



Sponson BOX

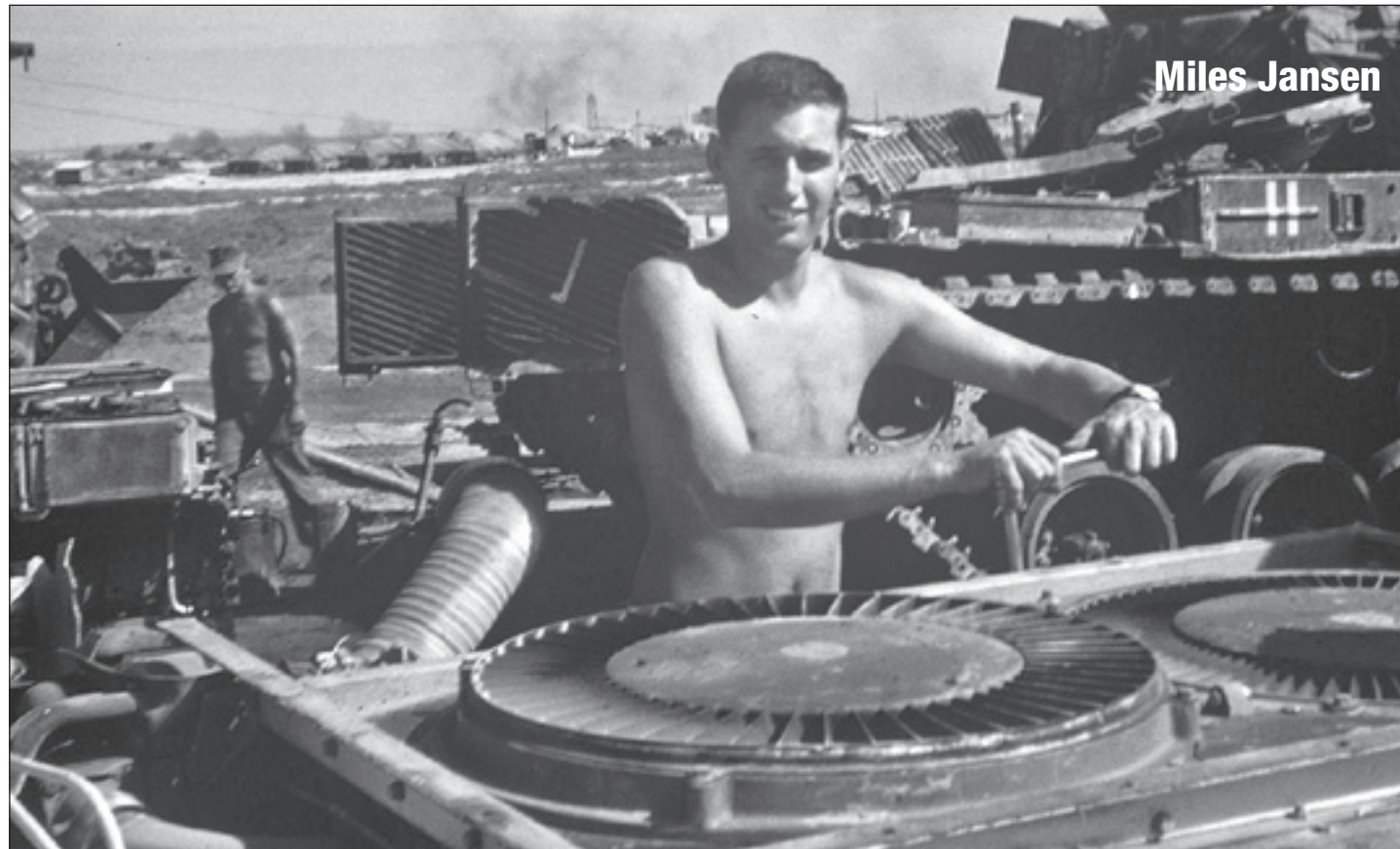
*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



**THIS ISSUE IS DEDICATED TO ALL TANK MECHANICS
WHO SERVED IN RVN 1965 – 1970**

This issue is dedicated to all the mechanics that worked on the tanks who were affectionately called “Shit Fisters” by tank crews... dirty hands being part of the job. It was a lucky tank that had a mechanic as a crewmember for they were often in the field filling crew positions.



Letter from the President

For this issue of the Sponson Box, we are going to make an attempt to honor our tank mechanics. As most of you know, this magazine is normally full of stories about tracked vehicle crewmen. While most of us realize that it took a lot more manpower and support to make our Marine tank battalions run smoothly and efficiently, we may not know that many of the “shitfisters” who were assigned to a tank platoon served with distinction, not only as tank repair experts, but also as tank crewmen. Some of our “tiger doctors” even served as tank commanders.

I have been asked why the VTA does not offer Life Memberships anymore. Back in 1999 when the organization was in its infancy, we needed “seed money” to get the organization up and running. At the time, Life Memberships were offered to the original 100 Charter Members as a way to help fund all of the necessary functions that the VTA wanted to accomplish in the beginning...including mailing out the brand-new Sponson Box newsletter. The individuals who gambled on our success were rewarded with a membership that pays for itself without further investment. Twelve years later the organization is financially sound and, while several Life members have stepped up to the plate and dug into their pockets offering up substantial “over & above” donations when called upon to do so, we really need to have a continuous and guaranteed income stream for the Sponson Box to be produced and mailed, for the new scholarship program to work, and for the other administrative functions of the organization such as recruiting mailings or website enhancements. One of the dangers of any organization to face is for the majority of members to become a Life Member and the annual cash flow starts to dry up. This could very well be the death knell of any organization. I am sure that you would agree with me that we do not want that to happen. I also understand that some of you simply do not want to have to bother every year with remembering to pay your annual dues. There is a remedy for this problem: You can pay up to three years worth of dues ahead if you would prefer. One benefit could be that you lock yourself into the current membership dues rate. In the unlikely event that dues have to increase, your three year advanced payment would be locked in to the old rate.

I recently got my February, 2012 Leatherneck magazine and noted that there was an announcement of a mini-reunion to be held for Bravo Co, 1st Tanks from the years 1966 to 1968. I had not heard of this get together prior to reading the magazine (the sad fact is that this issue would not be coming out until too late to announce this gathering in the St. Louis area). But, I wanted to assure all of you that if you ever want to conduct a mini-reunion at any time, please let us know (allowing plenty of lead time) so we can help with the publication of the announcement. Also please note that when your reunion concludes, we'd love to get a post-reunion write up and a photo to publish here.

New for the Sponson Box in this issue, you will find a dues envelope tucked inside. We hope this will make for an easy reminder to send in your 2012 dues ASAP.

Semper Fi,

John

*“I never think of a Marine but what I think of a man who wants to do more, not less;
a man you have to hold back, not shove.”*

President Lyndon B. Johnson

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1st Sgt. Rick Lewist
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Sponson Box Editor
215-794-9052 EST

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Sandra Coan – Proofing
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New Members for 2012 – 2nd Sponson Box

Baranski, Thomas M

5 Sherbrook Place
Lynn, MA 01904

Phone: 781-599-2783

B - H&S Co, 3rd, '66 - '67

MOS: 1811

DOB: 12/21/42

Wife: Gertrude

Recruited by: Ron Davidson

Cole, Donald D

502 S Jefferson
Litchfield, IL 62056

Phone: 636-221-4411

A & B Co, 1st Tanks, '65 – '66

H&S Co, 1st Tanks, '66 – '67

MOS: 1811

DOB: 02/07/46

Recruited by: Website

Duck, Eli Joseph

1775 Long Run Road
Mill Hill, PA 17751-9365

Phone: 570-726-3807

C Co, 1st Tanks, '66 – '67

MOS: 1811

DOB: 5/15/47

Wife: Gail

Recruited by: Joe Liu

Kopf, Francis A

3982 Wilner Drive
Oregon, WI 53575-2346

Phone: 608-873-8785

B Co, 1st Tanks, '68

MOS: 1811

DOB: 6/18/47

Wife: Billi

Recruited by: James Sausoman

2012 – 2nd Sponson Box Membership Information Changes

Binion, Sammy

375 Lawrence Dr
Ringgold, GA 30736

Phone: 931-698-1601.

Martin, Greg

827 Soroya Drive SW
Olympia, WA 98502-5144

Phillips, Todd

Phone: 740-296-8184

Rogers, Lawrence

Phone: 740-545-9726

1st Tanks, 1966

Shaw, George

DOB: 4/16/46

Please note: Most of these new members were recruited through a joint effort. The recruiters called or emailed John Wear or “Robbie” Robinson and the perspective member had a membership packet sent to them. The packet that was mailed included a sample of the Sponson Box news magazine, a membership application and a letter asking them to join. Anyone who knows a perspective member, please alert either Robbie or John.

ON THE COVER:
The 3rd Tanks, “The Magnificent Bastard”

Photo by Darrell Clock

M-51 Heavy Recovery Vehicle, US Marine Corps 3rd Tank Battalion, Dong Ha, June 1967. The heavy armored vehicle used during the Vietnam War by the USMC, the M-51 tank retriever was used to extract damaged vehicles. Each Marine tank battalion had four of these vehicles, one per company. This massive 60-ton vehicle used the same suspension and track components as the M-103 heavy tank. The 3rd Tank Battalion lost two M-51s to enemy action during the war.



Letter to the Editor

On Wed, Jan. 25, 2012, the below letter was published in the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper as a response to an editorial that had appeared in Monday’s paper where the commentator cautioned the readership about not rushing to judgment of the young Marines who appeared in a video and were apparently pissing on the bodies of dead Taliban terrorists.

This image comes from a YouTube video that allegedly shows



U.S. Marines urinating on bodies of the enemy.

Nothing ‘average’ about military

I can count on one hand the times that I have agreed with Leonard Pitts Jr., but today is one of those times (“Marines should be judged cautiously,” Monday). Because I am a U.S. Marine combat veteran of the Vietnam War, I fully understand the misguided motivation for those hapless young Marines who were videotaped while allegedly urinating on the bodies of their mortal enemies.

