

A Vignette



This is an M16 rifle like those carried by soldiers of my 2d Brigade of the 101st Airborne Division in Vietnam in 1968.

One of these soldiers was Bill Barth, now 67 years old and living in nearby Maryland. Bill, a retired paper salesman, is the father of three and grandfather of nine; they have a Catholic family.

For several years Bill and I have been having lunch together about every two months. He has brought me into touch with members of his 2d Platoon, C Company, 2/501st Infantry, including when they gathered at Washington's Vietnam Memorial on Veterans Day, 2013. A couple of dozen of them, some with wives, had driven down from a reunion the night before in nearby Pennsylvania and had expressed a wish that I join them.

Bill and I met for lunch Tuesday, December 16, as we have always done, at a Greek restaurant on Connecticut Avenue. Our conversation was usual, our recent activities, what was going on with our families, and reminiscences of almost 50 years ago.

For several months Bill has been volunteering at a nearby veterans hospital, escorting patients and mingling with them. In Vietnam he had served often as the "point man" of his rifle squad. He told me that the veterans, largely World War Two and Korea, asked him what he thought of the M16 rifle. I will quote him, as best I remember:

"I said that what I liked best about the M16 was that it had ten 10 holes and that I could say the rosary as I carried it."

The "ten holes," seen on top of the hand grip just behind the front sight, are there to let the heat from the rifle barrel dissipate while firing.