

Looking back on my life I can remember wanting to be a paratrooper when I was only ten years old. My family moved to 104 Dewberry Drive in Rochester NY, this was then referred to at the time in 1948, as Point Pleasant, New York. At the end of Dewberry drive was Durand Eastman Park that contained an 18-hole golf course that I spent a lot of time playing golf and searching for lost golf balls. During this time period I remember reading a comic book about the Normandy invasion and what part the 82nd Airborne participated in the war at that time. I was so impressed with the Paratroopers jumping out of airplanes that I knew that this was something I was going to do when I became an adult, and join the 82nd Airborne Division.

I started to devote more time in Durand Eastman Park to locate trees that I could climb up and jump off of. It didn't take long to find a tree that was tall enough to meet my standards, as my courage increased, I would climb up farther and jump, marking the last height with my pocket knife. The jumps were so thrilling each time I jumped, I was no longer afraid and I became very proud of myself. My Mother recalled during this time period how many times I would come home all scratched up with torn pants and shirts from jumping off my favorite tree in Durand Eastman Park.

Fast forward ten years to July 31, 1958, this was the day I enlisted in the United States Army and specifically volunteered for the 82nd airborne. Basic and advanced boot camps just flew by and on 8 January 1959 I was assigned to "D" Company, 3rd squad, 503rd infantry, 1st Airborne Battle Group {ABG}, 82nd Airborne at Fort Bragg, NC. This would be my home for the next twenty-nine months; my barrack was located on Graves Street.

Finally I could accomplish a dream to become a Paratrooper, believe me I was ready mentally, seeing how many "jumps" I had already made in Durand Eastman Park. In Jump School I was assigned to Basic Airborne, BAC #302 for 4 weeks of intense running and training.

It was during this time in early February, that I was being trained by many NCO's before and after attending Jump School in my "D" Company barracks. Every NCO who there at this time were very professional and accomplished teachers on the art of being a Paratrooper-Soldier. Remembering them today, is as vivid as the day I trained with these NCO's. Enjoying all of this was easy for me; after all I had been a "Paratrooper" for 10 years.

One particular Staff Sergeant that impressed me above all the other NCO's during my training to be a Paratrooper. Keep in mind that this NCO as well as other NCO's was looked upon as "God like" and I remembered this NCO for his demeanor and how he treated all the Privates in our platoon. He was a tall soldier of slight build with a soft spoken southern voice. His features are as vivid today as the day I met him. One does not forget a mentor like he was and this memory of him have been ingrained in my memory to this very day. This soldier was Staff Sergeant John Hartley Robertson. SSG John Robertson was a very patient teacher when it came to learning how the M-1 rifle should be cleaned, disassembled and assembled correctly. On one occasion when I had my M-1 disassembled on a Army blanket, SSG Robertson would fold the blanket over the M-1 and shake the blanket so all the parts would be mixed up. Then he told me that this is the best way to learn how to reassemble the rifle and he was right .

Thirty-years years later, my Wife Carol and I went to visit our Son, Sgt David Mahoney who was stationed at Fort Bragg to participate in the yearly 82nd Airborne “old timers” airborne celebration in July 1991. It was during this visit I learned that SSG John Hartley Robertson was shot down in a Helicopter in Laos. He was listed as MIA and then in 1976 without his body or any remains recovered he was listed as KIA. Recalling the moment I learned of SSG Robertson’s on that fateful day was complete disbelief. Although many years had passed since I last saw SSG Robertson I was upset and in complete denial that my friend had been was one of the countless American MIA’s from the war in Vietnam. Carol and I made many trips to the Vietnam Wall in Washington, D.C. to make pencil rubbings of his name and each visit left me wondering if John would ever be found.

So began my twenty-one year search for any Information on SSG Robertson. During this period I bought over 60 books on the Vietnam War, trying to get any information on SSG Robertson. The last book I bought was “SOG” by John Plaster that mentioned SSG Robertson and SFC Eulis Presley another soldier I knew in “D” Company. SFC Eulis Presley was depicted as a very brave soldier in the S.O.G. book. Eulis and I would correspond via e-mail and telephone after John Plaster called me and gave me Eulis’s phone number. During on of my many telephone calls to Eulis ,I let him know what I was doing to get information on John. Eulis warned me twice that what I was doing was too dangerous but he would not elaborate why .The book S.O.G gave me hope that this could be the chance that I needed to get more information. About 6 years ago I began to use the internet to try and get any information on John. Searching every conceivable avenue to get information I searched the Boy Scout’s of America, Fayetteville, NC grammar, high school and Colleges for his name. No information was to be had so I sent Freedom of information requests to: FBI.CIA, and the Dept of the Army . Only the CIA replied to my request and they directed me to the Library of Congress where I found more information about John. On the internet I posted remembrances of John on every military site I could find, hoping someone would read it and give me information on John. Also I had formulated a letter asking for help on getting information on John and emailed it to every United States Senator. Needless to say not one Senator replied, I was so disappointed .

But about 5 years ago, I did get the chance to meet one Congressman who upon seeing the photo of John that I sent him, quickly dismissed this photo of john as being a fraud. Apparently this photo was similar to one the Government had on hand and rebuked it’s authenticity. Wow more denial, what was going on, but I continued on determined to get the truth no matter how long it took. Being an honest person I began to increase my distrust of my Government and the elected officials that were in the business to deny any evidence concerning MIA/POW’s.