Pitts almost had it right when he spoke of “average Americans” not understanding what went on inside of the heads of those brave, yet far too ignorant, young men. Those Marines (and anyone who serves in the U.S. military) represent less than one-half of a percent of our nation’s population. There is no “average American” in the U.S. military. In my book these volunteers are the cream of the crop.

Those of us who are protected by these brave young men and women have no place making judgment calls about anything that transpires on the battlefield. We have absolutely no right to condemn them for any action. War is an ugly, brutal, and nasty business. As U.S. Rep. (and retired Army colonel) Allen West (R., Fla.) said, “Shut up!”

John Wear
New Hope

Hi John

Your letter to the Philadelphia Inquirer editor (above) is right on. I recall a trip to Khe Sahn by convoy when we were

entering (I think it was called) “Eagle’s Nest.” This was a very small outpost on Highway Nine. As we came in to the tiny base, all hell broke out. I jumped from the truck that I was riding and into the ditch along the road. I never saw so many mortar rounds hit such a small area! From the road ahead, I could hear a tank coming. I peeked out from my trench and I saw what caused all the commotion. Swinging from the gun tube was an NVA officer who had been lynched in the old west fashion. I am sure the crew got a royal ass-chewing for their stupidity. Perhaps they even got a demotion but it sure was not front page news. War is war. You have to be there to complain.

Steve Patton
Tuolumne, CA
(209) 928-3474

I loved this new copy of The Sponson Box. Until this issue I had thought you named our magazine after a portion of a woman’s anatomy.

Semper Fidelis
Jim Langford
Carlsbad, CA
Phone: (760) 729-1933

John... I want to thank you and the association for the very nice article on Roger McVay. I owe him a lot of credit and sadly I only got to know him for a short period after Nam. He helped me get some much needed information on things that happened a long time ago. He helped me to put something important things to rest. I know his wife really likes the things y’all wrote about him. Again, thank you for everything.

Semper Fi,

Jimmy Didear, Sgt
Corpus Christy, TX
Phone: (361) 877-6685

I got a letter yesterday from Eli J. Duck, who was with Charlie Co, 1st tanks. The letter was “strange” since it had my name on the envelope and the name of my street only...there was no home address numbers, no city, no state and no Zip code. How the letter ever got to me I’ll never know...Long story short, I had not heard from him in over 45 years and he said he had read my article when he was going through the VA process. He sent some pictures to make sure it was me. Please send him a VTA application and Sponson Box news magazine.

Joe Liu
Roy, UT
Phone: (801) 731-7591

Editor’s note: Eli became a member in January! Good job Joe!!!

Dear John,

This is not a real "Dear John" letter I just forgot to pay my dues for 2010. A friend of mine from Tank School, Russell Stingle, looked me up after 42 years. He lives in Bedford, KY. He has my address from back then. He went to 1st Tanks and I went to 3rd Tanks in Vietnam. Anyway, about a month ago he got up on Thursday morning and said to himself, "Today is the day that I am going to Tennessee to see Ken." And he did. He rode his motorcycle from Bedford to Greenville to see me after 42 years...it was unbelievable!!! We had a great little reunion. We called Jan "Turtle" Wendling in Ohio and talked to him awhile. Jan was with me in Vietnam. He came to see me after 35 years also on his motorcycle and he has visited me each year since then. After talking to Russell, I remembered I hadn't paid my dues...so here they are for 2010 and for 2011. I'm sorry. You can beat me with a tank track if you can pick it up. I can take the beating.

Semper Fi,

Ken Metcalf
296 DeBusk Road
Greenville, TN 37743
Phone: (423) 639-2876

Editor's note: This letter was first sent to me early in 2011 but unfortunately it was misplaced until now. Sorry Ken! And just a reminder to everyone: Your 2012 dues are now past due...please pay them today!!!

Enclosed are my 2012 membership dues and a donation for the general fund. I was very sorry to have missed the San Diego reunion. My wife has been having back problems which makes it difficult to leave, leaving her for even a short period of time. She is now receiving some different treatments, which look promising. Time will tell and I hope to make the next reunion (San Antonio?) if all works out. I attended my 3/5 Korean War reunion in San Antonio in September, 1994; it is a great place. Keep up the good work. The Sponson Box is GREAT!

Semper Fi

Fidelas "Fid" Jarnot
CO. A Co, 3rd Tanks, July '65 – Mar '66
Fallbrook, CA
Phone: (760) 728-0992

On August 11, 2011 at 3:00 AM, I, Tom Colson Sr, walked out of my home in Tucson, AZ, and threw my leg over my Harley Davidson motorcycle. I was finally heading out to the 2011 USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Reunion in San Diego, California! The last reunion that I was able to attend was the 2003 gathering in Seattle, WA. Back then I rode my Harley to that reunion from where I was living at the time, Prineville, OR. The bike trip to Seattle had taken me about 6 to 7 hours to make. I hadn't been able to make any of the past VTA reunions because of my own personal health and finance issues. This year, I was not going to miss it for anything! My travel time was planned to take about 8 hours, so I need to leave

when it was dark to get across the hot part of the desert where the temps can reach 120 degrees that time of year. I then made it to Yuma, AZ, by 7:30 AM where I stopped for breakfast. When I got back on the road again it was about 9:00 AM and it was already 102 degrees! I knew that I still had the El Central area to cross which is the hottest part of the desert and which was about 70 miles away. On another trip, the year before, I had ridden my bike to the San Diego area to see my mom in July. I made the same desert crossing at about 2:30 PM and it had been 119 degrees on the road. Back then it was so hot that it had actually fried the battery on my Harley. So for this trip, I rolled into my mom's San Diego home at about 10:45 AM and I felt really good. I knew that I was ready for some good times, both visiting my mom and my Marine tanker buddies. The next day was the start of the reunion so I got up early (at 5:30 AM) and headed to the Slopechute for an early check in. At the check in desk I got to see an old friend, John Wear. I hadn't seen him for about 10 years and he was very happy to see me. In looking back, this past year's reunion was so great and so exciting that I can hardly wait for the reunion in 2013 that will be in San Antonio. I am already mapping out my motorcycle trip to Texas. I am hoping that I will not miss any more of our tankers reunions since I missed so many in the past. I pray that I am done for all times with all of the cancer and problems and operations with my heart, back, knees, head and foot. That's what kept me from all the other reunions...but no more. I will make it, even if I have to make the trip on a tricycle!!!

Tom Colson
Tucson, AZ
Phone: (520) 382-7268

Last month I purchased a car from a local Chrysler dealer and I really hit it off with the salesman after learning that he had been a Navy F-4 pilot flying from a carrier off the coast of Vietnam in 1968. He (Ted) told me about Marines requesting close air support and the Navy Phantoms that they were flying didn't have any gun pods. So the pilots would get three or four Phantoms in a trail and goose them to Mach 1.4 (or above). Then they'd come in about 200 feet above the deck and hit the NVA with the sonic boom. He told me that they'd look back to see all the NVA writhing in pain on the ground. Pretty cool except Ted told me, "One of those slant-eyed gooks fired his rifle straight up on full auto as I passed by and put 28 bullet holes in my fuselage." Great guy!

Fred Kellogg
Vancouver, WA
Phone: (360) 609-3404

Good morning John... Just a quick note to give you a lead on a great tanker. Harry Schassow was with me on Alfa-41 from Jan '68 to Dec '68. He joined us at Con Thien and was still there when I rotated home in December. He also extended for six months and became a TC in Alpha Company. I believe he was with Capt Wunsch when Alfa-41 got blown away. Anyway, I just received my Sponson Box... awesome issue! Please send a

copy to Harry when you contact him. My dues are on the way.
God bless & Semper Fi

Don Sanders
Elyria, OH
Phone: (440) 366-6157

Here is Harry's address:

Harry Schossow
46502 - 525th Ave
Perham, MN 56573-8404.

John's reply: I'll have a VTA recruiting package sent to Harry this week.

QUESTION: Were you two guys part of Lt Jim Coan's 1st Platoon, Alfa Co? My sieve brain does not recall if you were at Con Thien with us or not. I am referring to the summer months of 1968... when my flame tank was stationed there... before "Operation Thor" where we went into the DMZ with the entire 9th Marine Regiment.

If Harry was on Capt Wunsch's tank then I understand that Jan "Turtle" Wendling, was the driver. We honored Capt Wunsch during the Farewell Dinner at the Charleston reunion in 2009. Capt Wunch's brother and his widow came to honor him. And we had a video made by Ollie North, who was climbing onto Wunch's tank when the RPG knocked Ollie off and killed the Skipper.

Don's reply: We were on Alfa-41 on that operation. That tank was the Alfa company skipper's tank but we only had an officer with us on maybe two occasions that I can recall. The officers seem to stay in the rear most of the time. We had a Lt Brignon when I first got in-country but he got wounded outside of Dong Ha and got medevaced. We were not part of Jim Coan's platoon. As I recall that operation seems like we had maybe twenty tanks involved (?). Some tanks from Alpha and maybe some from Bravo. We only worked with Bravo on a couple of ops. We mostly were just Alpha tanks. We did "mooch" ops in and around Con Thien, The Washout and C-2. My tank spent a month (I think) around September of '68 at The Rockpile while a Bravo tank was getting repaired back in Dong Ha. We were also part of "Task Force Robbie." We got sent over to the Dai Do to deal with the NVA when that battle happened. I believe that it was at the end of April 68. We were in 5th Platoon. I do remember the B-52's dropping bombs as we waited to go in and our tank was bouncing around from the vibes of the bomb blast. I also remember finding an underground hospital and about 4,000 gooks running away from us.

My buddy Harry wasn't on Alfa 41 when the skipper got hit. By then he had his own tank but he was there when it happened. We'd been in that same area several times and we even got stuck out there once. Turtle got in-country around the same time that I left for the World. He is from Mansfield, Ohio...my hometown. I know his brother John. They were all Marines and Mansfield cops. Thanks for getting that stuff off to Harry. Semper FI.

John's Reply: You are dusting off a lot of cobwebs in my rusty dusty brain housing group! I too was with Task Force Robbie!

