **Casualties and Damage:** The assault resulted in at least six **(6) deaths** and over **31 wounded**. Equipment destroyed in the attack included a "Duster" (M42 self-propelled anti-aircraft gun), an 8-inch artillery piece, and several 5-ton trucks and bunkers.
- **Strategic Role:** The base was used as a staging ground for raids and provided fire support to infantry operating beyond the range of their primary base camps. It was heavily fortified, with one report mentioning the use of approximately 94,000 sandbags during its reinforcement.
- **Equipment:** The firebase was equipped with significant firepower, including **175mm guns**, Quad .50 caliber machine guns, and AN/TPS-25 ground surveillance radar.
- **Deactivation:** Following the stand-down of various U.S. units in early 1971, FSB Blue was eventually deactivated as part of the broader American withdrawal from Vietnam.

Further information found:

In February 1971, major combat operations, such as Operation Lam Son 719, were occurring, and other firebases in the region, such as FSB 31, were also under heavy attack. A report was found indicating that much of the infantry on and around FSB Blue were not there during the attack because they were off on a three-day raid into Cambodia.

The primary forces on FSB Blue were from the 7th Battalion, 8th Artillery. It was built by their Brave Battery starting 30 June 1970 when they pulled back from Cambodia. Over 94,000 sandbags plus significant engineer support hardened this small Fire Base. There

was also a contingent of engineers from the 20th Engineer Brigade on FSB Blue on the night of the attack. Major equipment included four M107 175mm Self-Propelled Guns, two Dusters, two Quad 50s, a M109 155mm Self-Propelled Howitzer, a M110 8-inch (203 mm) self-propelled howitzer, an AN/TPS-25 RADAR, and an Infrared (IR) capable searchlight team.

A record of the battle

Posted on the Vietnam Memorial virtual Wall of Faces page for each of our fallen is this record.

POSTED ON 6.8.2017 POSTED BY: wkillian@smjuhsd.org

Final Mission of *(name specific for page)*

Fire Support Base Blue was located near the Cambodian border in Tay Ninh Province, RVN. At 2:15 AM on February 23, 1971, the base was attacked by Viet Cong sappers. Using rocket-propelled grenades, they cut a large hole in the wire mesh surrounding the camp, and a band of approximately 20 VC sappers quickly slipped in and began throwing satchel charges all over the base. SP4 Frederick L. Beatty was on guard duty when the assault began and was the first killed by the enemy. The VC, wearing only shorts and small hats, covered themselves with charcoal from head to foot, even blackening their eyelids. They appeared to know the exact location of their objectives and spent little time searching the compound for targets. One of the places the sappers tossed their charges was a hootch where the crew of a M42 “Duster” was sleeping. All five crewmen were killed in the blast. The lost soldiers included PFC

Douglas J. Crawford, PFC Ronald J. Fisher, SSGT Genaro Garza, PFC Joseph B. Hart, and PFC Vincent J. Medjesky. A total of 23 Americans were medivacked when the attack was ended. Most of the sappers were killed during the attack, however, four were captured after they were found hiding in a bunker. [Taken from coffeltdatabase.org, information provided by Edward Brady at thewall-usa.com, and "Threatened Overrun of FSB Blue Thwarted by Quick Reactions." Castle Courier (a publication of the U.S. Army Engineer Command, Vietnam), Long Binh, RVN, April 5, 1971]

Editor's note: PFC Douglas J. Crawford and PFC Vincent J. Medjesky were not assigned to 5th Battalion, 2nd Artillery, nor were they in the sleeping bunker. They were killed in the fight to retake control of the fire base.

PFC Douglas Jay Crawford was awarded the Bronze Star Medal for Valor, with Combat Distinguishing Device (V), for his exemplary gallantry in action. He served as a Radio Teletype Operator and was assigned to B BTRY, 7TH BN, 8TH ARTILLERY, 23RD ARTY GROUP, II FIELD FORCE.

See <http://www.virtualwall.org/dc/CrawfordDJ01a.htm>

PFC Vincent Joseph Medjesky was awarded the Silver Star Medal for his conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action. He served as an Artilleryman and was assigned to B BTRY, 7TH BN, 8TH ARTILLERY, 23RD ARTY GROUP, II FIELD FORCE.

See <http://www.virtualwall.org/dm/MedjeskyVJ01a.htm>

Those who Came Home

Sergeant Joe Parrish

Joe was standing in the tub loading ammo for his gunner on the one still operational Duster when he was shot from the side severing his spine. Joe told Dave McCray that he thinks the round may have come from a sniper hiding in a spider hole in the cemetery in front of their position. He told John Mowatt and Dave McCray that when he fell in the tub his right leg flew up and onto the hot barrels. His left shoulder fell behind the guns trapping him from moving and getting crushed by the guns as they recoiled. The burns on his right leg ultimately resulted in it being amputated just below his hip. His shoulder was crushed so badly it never could be fixed leaving him with only partial use of his left hand. The round also damaged his lungs, so breathing was very difficult. Even though the U.S. forces destroyed the enemy and secured the fire base, the wounded were not evacuated until nine A.M. the next morning.