When I left the Army in 1961, got married, had 4 children and worked in the printing industry and moved to Virginia and retired in 2002. Many hours were spent on my laptop computer searching every Military web site for anything related to John, but I did not turn up anything at all. There was one incursion that I did do and that was from a conversation that I had with one of my old friend, Ist Sgt. John Pierce who told me about John’s wife who remarried and was still living. So off I went on the hunt for John’s ex-wife on my internet search, that turned out to be a lengthy search. But eventually all the hard work paid off and I located her. There was contact with her via e-mail that was not a pleasant experience as she had been contacted many times about John. All these contacts were bogus ones that claimed they had information about John that turned out to be totally false. Looking back at this contact with John’s ex-wife I could

understand why she was not interested in what I had to say, so I let it be and never contacted her again.

Then one wonderful day about 6 years ago, I received a call from Tom Faunce and his cousin Joe. Tom had come across one of my many internet postings about SFC John Hartley Robertson and they called me. They told me that they had found a man in Vietnam that claimed to be SSG John Hartley Robertson. Over the next 6 years Tom, Joe and I met with stiff resistance in getting information about John. It seemed that all along the way we were told that the person Tom and Joe found in Vietnam was not John Robertson. Tom sent me a picture of this person and I immediately recognized this person to be SSG John Hartley Robertson. His facial features were unmistakable: his forehead hairline, nose and chin. But most of all the outcropping of hair next to his sideburns was exactly as I remembered this. Privately some of his privates including me that John had two sets of sideburns: one going down and the other one towards his nose. Needless to say we never said this in John's presence.

In July of 2012, I had the chance to travel to Vietnam with Tom and Joe to meet the man claiming to be John Robertson. The flight to Vietnam was very long, I wasn't able to sleep and all my thoughts were on meeting John and what I would feel when I finally met him in person. Could I be wrong, was this all a mistake? We're all John's detractors correct? Now after nearly a 21 year search it was crunch time to go to Vietnam. Passport approval, many vaccinations, pills and packing it was time to go and see if it was John. After getting settled in a Hotel in Saigon our team met John the next day. There was a heavy feeling in my chest and my mouth was so darn dry when I finally met the man who claimed to be John Hartley Robertson. It was John without a shadow of doubt! No one could dissuade me otherwise. The long search came to one fantastic conclusion : John was finally found. Over the next 6 days spent with John passed incredibly fast, and then it was time to leave. There was so much emotion in my heart when we all said our final goodbyes, I wondered if I would ever see him again.

Information about John's parents and his siblings had always eluded me but thanks to some key clues from Bob Dussault I went back to the searching for his next-of-kin. John had three sisters and a younger brother Bill who died on the day our team arrived in Vietnam in late July of 2012. John's mother's date of passing was in this information that was another clue. Wow, this was a break I thought I needed but little did I know at the time this would be more long hours of searching to find out where she was buried.

After searching every cemetery in surrounding counties I came across did have John's mother as being buried there, this fact was a small break that I needed. So I called this cemetery hoping that there was a list of next-of-kin in their records. Unfortunately back in 1981 Cemeteries did not include next-of-kin, but today the next-of-kin is now included in the death records. Prior to this search I looked up every grade and High school located in the library system of John's hometown. This search of High schools that had Yearbooks on file were searched page for page with no reference to John or his three sisters and brother - more dead ends. Running out of options now after so many hours on the computer, I tried a new approach.

Going back online to the library I took a long shot and called them. When someone dies I figured there had to be something about death notices in their records. It took some time to get connected to many people who set me from department to department with no results. Finally one person said she would call down to the archived microfiche department for help. Soon I was speaking to a very nice lady who said that she would look for any thing concerning John's mother. Time stood still for me as the minutes passed until she returned to the phone and indicated that there was a small death notice on file but she could not give me this information over the phone. This is it I thought, my heart was pounding and with a dry mouth I asked when I could see this notice. The young lady told me the death notice could be seen and proceeded to give me the time the library was open so I could come down to view it.

My voice was cracking now as I spoke and I nearly shouted that I was calling from Virginia, and I needed this information right now. The lady replied that the only way I could get this information was to pay \$5.00 via credit card and she would email it to me. Vola - after paying with a credit card I received a short obituary notice for John's mother. The death notice included all three surviving sisters and John's brother. Incredibly the notice listed the three sisters names including their married names, holy moly I was at the edge of finding a relative of John's! I was so excited, this is what our team needed, a living relative that would verify that John was in fact their brother. Decisions, decisions, what should I do?

As I looked at the three sisters names - who should I call first? Looking at the three sisters names, I picked out Jean Robertson Holley as a starting point, why I chose Jean I don't have a clue. So back to the computer once again and a white page search for her began. After about an hour or so I visited 11 white pages that claimed to have information on Jean but you had to pay first with no expectation of positive results. Then on the 12th try, bingo I located Jean Robertson Holly's phone number. There was only seconds before I dialed her phone number, was this really happening I thought as the phone rang, this is it, finally a possible connection. A very soft spoken southern man answered the phone and indeed his wife Jean was at home and he let me speak to her. Jeans voice was quiet and restrained as she spoke, explaining that she recently had surgery and was not feeling well. Then I told her about our team finding her brother in Vietnam. She had no idea that 'Johnny' could be alive! After this monumental call to Jean, the following weeks led Jean and her daughters in an amazing journey that concluded with a powerful reunion on December 17, 2012 - a reunion a family 44 years in the making. For me personally I felt so many emotions on that wonderful day. Happy for John and his family but so very saddened that our government had failed John and his quest to be found and returned home.