With regard to that huge battle at Dia Do... which I understand is called "The Battle for Dong Ha"... our tank and

maybe five others hit anti-tank mines outside of Cam Vu as we hauled balls toward the hapless grunts who had hit the shit east of Cam Lo Hill. So your tank made it to the battle site? I did not know ANY Marine tanks made it to the battle. I do remember sitting at the tank ramp at Dong Ha repairing the mine damage and listening to, what seemed to be, an endless three-day long firefight. I have also read personal accounts of the battle where the 4th Marines, after walking into the buzz saw that the NVA attackers sprung on them... fought with jammed weapons, bayonets and entrenching tools... and ended up kicking the shit out of the gooks.

Don's Reply: Charlie Company tanks were the ones who devastated the gooks as we were driving down the trenches and crushing them. We went on a Mike boat out of Dong Ha after getting notified of the firefight. We got there at the end when the grunts were clearing trenches, etc. That's where I drank the contaminated water from the well that had gook bodies in it...I got sooooo fuckin' sick. I was the only one from my tank that drank the water. We stayed two days and then back to (I think) C-2. Ours was the only tank from 5th Plt to go to Dia Do. The battle was all over by the Cua Viet area. Echo Company, 2/4 only had 12 men left standing. The cover photo on front of the Sponson Box brought back memories of us carrying out the dead from 3/3. I think it was during a different action that was part of that initiative... just outside the Washout. They lost 12 KIA. We found one Marine alive... but I'll never forget the dead bodies all over our tank. And the shit outside of Dong Ha, when Delta Co, 26th marines got ambushed and damn near wiped out. All of these were like April/May '68.

John:

I would like to order the 1st Tank Bn M48A3 model. I will send you a \$44.99 check through the bank today... is this the proper way to order it? I will also include my membership dues.

Do you have Tom Roberts email address? If so, please send it to me.

Allen Cohen
Tampa, FL
Phone: (678) 778-6963

P.S. The Sponson Box was really good. Thanks!

Hi John,

I've enclosed a check for my 2012 membership dues. I hope this finds your and yours well. I hated missing the reunion (in San Diego) but my doctor wouldn't allow me to be in the air that long. It's too much of a risk for a blood clot. Lord knows I don't need that, I've had seven and that's enough. I did make it to the Marine Corps Tankers reunion (at Quantico, VA). We had a great time as always. The (new) Tankers Memorial in Semper Fidelis Park at the Marine Corps Museum is wonderful. The enclosed photo shows the bricks of four USMC VTA members who fought together in Vietnam and now have our bricks together directly in front of the monument.

I've been working with Bobby Walker on a story that we think would be good for the Sponson Box. I will be sending it to you

soon. I am going to send Bob Peavey the names, addresses, and service numbers of the five 1st Tank Battalion Marines that were KIA just east of Outpost Bear on the afternoon of 6 February 1968. A lot of us would like to see them recognized in the Fallen Heroes ceremony during some of the future reunions. As you know they were all from H&S Company, 1st Tanks and a lot of us knew them. I still wonder about the wounded from that day. Did they live? I know that Capt McPherson was lung shot but he lived. The rest of them, I don't about. Maybe we could have an article in the Sponson Box. I think that it would get a lot of feedback. Semper Fi

Tom Clary
Fort White, FL
Phone: (386) 497-1012

Dear Friends,

Thank you for the beautiful flowers that you sent for my husband, Gary L Gibson's funeral services on August 6, 2011 and for the beautiful flower arrangement that you sent to me. Your kindness was greatly appreciated at this time of our loss of our beloved husband, father and grandfather.

The family of Gary L Gibson

Connie, Robert and Teresa
Verona, MO

Letter to the Editor:

I was in 2nd Tank Bn. during a time when we had very few officers. The only time you would see three officers, we knew a courts martial was going on. At the time I was a Staff Sergeant with many years in grade and the battalion required that senior staff NCOs had to stand Officer of the Day watch. I had the duty one night and was sleeping in the S-1 area. Normally I would awaken the Corporal of the Guard to wake the duty driver so I could inspect the two sentries in the tank park. For some reason, I was awake one night, walking around the battalion area (maybe checking posts, maybe getting some smokes out of the duty pick 'em-up truck). I had decided to bypass obtaining a driver and I jumped into the pick 'em-up and drove down to the tank park. When I arrived at the maintenance shop I could not find the sentries. They were not to be found anywhere. I was about to go into a 3-foot hover when the phone outside the shop rang. I picked it up and said, "Post three."

The voice on the other end said, "The ghost is out."

"What?" I asked.

The voice again said, "The mother f*ckin' ghost is out!"

I then asked in my most official OOD voice, "Who the hell is this?"

After a momentary pause, the voice replied, "Well, f*ck you! You're the f*ckin' ghost!"

Semper Fi!

Tom Roberts
Yuma, AZ
Phone: (928) 317-9794

To my Third Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Tanks Buddies:

Jan 4, 1966, I was up very early or possibly I never went to bed. I was dressed in clothes that didn't fit. Someone was always yelling. I was running everywhere. I was always doing pushups or squat thrusts. Luckily I didn't have to do any thinking because I was always told what to do and how and when and how many. For the first of my 13 weeks I only had to remember three names and a series of numbers. I still remember them all 47 years later. The only other name that I remember is a guy that always was behind me everyday. I often thought this was just a dream and I would wake up safe and at home. That never happened!!! In those 13 weeks of what was Hell to me, I learned a lot about myself and what it was going to take to get out of the mess that I had gotten myself into. The best part of all of this really BAD DREAM was finding all of you guys and getting to know you during our time together in a tropical paradise with warm beer and bad food. The things that happened there are memories and not all of them are good...and some still haunt me today. A lot of things have changed in 47 years. I no longer run, I don't exercise and the only one that yells is my wife when I don't hear her well. There are a few numbers that are still stuck in my head today. Thirteen, as in 1369 MOS; 47 is the year that I was born and the names of each and every one of those that made me a better man. Some of those men didn't make it back from the tropical paradise; some did and were taken away too soon. For those of you who are still around THANK YOU!!!

Semper Fi

Sgt Paul R. Tate
USMC 1811

Enclosed you will find a compact disk (CD) that contains a written history of my time in Vietnam as a Marine Corps tanker. As I stated in the introduction, I have written this for m decedents so they will have a record of what my family went through during the Vietnam War. I think it is probably very typical of what happened to a lot of families during that time. I give permission to do with it what you want. If you want to print it in its entirety that's fine or if you want to take certain stories and print them that's fine too. Hope that you find in interesting reading.

Your friend,
Semper Fi

Ric Langley

Editor's note: This wonderful & most appreciated gift is exactly what we need to fulfill our efforts in publishing our Marine Corps tanker legacy.

I received my latest copy of the Sponson Box yesterday and have just finished it. I applaud your efforts both in content and worthiness! As a professional proofreader I found only one mistake throughout; 2nd paragraph...line six...word eight. You wrote "though" and it should have read "thought." With 43 pages of text that is a very good job, few current newspapers can say as much! You are a worthy successor to those who have preceded you, John.

I am one of probably many who haven't paid their 2012 dues yet. May I ask a question? Is it intentional to not put the dues levy anywhere in print in hope that more will be received? Is it not mentioned in the anticipation that members will call and provide you with an opportunity for a conversation that otherwise would not have had the chance to enjoy? I find it hard to believe it is only an oversight...but at any rate some of us, as we belong to numerous organizations with different dues structures, need to be told how much to send. My first bride, Janiece will remit some amount of payment shortly after I ask her. I handled our family finances from the date of our marriage to almost two years ago. It occurred to me that were I to be killed in an auto accident she didn't have the faintest idea where our money came from or where it went. After much grumbling (she was a professional banker throughout her career) she took over

Looking For

I am looking for several M-48 tank track end connectors with the wedge nut & bolt. Does anyone have a source for them?

Ken Zebal
Tucson, AZ
Phone: (520) 834-3597

My name is Robert Nason and I was a grunt squad leader of the 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Hotel Company 2/9. At the end of May 1967, a tank that was accompanying our unit was hit with a RPG and was burning. A Marine was standing in the shade close by with all of his clothes burned & melted off his body. Most of his skin was burned off except for his face. All he had left of his clothing was his boots. He was a black kid and he was in shock. He looked like he had been blown off of the top of the tank. The Marine tankers inside of the tank were also in very bad shape. I climbed up on the side of the tank and just as I was reaching for a Marine inside, we came under heavy enemy fire. My entire squad ran off chasing the NVA into the tree line. Rounds were hitting the tank all around me. Anyway two of my men were shot during the firefight. One of them lost his arm. I eventually got one of the burned tankers out to the road where we ran across another tank heading to the rear that was loaded with wounded Marines. I am looking for the burned black Marine tanker. We had to leave the knocked out tank after we told the other tank crew about it. I don't know if the rest of the crew was dead or not...due to the nature of the situation. We lost many good men that day. I checked my combat history and it looks like this all

the money responsibilities. Now if we have an expense that isn't accompanied by a bill I put in my request for payment and she honors it. Oh, back to the dues issue, I would suggest a dollar figure be posted in the "Membership Dues Notice" box on page 25 of this issue. A line could simply be added stating that the yearly dues are \$_____.

In all capacities I thank you for your most dedicated service to our beloved organization. Your leadership is vital to our continued existence.

Your Tracked Brother,

Craig Newberry
Linden, MI
Phone: (810) 735-4863

Editor's Note: Dues are \$30 per year... sorry!!! You will find in this issue, hopefully, an envelope to mail in your dues.

happened during "OPERATION HICKORY" in Quang Tri Province on or around May 18th to the end of the month. There must be a way to find that wounded Marine tanker. I sure would like to talk to him

ROBERT (Bob) NASON
43311 WEST SUGAR PINE DR.
OAKHURST CA. 93644
Phone: (559) 658-5647
Email: nace@sti.net

Squad Leader, 1st Squad, 1st Platoon, Hotel Co., 2/9
May 1967 OPERATION HICKORY

At about 7:40 PM tonight my wife and I had just finished supper and the phone rang. I answered it and this voice on the other end asked if I was Gene. I replied, "Yes" while "Who is this?" is going through my mind. He said, "This is Fred Goger. We were together in 3rd Tanks, H&S Company, Communications Platoon in Nam!" He got my information from reading the most current issue of the Sponson Box. Geez! That was nice! We talked and exchanged some information and I told him where to see a picture of me on The Brotherhood site. Today was a good day...since my granddaughter also got me to eat sushi. You know what? It's pretty good.