Editor note: More about that situation later.

Sergeant Bobby Fussell

SGT Fussell was off duty and in the sleeping bunker that night. Just prior to the attack he had gone to the latrine in his underwear without his weapon and was there when the assault began. By the time he could maneuver back, the sappers had destroyed his bunker, and SGT Parrish had been wounded. Bobby blamed himself for not being in the fight, for Joe being wounded, and for his teammates' deaths. Dave McCray and Steve Belt drove from

Oklahoma City to Wakenny, Kansas in one day and back to see Bobby. Survivors' guilt and years of alcoholism had destroyed his life. He was never the same.

John Mowatt found this photo of Bobby Fussell and him in Vietnam.



This is for Richard Burmood & Dave McCray - found this picture of the only guy from AIT or NCOCS I ever saw while in Vietnam. Not sure when or where but it is of me and Sgt Bobby Fussell so it was before he was at FSB BLUE with Sgt Joe Parrish - I'm thinking it was before both of us were assigned to different Duster units during our first week in Nam.

Our fatigues look quite new! As do the boots!!

Editor note: Very unusual to cover sandbags in cement. Clearly a rear echelon area.

NDQSA members who were on FSB Blue that night based on roster – not active and no other information.

Charles Veltri, B/5/2 – West Jordan, Utah

Bryant Penton, B/5/2 – Hattiesburg, Mississippi

Don Bird, B/5/2 – Clovis, New Mexico

Ray Findley, I/29 SLT – Plymouth Meeting, Pennsylvania

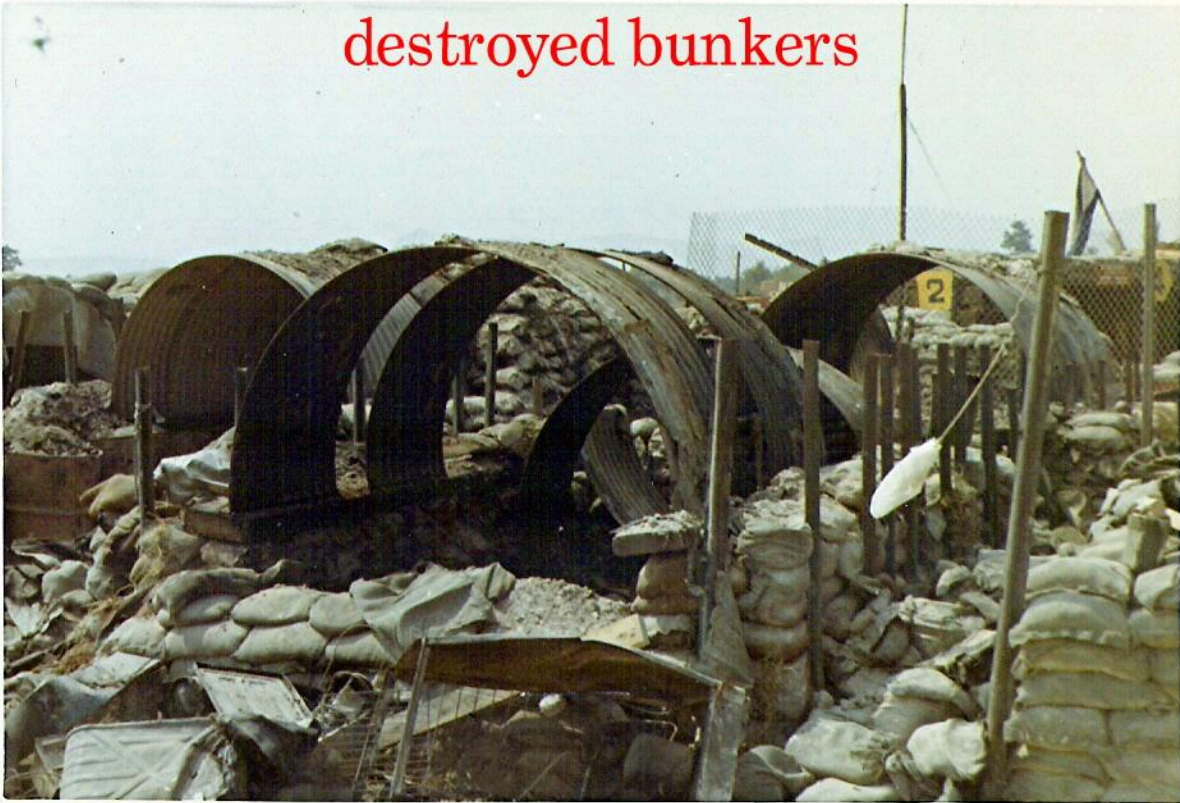
Bob Miller, B/5/2 – Montrose, Colorado (was on commo duty at Blue during the attack)