Semper Fi.

Gene Hika
Ft Meyers, FL
Phone: (239) 267-4984

J KE

In an effort to ensure proper training and readiness among the military services, Congress has approved the following changes to basic principles of recruit training:

Haircuts:

Marines: Heads will be shaved.

Army: Stylish flat-top's for all recruits.

Navy: No haircut standard.

Air Force: Complete makeovers as seen on the Jenny Jones show.

Training Hours:

Marines: Reveille at 0500, train until 2000.

Army: Reveille at 0600, train until 1900.

Navy: Get out of bed at 0900, train until 1100, lunch until 1300, train until 1600.

Air Force: Awaken at 1000, breakfast in bed, train from 1100 to 1200, lunch at 1200, train from 1300 to 1400, nap at 1400, awaken from nap at 1500, training ceases at 1500.

Meals:

Marines: Meals, Ready-to-Eat 3 times a day.

Army: One hot meal, 2 MRE's.

Navy: 3 hot meals.

Air Force: Catered meals prepared by the Galloping Gourmet, Julia Child, and Wolfgang Puck and Emeril Lagasse. All you can eat.

Leave And Liberty:

Marines: None.

Army: 4 hours a week.

Navy: 2 days a week.

Airforce: For every four hours of training, recruits will receive eight hours of leave and liberty.

Protocol:

Marines: Will address all officers

as "Sir," and refer to the rank of all enlisted members when speaking to them (i.e., Sgt. Smith).

Army: Will address all officers as "Sir," unless they are friends, and will call all enlisted personnel "Sarge."

Navy: Will address all officers as "Skipper," and all enlisted personnel as "Chief."

Air Force: All Air Force personnel shall be on a first name basis with each other.

Decorations/Awards:

Marines: Medals and badges are awarded for acts of gallantry and bravery only.

Army: Medals and badges are awarded for every bullet fired, hand grenade thrown, fitness test passed, and bed made.

Navy: Will have ships' engineers make medals for them as desired.

Air Force: Will be issued all medals and badges, as they will most likely be awarded them at some point early in their careers anyway.

Camouflage Uniforms:

Marines: Work uniform, to be worn only during training and in field situations.

Army: Will wear it anytime, anywhere.

Navy: Will not wear camouflage uniforms, they do not camouflage you on a ship. (Ship Captains will make every effort to attempt to explain this to sailors.)

Air Force: Will defeat the purpose of camouflage uniforms by putting blue and silver chevrons and colorful squadron patches all over them.

Career Fields:

Marines: All Marines shall be

considered riflemen first and foremost.

Army: It doesn't matter, all career fields promote to E-8 in first enlistment anyway.

Navy: Nobody knows. The Navy is still trying figure out what sailors in the ABH, SMC, BNC and BSN rates do anyway.

Air Force: Every recruit will be trained in a manner that will allow them to leave the service early to go on to higher paying civilian jobs.

A Short Story about a Vietnam Helicopter Pilot

Submitted by VTA member John Lange

One day a long, long time ago, there was this US Army helicopter pilot who was not full of shit...

But it was just one helicopter pilot and it was a long, long time ago...

And it was just one day...

REUNION ANNOUNCEMENT:

Bravo Company, 1st Tanks (1966 – 1968) will be holding a mini-reunion on May 16 to 20, 2012 in Saint Charles Missouri.

We had a GREAT time last year and we'll be doing some different events this year! The airport is only about 20 minutes from the town and it would enable us to pick up each other very easily if needed.

Contact Ron "Snoopy" Davidson
65 Beasley Drive
Lexington, TN 38351
Phone: (815) 764-0124
Email: bravo34@charter.net

Vietnam Tankers Associaton Scholarship Program

The Board of Directors of the VTA implemented an academic scholarship program last year. The first award of \$1,000 was made to a VTA member's child for the 2011-2012 school year. Continuing with the program, another four-year scholarship will be awarded this year in the amount of \$1,000 per academic year. To be eligible for this scholarship, the applicant must be a spouse, child, stepchild, or grandchild of a VTA member who has a DD-214 on file with the VTA and whose membership dues are current. VTA Board of Directors are not eligible.

Student Scholarship Criteria:

1. Have a minimum GPA of 3.0 at the last high school or academic institution attended.
2. Must be registered to attend a minimum of half-time (as determined by the institution) at an accredited educational/technical college or university.
3. Must agree to authorize the VTA to publicize the scholarship award announcement in the Sponson Box newsletter.
4. Application materials must be postmarked no later than the May 31st deadline.

The scholarship program committee will review all applications for completeness, then the VTA Board of Directors will select the scholarship winner. Determining factors will be letters of recommendation, a letter in the applicant's own words expressing current educational goals and prior accomplishments, and a 500-word essay on the topic: Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans.

To obtain a scholarship application form, contact Jim Coan, 5374 E. Lantana Drive, Sierra Vista, AZ 85650, or e-mail him at zzjimco@aol.com



A Hunting Trip

While serving with Bravo Company 1/9 in the vicinity of Cam Lo in 1969 we were assigned to a tank patrol. After several hours of seeing nothing, the Gunny in charge of the tank frantically requested an M16. From his perch he popped off five or six rounds. Of course we scattered and set up a perimeter expecting the worse, with a sheepish grin

the gunny informed us he had shot a deer. Volunteers were requested to mount a combat patrol to retrieve it. Several of us searched for about a half-hour to no avail. On the way back riding on the tank any wild animal was fair game. With the M79 loaded with buckshot and M16s firing it must have sounded like a small rolling firefight. Fortunately we weren't

hunting for supper because we came home empty-handed. Upon returning to base a special formation was called and our CO informed us that was the first and last hunting trip we would participate in. Our unauthorized hunting trip stands out in my memory as one of the few enjoyable times I spent in Vietnam.

William Whitley

Attention Members!

Greg Martin, our new webmaster, is looking for your Vietnam photos to post on the VTA website. Here is what we need for you to do:

1. Look over your Vietnam photo and/or slide collection and pick out the photos that are as clear and in focus as they can be.
2. Convert your photos to a computerized image version like Adobe.
3. Each photo must be identified as to what the photo is, such as where it was taken, the year it was taken, and who is in the photo.

4. Send your photos to Greg via email.
5. We suggest that you send no more than three photo images at a time with the identification included for each image.
6. **SAY AGAIN:** We must have detailed identification for the photos to mean anything to the viewers of the website. Please make sure that the following is included: LOCATION, PLATOON, COMPANY, BATTALION, OPERATION NAME, MONTH, YEAR and individual NAMES.

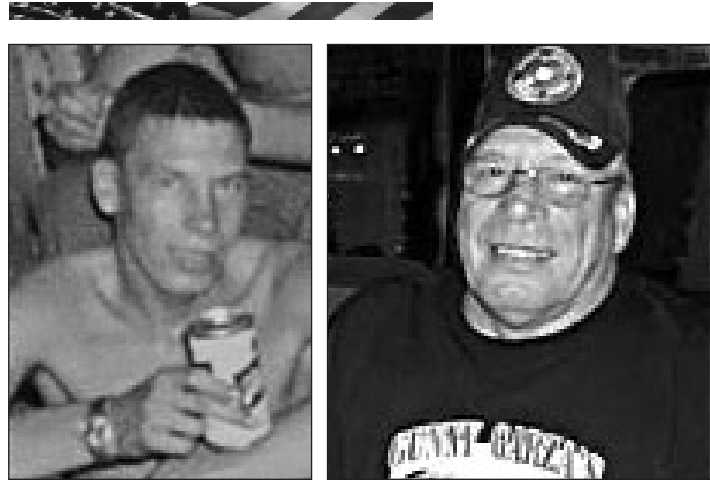
7. If you need help accomplishing this mission please contact:

Greg Martin
Phone: 360-480-1206
usmctanker@comcast.net

John Wear
Phone: 215-794-9052
johnwear2@verizon.net

Bob Peavey
Phone: 707-365-3711
repv@comcast.net

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky



The tank park in the sky welcomed another member of the illustrious 3rd Herd of Bravo Co, 1st Tanks. Sgt. Cecil Brown Jr, of Sidney, Ohio, passed away on April 10th after a long battle with myositis, silicosis and a short battle with cancer. He was a hard working and trusted Marine. Cpl. Brown was the tank commander of B-35 and expected each crewmember to perform his job, both in combat and in the tank park – everyone worked until the job was completed – then everyone could have a somewhat cold beer! There were no slackers allowed on his tank! I always considered B-35 “my tank”, so I spent quite a bit of time on B-35, riding, playing loader, or even “bumping” Cecil so I could be the TC. I always got the same comment – “OK LT, but don’t screw up my tank - sir!”

Rotating stateside in mid '67, he was assigned to 2nd Tanks and then received orders to Marine Barracks, 8th & I, Washington, D.C., along with a promotion to Sgt. When his enlistment was up, he returned to civilian life and his home town of Sidney. Cecil went to work at the Wagner Ware Foundry in Sidney, makers of the famous Magnalite cookware.

His wife, Janice, eight children, 10 grandchildren, and his mother survive him.

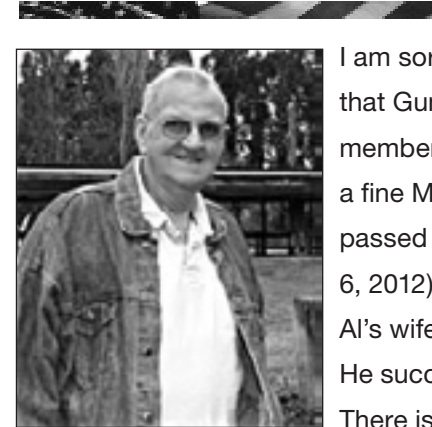
Several years ago, the 3rd Herd reassembled and it has been a special two + years of renewed friendships and experiences. Cecil, Janice, and two of his children were able to attend the 3rd Herd reunion in St Charles, MO last summer. His slight smile had not changed over the years. Cecil was on oxygen during the 4 days and it meant a great deal to him and the rest of us to get together and share the memories of a time when we were young and wild. We're old and subdued now, but we still have those visions of grandeur! Farewell, Cecil, it was a pleasure and honor to have known and served with you.

Submitted by Rod “Lt Fuzz” Henderson

This to let “All Hands” know that **James L. “Seamus” Garrahy**, age 70, died on Monday, January 09, 2012, at his home in Gettysburg, PA.

Jim was a veteran of the US Marine Corps and remained active in Marine affairs for the rest of his life. Through the years he has hosted thousands of active and retired veterans at his home in what had become known as “Steaks and Beers”. Seamus had for the last five years hosted the finish line and post race event for the “Face of America – Wounded Warriors Bike Ride”.

Seamus lived a full life filled with adventures, friendships and fun. For a year he served as a crew mate aboard the HMS Bounty tall ship sailing the Atlantic. He founded a singing group known as the “Sault Antlers Men’s Choir” singing Irish drinking songs. They recorded an album and later were a fixture in the area every St. Patrick’s Day.



I am sorry to report to you that Gunnery Sgt **Al Waters**, a member of your organization, a fine Marine and good friend, passed away yesterday (Feb 6, 2012) in his home in Florida. Al’s wife Bev was at his side. He succumbed to cancer. There is going to be a small service here in Florida and a second at his home in Stratford, Connecticut.

He was proud of his service as a Marine and a tanker. I knew him as a shooter. I believe that we first crossed paths in Kaneohe Bay after his RVN days. Later we became neighbors by chance.

Semper Fi,

Ken Hill
Lakeland, Florida

P.S: I will leave you with a thought. Al usually didn't give out his home address he'd only give you driving directions. He'd tell you "Follow the main road in, detour around the club house then go a couple of blocks and look to your right for the American flag and the Marine Corps flag" flying on his flagpole. Toward the end he was alert but the cancer meds really slowed him up. He'd have to sleep late and I'd tell him I was going to find him some nice Oakley sunglasses so he could look the part. One finger would always pop up! He was Gung Ho 'til the very end!

According to Sunday's (Jan 16, 2012) San Diego Union-Tribune obituaries, we lost another Marine tanker.

Brian “BD” Kent Davis
1943-2012, (68 years old)

It says that besides being a police officer and a fireman, he was a sergeant in the USMC from 1966-1967 and that he was a tank commander at Camp Pendleton. He also stayed in the USMC reserves till 1972. If he was active duty 1966 – 67 so it may mean that he was part of C Co, 1st. Tanks. As reserve he would be 4th Tanks. I guess that we should put his name out in the S-Box and on our web site and see if anybody knew him.

Rick Lewis 1st.Sgt. USMC (Retired)
San Diego
(858) 735-1772

Colonel **Bill Dabney**, USMC, (ret) passed away at 0200, 15 Feb, 2012. He was a Navy Cross recipient for his heroism as a company commander (India Co, 3/26) at a place called Khe Sanh during the Vietnam War. 163 of the men in his company of 180 were either killed or wounded during that battle. He was the son-in-law of General “Chesty” Puller and the husband of his loving wife, Virginia. America has lost a real hero.

What Members Are Doing



VTA Treasurer, Jim Coan, was the guest of honor at the 2011 USMC Birthday Ball at Fort Huachuca, Arizona, this past November 11th. Jim participated in the cake-cutting ceremony along with the youngest Marine (born in 1993) and the oldest Marine (91, a veteran of WWII). Right after the ceremony, the CO of the Fort Marine detachment said a few words and then turned the mike over to Jim. As he was about two minutes into his talk at the podium, a corporal from the color guard who was standing at parade rest fainted and he hit the deck prone on his back with a loud crash. Jim says, "I almost went into flashback mode, looking around for a corpsman! It was surreal for a moment and I stopped talking. A Marine master sergeant, who was the master of ceremonies for the birthday ball and who was standing behind me, told me to keep on talking and so I did. It was pretty difficult without worrying about the

fallen Marine. My wife, Sandra, told me that for about five minutes I was speaking but no one could hear me because I forgot to speak into the mike. Later, when the colors were secured at the end of the ceremony, one of the color guard Marines forgot about the ceiling light fixture and, you guessed it, he hit the light fixture with the top of the flag pole. The Marine captain standing next to me muttered some @%&#@ words. I told him it happens all the time in these ceremonies and suggested that he shouldn't stress out. But, all in all, it was a most memorable experience that I'll always treasure."

Don't know if you received my e-mail or not, but I am leaving the country on 12/27 and will not return until sometime in early 2013. I have been invited back to my family's estates in Scotland (Crathes Castle) for what we Scot's call "The Joining." The Burnett of Leys (you can Google it since it's pretty interesting stuff) will be holding a reunion of the Burnett family (estimated at 10,000 worldwide) in 2013 and I have been asked to represent all of the Burnett's from the U.S along with several other families from here.

Thanks

Mike Burnett
Merced, CA
Phone: (209) 383-2261

During the 2011 VTA reunion in San Diego, Roger "Blues" Unland (A Co. 3rd Tanks and B Co. 5th Tanks) and Tom "Sparrow" Moad (A Co. 3rd Tanks) were talking about the two of them taking a trip to the San Francisco Bay Area. When they told me about it, I told them, "Let's make it a reality". So, when Sparrow got home, he discussed it with his missus, and when Blues got home he talked to his wife about it. Of course, I was pretty sure that both spouses would be more than happy to get these two tread heads out of the house for a few days, so I put a plan together as soon as I got home. I started by contacting Bill Stevenson. Bill served in the 2nd Plt. of B Co., 5th Tanks when I was in 1st Plt., B Co., 5th Tanks at Camp Pendleton. Bill, now a retired plumber and his wife Valarie live close to me in South San Francisco. I told Bill about Sparrow and Blues coming up to the Bay Area and that I had decided to put together a trip to the Military Vehicle Foundation located in Portola Valley California. The vehicle collection, which includes a functional German Panther Tank (less functioning weapons), is the largest privately own collection of its kind in the world. I then called Mike Jiron, a Marine with whom I experienced the fun of Boot Camp, ITR, Tank School, and with whom I served with in B Co. 5th Tanks. Mike retired from Warner Bros. a couple of years ago and he, with his wife Debbie, live in Lake Tahoe (on the Nevada side). I told Jiron about our plan and he was more than happy just to be a part of it. Mike arrived on Thursday, 12 January, and on Friday,

13 Jan., Mike and I went up to San Francisco, had breakfast, visited the Marines Memorial Club & Hotel and a few other locations. As we did these things I had my cell phone with me because I told Blues you'll need to call me when you arrive in the Bay Area. Since school is in session, my wife, Annette, the schoolteacher, will be at work and I may not be home to greet them. So, Mike and I visited in San Francisco without the least bit of concern about where Blues and Sparrow were. After all, these guys had cell phones and I would get a call when they got near the Bay Area. Well, unknown to me, Sparrow and Blues had arrived at my home not that long after I left it with Mike. Unwittingly, they thought that I would be returning "at any minute" because they knew I was expecting them and that I would never let a brother down. A few hours passed and they continued to wait. Apparently while they waited, one of my neighbors saw these two men sitting in front of my home and, since they were not anyone who they would normally see in the neighborhood, they called the police. Well, to make a long story short, Blues and Sparrow met a couple of our local law enforcement guys. When the officers discovered that Blues and Sparrow were Vietnam Marine Corps Veterans and they had explained what they were doing in front of my home, things got a whole lot better for everyone (especially for Sparrow and Blues). Of course much like any of the antics of Blues and Sparrow, there's some even funnier parts of the story, but we'll save those for our next reunion.

In short, we had a real great time and I'm sure that Sparrow's



Left to Right: Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri, Bill Stevenson, "Fritz" a WW 2. German Army Panther Tank Driver, Roger "Blues" Unland, Tom "Sparrow" Moad and Mike Jiron.

wife Casper, Blue's wife Mary, Mike's wife Debbie, and Bill's wife Valarie enjoyed the husband-free rest. As for my wife, Annette, she was as usual a great hostess and she deserves a vote for sainthood.

Semper Fi,

Belmo

Sparrow added: "Fritz, the old German, was driving a Panzer that made it to within two miles of the fuel dump before they ran out of gas during the Battle of the Bulge. Tommy, the guy that was on a Sherman in WW2, was also with us. I don't think there was a dry eye in the house when they gave each other a tankers hug."

I just received the latest edition of the Sponson Box - Great job, Mr. Editor! It also reminded me that I hadn't sent in my annual dues, so you will be receiving a check for my 2012 dues plus a little extra to use as you see fit.

This has been a rather rough year for us. Due to my wife Elsie's health condition, we had to leave our beautiful home on Whidbey Island and move into a Senior Retirement Community in the Seattle area to be nearer to necessary health providers for her. The place we are living also has assisted living and long-term care facilities as required. We are leasing our home, as we own it free and clear and don't intend to give it away in this depressed housing market.

Elsie has been diagnosed with a rare condition called Progressive Supranuclear Palsy (PSP). She suffered some strokes about a year and a half ago, which have been determined to have occurred in the brain stem (Supranuclear). The brain stem receives signals from the brain to control and execute various body motor functions. Elsie has lost a good deal of her mobility and her speech capability is virtually gone. There is no treatment or cure for this disease and it will progress over time. We're coping on a day-to-day basis. I will soon celebrate my 80th birthday and

am in excellent health, which is a God-send for me to be able to be her care-giver at home.

There is that old saying that "lightning never strikes in the same place". That may be true but my late wife, Nan, was diagnosed with the same PSP condition that Elsie has. Nan's condition deteriorated much more rapidly than what Elsie is experiencing but the end result will be the same we know. The odds on this happening with them both have to be pretty high!