Bravo Battery, 7th Battalion, 6th Artillery Photos



175mm gun with visual and radar towers in the background

destroyed bunkers





Sandbagged trench and bunker damage next morning



I think this is SGT Parrish's operational Duster but it was not identified. It could be the one that SP4 Frederick L. Beatty was on that was destroyed in the initial assault, but I don't see the damage that killed him.



These four North Vietnamese sappers were found at daylight hiding in one of the bunkers. Choosing to surrender over death.



Another view of the sleeping bunkers and damage

Delay in evacuating the injured

I offered to come back to this topic. All those who knew Joe were in awe of him and his positivity - of course his loving and caring wife Connie was a huge part of this man surviving as long as he did. But he did have one man who he detested and that was Al Gore.

Here is the rest of that story.

Key Details of Al Gore's Vietnam Service:



Enlistment: After graduating from Harvard in 1969, Gore enlisted in the Army instead of seeking deferments.

Role: He served as a reporter for *The Army Flier* (Fort Rucker) and later for *The Castle Courier* with the 20th Engineer Brigade in Vietnam.

Timing: He was deployed in January 1971, after his father, Senator Al Gore Sr.,

lost his reelection bid, and was honorably discharged in May 1971 to attend Vanderbilt University.

Al Gore served as an Army journalist for the *Castle Courier*, the newspaper of the 20th Engineer Brigade in Bien Hoa, Vietnam, from January to May 1971. Assigned as an enlisted soldier after basic training at Fort Rucker, he wrote articles covering the daily lives and operations of engineering troops, although he did not participate in direct combat.

Why a delay in medivac

20th Engr Bde leadership flew into FSB Blue and Al Gore came along on that flight. Senior leadership was so afraid of something happening to him, because of his father's influence, they would not clear the landing pad of the VIP bird for the Medivac helicopter in case the base came under fire and they could not get him out. That *Castle Courier* article would have been written by him. Joe and the other 22 wounded were left to wait like cordwood.

Joe Parrish comes home

We will use a few pictures to remember Joe Parrish.



John Mowatt (leather jacket) and Joe Parrish at the Wall on Veterans Day 1997.



Joe and Connie Parrish at the NCOCC get together coordinated by Dave McCray during the 2000 NDQSA reunion.

The pages after this were cut from Dave McCray's scrapbook and from John Mowatt's scrapbook which are on the website.

Thank you for taking this heritage walk. The small number of men lost, and lives affected by FSB Blue doesn't even warrant a notation in history, but it ultimately had a big impact on the Duster, Quad, Searchlight brotherhood. A story that deserves to be told.

Richard Burmood



NDQSA Reunion 2000 Washington, DC

Wheelchair: Joe Parrish

Bottom Row (L to R): Tom Mahoney, Richard Burmood, Steve Belt, Tim Tweedell, Pete Breckenridge, Gerald Chapman.

Top row (L to R): Robert Dembinski, Mike Dunkerly, John Mowatt, Dave McCray



NCOCC classmates at 2016 NDQSA reunion in Nashville, Tennessee

L to R John Mowatt, Dave McCray, Joe Parrish and Mike Dunkerly at the 2016 NDQSA reunion in Nashville

Memorial Page — Joseph Parrish

I lost a very dear friend on January 29th, 2017



- (Sgt) Joe Parrish. Joe and I were in the Army together went to AIT & NCOCS schools together! We were in the same Battalion in Vietnam 1970-71. Joe was in Bravo company and I was in Delta, 5th/2nd.

Joe had been severely wounded when FSB Blue was overrun by the enemy!



Almost 20 years after the war Joe and I were reunited again at the Vietnam Memorial (Wall) in Washington DC. I had flown down to see him in Alabama earlier that year to reestablish our relationship. This man never complained or lost his love of life and his wonderful Southern sense of humor! Joe's "can do" attitude was infectious and he is missed by all who met him. Our brother who gave so much is finally at rest. God bless him and his memory. He was blessed to always have Connie by his side for all those years.



Picture above left: Joe Parrish with his specially designed fishing boat. That was such a healing time when I visited him and felt his strength and wisdom about pain and loss.

Picture above right: Joe Parrish and I on Veterans Day 1997.

Picture right: L to R night photo at the "Three Servicemen" bronze statue—reunion 2000 Dave McCray, Joe Parrish, John Mowatt, Robert Dembinski (kneeling), Tom Mahoney (standing)