We know that God is good and we have much to be thankful for. Our children on both sides of our families have been very caring and supportive. Elsie's daughter and husband live in the area near us as well as two of her grandchildren. My kids are scattered throughout CA and AZ but keep in close touch with us.

Thanks for your friendship, John, and all you do for all us old Nam tankers.

Semper Fi,

Ev Tunget

Shoreline, WA

Phone: (206) 546-3206

Editor's Comment: The entire organization's thoughts are with your wife and you.

Todd Phillips writes: From November 8 to 11, 2012, in Washington, DC, we will be helping to celebrate the 30th Anniversary of the dedication of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial (The Wall). There will be a ceremony called "Reading the Names on The Wall" where a group of 2,000 volunteers will read each & every name that appears on those black granite walls. Several VTA members will be staying at the Virginian Suites hotel in Arlington and we will also be participating in the USMC Birthday event that is held on the morning of Nov 10th at the USMC War Memorial (the Iwo Jima Monument). Anyone who would like to join us is welcome. ▲

Hearts and Minds

By Tom Fenerty

Foxtrot 2/9, RVN '68 - '69

Much has been written and said recently concerning our Afghan allies and winning the war by first winning the "hearts & minds" of the people. It has become the centerpiece of our strategy. We (our men on the ground) must first show that we care.

We care so much that we have placed

our youth in the crosshairs of the enemy. The insurgents get the first shot, and if that's not bad enough, they then get to hide their weapons and blend in with women and children. Some very noble folks who are not in harm's way must have made this decision.

History, from the beginning of

the written word, tells us that war is a savage endeavor. If the war in the Pacific was fought today, our Marines would probably be viewed as those savages and not the heroes they became while fighting for their very survival. They

(Continued on page 33)

Poems & Songs

ODE TO A WARRIOR

Been from Hong Kong to Pusan

From Trinidad to Bagdad

Seen cock fights dog fights

Men die and women cry

Been to Belleau Woods

To the islands of the Pacific

From the mountains of Korea

To the jungles of Nam

Been to the sand box called Iraq

And the land of the Taliban

Have stormed the gates of Hell

Semper Fi all the way

One in a Corps of warriors

A United States Marine

James E. Knowles Sgt. USMC

GOODBYE MY SWEETHEART HELLO VIETNAM

Kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone,
Goodbye my sweetheart hello Vietnam

America has heard the bugle call
And you know it involves us one and all.
I don't suppose that war will ever end
There's fighting that will break us up again.

Goodbye my darling hello Vietnam
A hill to take a battle to be won.

Kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone
Goodbye my sweetheart hello Vietnam.

A ship is waiting for us at the dock.
America has trouble to be stopped.
We must stop communism in that land.
Or freedom will start slipping through our hands
Goodbye my darling hello Vietnam

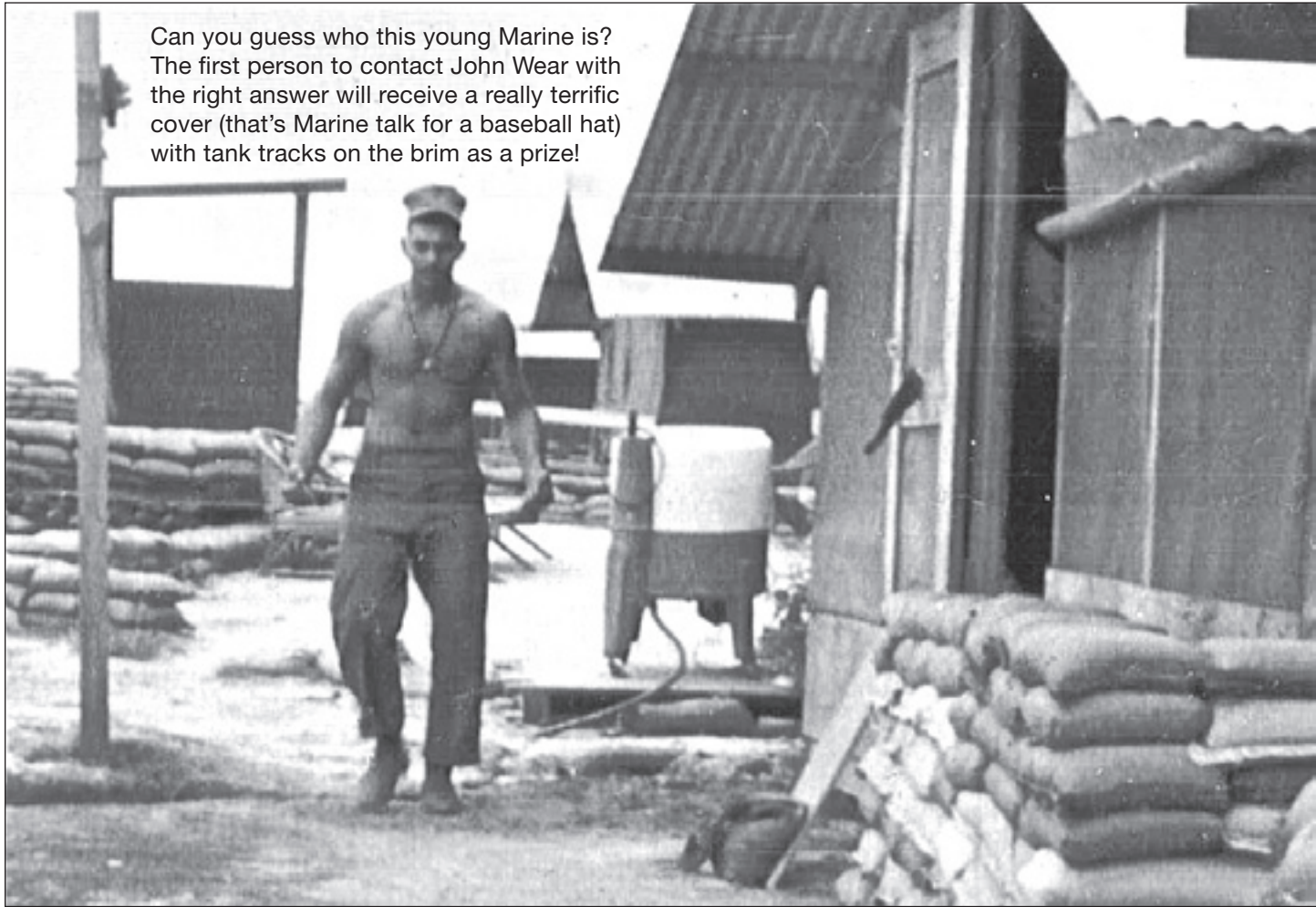
(Spoken)

I hope and pray someday the world will learn
That fires we don't put out will bigger burn
We must save freedom now at any cost
Or someday our own freedom will be lost.

A hill to take a battle to be won.
Kiss me goodbye and write me while I'm gone.
Goodbye my sweetheart, Hello Vietnam.

Editor's Note: Many of our reunion attendees may recall Doc Hackemack, Wally Young and their chorus of rabble-rousers singing this song. We are publishing it so that at our next get together we all will all be able to sing along.

Can you guess who this young Marine is? The first person to contact John Wear with the right answer will receive a really terrific cover (that's Marine talk for a baseball hat) with tank tracks on the brim as a prize!



GUESS WHO

Photo Contest

Last issue's winner is:

No one volunteered to identify Carl "Flash" Fleischmann. Al Esquivel (on the right) and Carl "Flash" Fleischmann (on the left), 3rd Tank Bn 1968



This is the third submission of a reply to the question:

What did Vietnam teach you?

A challenging question indeed Mr. Wear.
A ground pounders point of view...

I learned to make do... if you don't understand that, then there's no sense reading any further

I learned loyalty

I learned that leadership counts

I learned that I (and many others) had more endurance than ever thought possible

I learned that some men reach their limit to endure... and I understood

I learned what fear was

I learned that combat can turn a man's soul inside-out

I learned that one has no idea how he will react when the shit hits the fan

It just happens so fast.

I learned how to block out emotion

I've learned that the bonds that are formed during this intense life or death existence last forever

I learned that one has long forgotten the mundane but the horror stays forever

I learned to trust my instincts

I learned that a sense of humor is important

I learned how to make the best of a situation

I learned how to adapt and improvise

I learned what a man's brains look like

I learned that I had developed a Confidence, a confidence that **nothing** that happens from here on out will be as difficult as was my twelve & twenty. Like the man said in 'Platoon, "the rest is gravy."

I learned that life's simple pleasures are all that count

Lastly, I very quickly learned that this was not going to be a career choice

As an aside, I have a 'T-shirt' that reads 'University of Da Nang Athletics.

I get comments and questions... "Did you go there?"

I answer: "Yep, I earned a Masters."

I learned a lot.

Tom Fenerty

Fox, 2/9

Associate Member USMC VTA

EDITOR'S COMMENT: *We have close to 500 members of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. Each and every one of you have a story... or to put it even more simply, you have "words"... about what you learned in Vietnam It could be a lesson about yourself, about your Marine Corps or about your country... The nagging question remains: Where are your stories???*

Book Review



JUST FINISHED READING “HELL IS UPON US” BY VICTOR BROOKS. IT IS A FAIRLY RECENTLY PUBLISHED (IN 2005) HISTORY BOOK OF THE US INVASION OF THE MARIANAS ISLANDS, OR AS THE AUTHOR CALLS IT, “THE D-DAY IN THE PACIFIC.” FOR THOSE WHO ARE NOT STUDENTS OF MILITARY HISTORY THE MARIANAS ISLANDS ARE MADE UP OF TINIAN, SAIPAN AND GUAM. As Marine veterans we certainly know these names. What I did not know before was that D-Day in the Pacific occurred within a week of D-Day on the shores of Europe and that the amount of ships and airplanes surpassed that which supported the European invasion. I am writing this review of the very well researched and well-written book to illustrate some of the WW II Marine tank tactics and how the author writes about them.

The author indicates that the period of time between Pearl Harbor and the return of Douglas MacArthur and the Japanese surrender on the USS Missouri has been dreadfully neglected in films, documentaries and books. “Yet it was during this period that the fate of Japan was sealed: The tide of war was swung irrevocably in favor of the United States.”

“The invasion of Saipan was expected to allow the Marine Corps to deploy the first truly major tank formations of the Pacific War. Each tank battalion assigned to (Operation) Forager was equipped with forty-six Sherman’s; these were supported by a company of light reconnaissance tanks and a platoon of specially equipped flame tanks mounting the Canadian Ronson flame gun that could spew a stream of fire up to 80 yards.”

I noted that the Marines called flame-thrower tanks, “Satan tanks.”

“As Sherman’s and Satan flame tanks sprayed shells and flame at the defenders crouching in the underbrush above, the Imperial troops whittled down the attackers at an alarming rate.”

“Lieutenant William McMillan, commander of a tank platoon screening the 2nd Division, was advancing

southward when a concealed Japanese machine gun suddenly came to life: ‘I got on the ground, and I was on the telephone. There was a burst from a Nambu machine gun. There was an infantry kid right beside me. He got it right across the waist. They got me across the legs. I couldn’t walk...We got the two Japs that had the machine gun. Before I gave up, we killed them. I hopped around there, and they evacuated me.’”

“Wounded for the third time in the campaign, Lt McMillan was on his way back to the United States when his companions continued their careful advance southward. Much like the bush and jungle of another war a generation later (Vietnam), seemingly innocuous stretches of cane fields and farmhouses could turn into places of deadly peril.”

“...as eighty-six Thunderbolts shot out from Aslito Airfield on Saipan, roared over the American lines and hurled rockets, bombs and (a new invention in the war) napalm on target that would not have looked out of place in Vietnam two decades later.”

“Then just as the American outposts were about to be overrun, five Sherman’s that had been parked farther down

Harmon Road for just such an eventuality rumbled forward and used their heavier guns to turn four enemy vehicles (tanks) into fiery infernos while the lone bazooka crew accounted for two more.”

Toward the end of the book the author writes about the Japanese banzai attacks: “Just as the Viet Cong threw away the inherent advantage of guerilla war in the disastrous frontal assault that was the Tet offensive, the Japanese troops in the Marianas seemed to stage a succession of mini-Tets that invariably accelerated the progress of American advances.”

After the Marianas Islands were captured (Guam was actually recaptured since it had been an American territory prior to WW II) and the brand new B-29 Super Fortress heavy bomber began unleashing its aerial Armageddon upon the Japanese Empire, the man who replaced Tojo, Admiral Miwa, told the Emperor, “Hell is upon us.” And you know what? He was correct!

John Wear
New Hope, PA
Phone: 215-794-9052

Off with the old . . .



VISION RINGS & C-4

By Steve Patton

ONE OF MY FIRST JOBS IN DA NANG WAS HELPING TO CONVERT ALL OF OUR GUN TANKS TO THE A3 VARIANT WHICH INCLUDED INSTALLING VISION RINGS. THESE WERE CAST STEEL SECTIONS THAT HELD 15 BULLETPROOF WINDOWS. They allowed the tank commander to have a 360° view of his surroundings. The vision-ring came on a pallet without the glass windows installed. I would get a boom truck and operator from the motor pool and hope that the operator was experienced.

I would remove the Tank Commanders cupola and disconnect all of the wiring. The tank commander cupola was pulled off of the turret and set aside. Then we installed the vision ring. I would direct it to be put in place and then I'd bolted it to the tank. We would then pick up and replace the tank commander cupola. Replacing the wires and installing the windows came next. I would coat each window with a silicone sealer and push them in place. With a great deal of pressure, I could replace any of these windows that would get shot out or hit by mortars. I never had one hit by an RPG rocket.

A much easier refit was adding the Xenon-searchlight. Every time a tank

came in for maintenance or repairs, they would get a vision -ring and a Xenon searchlight. By the time I left Vietnam all of the tanks in the battalion were all refitted.

One day I was doing a repair job on a tank with a blown hydraulic fuse. A hydraulic fuse is just a thin disk about the size of a nickel that maintains hydraulic fluid pressure for the turret and gun movements. This fuse is located at the foot of the gunner. You just disconnect the line and remove the old fuse...the broken fuse is usually in pieces...and you install the new one. Some tank crewmen would use a piece of C- rats can if they didn't have a fuse. That was a Big No - No!!! The can is

too thick and it would build up too much pressure. If the line then breaks, the fluid would have enough pressure to cut to the bone...just like a knife.

Late one afternoon a tank mechanic (2141), ask if I could help him move a shot up tank turret so he could get the engine pulled out. As I understood it an RPG had set off all of the ammo inside of the tank, killing the entire crew and destroying everything inside the turret. The hydraulic drive motor sits on the turret ring below the tank commander's hatch and it is about the size of a small beer keg. The 2141 staff sergeant named Kniffen, from Texas, suggested that if we use a little C-4 placed behind and below the drive motor that it might work. We took a bar of C-4 and broke it into four pieces. It was connected by an instantaneous fuse and blasting four caps then we then ran about 30 seconds of slow fuse out the tank commander's hatch. The tank was backed up to the fence that divided the tank park and an Army "duster" unit that was next door. We made sure everyone was clear and yelled, "Fire in the hole!" Boy! Did that C-4 get the job done! We even had a mushroom cloud come out of the turret and the tank was actually lifted off the ground! The Army unit next door sounded its "Incoming" alarm and all the doggies went for cover! After the dust had settled, I looked inside the tank turret. The drive motor was nowhere to be found! I got down from the tank and from the ground I took one finger and pushed on the flash suppressor of the gun...the turret swung around easily giving access to the engine bay.

We also used a thumb-sized ball of C-4 on stubborn torsion bars and sometimes with very dangerous results. Once a 90 pound piece of torsion bar piece was shot out like a rocket and it went through my supply tent, landing in the ravine behind the tank park! ▲

On with the new



C-RATIONS

This is the official Quartermaster's description of C-Rations used in Vietnam

The Meal, Combat, Individual, is designed for issue as the tactical situation dictates, either in individual units as a meal or in multiples of three as a complete ration. Its characteristics emphasize utility, flexibility of use, and more variety of food components than were included in the Ration, Combat, Individual (C Ration) which it replaces. Twelve different menus are included in the specification.

Each menu contains: one canned meat item; one canned fruit, bread or dessert item;

one B unit; an accessory packet containing cigarettes, matches, chewing gum, toilet paper, coffee, cream, sugar, and salt; and a spoon. Four can openers are provided in each case of 12 meals. Although the meat item can be eaten cold, it is more palatable when heated.

Each complete meal contains approximately 1200 calories. The daily ration of 3 meals provides approximately 3600 calories.



B-2 UNITS

Meat Choices (in larger cans):
 Beans and Wieners
 Spaghetti and Meatballs
 Beefsteak, Potatoes and Gravy
 Ham and Lima Beans
 Meatballs and Beans
 Crackers (4)
 Cheese Spread, Processed
 Caraway
 Pimento
 Fruit Cake
 Pecan Roll
 Pound Cake
 Accessory Pack*

B-3 UNITS

Meat Choices (in small cans):
 Boned Chicken
 Chicken and Noodles
 Meat Loaf
 Spiced Beef
 Bread, White
 Cookies (4)
 Cocoa Beverage Powder
 Jam
 Apple
 Berry
 Grape
 Mixed Fruit
 Strawberry
 Accessory Pack*

*ACCESSORY PACK

Spoon, Plastic
 Salt
 Pepper
 Coffee, Instant
 Sugar
 Creamer, Non-dairy
 Gum, 2 Chiclets
 Cigarettes, 4 smokes/pack
 Winston
 Marlboro
 Salem
 Pall Mall
 Camel
 Chesterfield
 Kent
 Lucky Strike
 Kool
 Matches, Moisture Resistant, Toilet Paper

Link to original article:
<http://gruntfixer.homestead.com/files/crats.html>



A 2141 Extraordinaire



was transferred to 3rd Tank Battalion on Okinawa, and in the spring of 1965 he went into Vietnam and served in the areas of Danang, Hue, and Chu Lai until rotating home in February 1966.

From March 1966 until June 1968, he served as a member of the Inspector-Instructor staff of the 4th Armored Amphibian Company, FMF, USMCR, Treasure Island, San Francisco. In addition to maintaining amtracs, he was motor transport and engineer equipment chief. He returned to Vietnam from July 1968 until August of 1969, again to 3rd Tank Battalion. He was the maintenance chief of "B" Company, located near

Harold was born in Pawnee City, Nebraska on May 8, 1941. A hundred years too late to walk the Rockies with Jed Smith and Jim Bridger, he hunted game around his farm home and trapped beaver in the nearby creeks. At eight years old he was driving a tractor and helping out with the farm chores. At sixteen he left school and went to work in masonry, mechanical trades, and also helped his folks with the farming. His desire for adventure brought him to San Diego, California and the United States Marine Corps in September 1959.

Harold was an infantry Marine following boot camp. He served with the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines and 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines on Okinawa until May 1962. During that time he received specialized training in Demolitions and Land Mine Warfare School and NCO Leadership School. He also obtained his high school GED. He then joined 1st Tank Battalion and attended Tracked Vehicle Repairman School, both basic and advanced courses, graduating first in each course. In December of 1964 he



the DMZ. He was responsible for the maintenance and recovery of tanks and other wheeled vehicles. For exemplary service during this period he received the Navy Achievement Medal, with Combat "V". He was also awarded his second Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry with

Bronze Star, the Purple Heart, and the Navy Cross for his heroic actions on 24 March 1969.

In September of 1969 Harold joined the Marine Corps Reserve on Treasure Island. The 4th Armored Amphibian Company was soon disbanded. The unit was redesignated Headquarters Company, 3rd Field Artillery Group. He was the Group Motor Transport Chief, coordinating and supervising motor transport activities of the unit located at various sites throughout the country.

Harold later transferred to the 23rd Marine Regiment on Alameda and served as Regimental Motor Transport Chief. After serving in this capacity for three years, he transferred again to Treasure Island. The 3rd Field Artillery Group had been redesignated the 1st Battalion, 14th Marines. He was the Battalion Motor Transport Chief with duties similar to previous assignments. During the last four years of Harold's reserve duty he served as Battalion Sergeant Major. His duties as Sergeant Major were to continually monitor and report to the commanding officer the overall state of well being of the battalion with respect to troop needs, morale, training, and leadership. In March of 1986, Harold retired from the Marine Corps Reserve.

Harold's civilian employment was with the City of Oakland's (California) Equipment Division from February 1970 through March 2000. He began his employment at the City as a heavy equipment mechanic and moved up through supervisory positions to become Equipment Superintendent over the whole shop until his retirement.

Harold met his wife, Laura, in Southern California and they married in 1962. Together, they raised three sons who all completed their educations in the Bay Area of California. ▲

Three Navy Crosses to Tank Mechanics

The highest award given within any tank battalion during the Vietnam war

Harold A. Riensche

Home of record: Beatrice, Nebraska



Awards and Citations

Navy Cross

Awarded for actions during the Vietnam War
The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Staff Sergeant Harold A. Riensche (MCSN: 1880764), United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as Maintenance Chief with Company B, Third Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in the Republic of Vietnam on 24 March 1969. Staff Sergeant Riensche and his four-man crew were embarked aboard an M51 Tank Retriever assigned the recovery of a disabled tank located near Dong Ha, when their vehicle detonated a mine and sustained extensive damage. While repairing the retriever, the Marines came under a heavy volume of automatic weapons fire from a North Vietnamese Army platoon occupying well-concealed emplacements in the tall elephant grass nearby. In the initial burst of fire which came from all sides, two of Staff Sergeant Riensche's crew were killed and two wounded, leaving him the sole defender of the retriever. Although in a dangerously exposed position, he commenced returning fire with a mounted .50 caliber machine gun. When a hostile round rendered the weapon

inoperable, he moved across the top of the tracked vehicle to an M-60 machine gun, removed it from its mount and, standing in full view of the enemy, continued firing at the advancing North Vietnamese. When the barrel vibrated loose and fell from his weapon, Staff Sergeant Riensche caught the red hot cylinder in mid air and, while reinserting it, sustained serious burns to his hands. Ignoring his painful injury, he resolutely resumed firing all around his vehicle until the machine gun malfunctioned. While attempting to correct the difficulty, he observed a hostile soldier who had maneuvered to a point next to the recovery vehicle and quickly killed the man with his .45 caliber pistol. Unable to pinpoint the location of each North Vietnamese soldier in the gathering darkness, he then commenced throwing hand grenades in all directions, forcing the enemy to withdraw. Following their retreat with grenade launcher fire, Staff Sergeant Riensche, although still a very vulnerable target and vastly outnumbered, tenaciously manned his hazardous position and continued firing on possible hostile emplacements until a friendly tank arrived to render assistance. His heroic and decisive action inspired all who observed him and saved the lives of two fellow Marines. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty in the face of grave personal danger, Staff Sergeant Riensche upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service.

General Orders: Authority: Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals

Action Date: 24-Mar-69

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Staff Sergeant

Company: Company B

Battalion: 3rd Tank Battalion

Division: 3rd Marine Division (Rein.) FMF

Charles D. Thatcher

Home of record: Chicago, Illinois



Awards and Citations

Navy Cross

Awarded for actions during the Vietnam War
The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Lance Corporal Charles D. Thatcher (MCSN: 2178769), United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism as a Tank Commander with Company A, Third Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 8 May 1967. While operating in support of the First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Lance Corporal Thatcher's tank was hit and heavily damaged by enemy fire during a savage mortar and infantry attack on the battalion's positions at Gio Linh by a 400-man North Vietnamese Army force. During the initial enemy antitank rocket assault, two of his crewmen were killed and one wounded. Although painfully wounded in the back and neck, he courageously reentered the burning tank to remove the dead and wounded and administered first aid to the surviving crewman. For one hour, while awaiting reinforcements, he

cared for his wounded companion while fighting off repeated enemy assaults. When he was assured that his comrade had been moved to a secure area, he resolutely returned to his tank and boldly engaged the North Vietnamese alone with his .30-caliber machine gun, inflicting heavy casualties on the enemy. Having expended his machine gun ammunition, he left his disabled tank, retrieved a rifle from a dead infantryman, and continued to deliver a heavy volume of accurate fire on the enemy. Realizing that the infantrymen were dangerously low on small-arms ammunition, he completely disregarded his own safety to carry re-supplies to their fighting holes while under intense hostile fire. With three tanks disabled by the enemy fire, Lance Corporal Thatcher reacted instantly when he observed a North Vietnamese soldier about to fire a rocket at one of the operative tanks. Displaying bold initiative, he killed the enemy as he rushed the tank with his rocket launcher. Throughout the vicious fire fight, he repeatedly risked his own life to assist his wounded companions and provide continuous covering fire. His daring and heroic actions were instrumental in repulsing the North Vietnamese attack. Lance Corporal Thatcher's uncommon courage, inspiring leadership, and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of enemy fire reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

General Orders: Authority: Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals

Action Date: 8-May-67

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Lance Corporal

Company: Company A

Battalion: 3rd Tank Battalion

Division: 3rd Marine Division (Rein.) FMF

Editors Note: I called Charles one afternoon a few months ago and asked him if I could call him back in the next day or two so that we could get some background on his current life for this issue of the Sponson Box. He agreed...but unfortunately too many other projects got in the way and time slipped by without me calling back. I humbly ask for his forgiveness for not following up on this project.

David J. Danner

Home of record: Sioux City, Iowa



Awards and Citations

Navy Cross

Awarded for actions during the Vietnam War
The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Sergeant David J. Danner (MCSN: 2113629), United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism as a Tank Maintenance Man and Crewman with Company A, Third Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 8 May 1967. While operating in support of the First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Sergeant Danner's tank was hit and heavily damaged by enemy fire during a savage mortar and infantry attack on the battalion's positions at Gio Linh by a 400-man North Vietnamese Army force. Although wounded himself, Sergeant Danner helped his dazed and wounded fellow crewmen from the wreckage to the medical aid station. Realizing that enemy soldiers were in the Command Post area, having penetrated the defensive perimeter during their initial assault, he refused first aid and resolutely returned to his disabled tank to retrieve a .30-caliber machine gun. Mounting the weapon on the ground, he commenced delivering a heavy volume of fire on the attackers. With complete disregard for his own safety, he repeatedly left his position to deliver badly needed ammunition to the infantrymen in the fighting holes and to assist in moving casualties to safer positions. On one occasion, observing a seriously wounded Marine in need of immediate medical treatment, Sergeant Danner carried the man through intense enemy fire to the Corpsman's bunker where he could receive life-saving first aid, which prevented him from bleeding to death. Demonstrating uncommon courage and tenacity, he then returned to his machine gun where he continued to provide covering fire for his comrades, moving his weapon to alternate positions in order to deliver maximum fire on the enemy. Although in extreme pain from fragment wounds in his arms and back and suffering severe burns and a loss of hearing as a result of an explosion, he selflessly disregarded his own welfare throughout the vicious fire fight in order to assist his comrades in repulsing the North Vietnamese attack. By his

exceptional professional skill and bold initiative, he personally killed fifteen enemy soldiers and undoubtedly wounded many more. Sergeant Danner's daring and heroic actions at great personal risk, inspiring leadership, and unwavering devotion to duty reflected great credit upon himself and were in keeping with the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

General Orders: Authority: Navy Department Board of Decorations and Medals

Action Date: 8-May-67

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Sergeant

Company: Company A

Battalion: 3rd Tank Battalion

Division: 3rd Marine Division (Rein.) FMF

From David:

You could say my tour as a US Marine started when I was in the 4th grade. There was a small branch library near my school on the west side of Sioux City, Iowa, and it was in that library that I had been checking out all sorts of books during that year. As luck would have it, I checked out a book on Medal of Honor winners from World War II while the "Victory at Sea" series was running on television. It was from this book that I read about John Basilone who was awarded a Medal of Honor with 7th Marines on an island called Guadalcanal. My having been born on the West Coast during the war, all of this stuck with me. When I got my induction notice in the fall of 1964, there was just no way that I was going into the Army. The Marine recruiter then sealed the deal and signed me to a three year enlistment. I rotated into Vietnam with BLT 3/3 and a platoon of tanks from C Co, Third Tanks. After floating around in the South China Sea for a month, we landed at Dong Ha in October 1966. I was then assigned to A Co. as a 2141 and relocated to Camp Carroll. A year later, I got back stateside at the end of October 1967 and was discharged the following January at Camp Pendleton. My stint with the FMF was everything I expected and I still feel I owe a lot to those who fought World War II, my father included. I have been in Iowa City ever since where I finished school and finally found a job with The City in 1979. I drive a transit bus for them and handle well over 100 people a day, from all over the world, within Iowa City. If I learned anything at all from Vietnam, it is that politics changes almost everything that you would expect from life. I feel fortunate to have found a steady job. I was married and divorced and have a grown daughter. I would not trade my experience in the Marine Corps for anything. They are not kidding anyone, they are the finest.

Semper Fi

Dave Danner

MOS 2141

Iowa City, Iowa

Here is a note from a Vietnam Marine grunt

By Brian Gage,
Mike Co, 3/7

About 15 years ago I was on the Mike 3/7 website. I was reading all the e-mails and messages that people were asking about information or contacts who knew their KIA father, husband, brother, etc. Well, I read a message from the sister of a Marine who had been KIA about two months after I rotated back to The World. I had been in 3rd platoon and her brother had been in 2nd platoon. I decided to answer her 6-year-old e-mail address...not expecting it to be active, but I felt that I owed the Marine to try. As far as I knew he and I had never met. Low and behold, I get a response from her. This amounted to a similar relationship that you currently enjoy. Then it just stopped. It turned out that the time she expended on her deceased brother and communication

with Mike Marines was causing problems with her family. Well, I relished the relationship we had for that time. Then last year the association sent out an e-mail from a purported 2nd Platoon Mike platoon sergeant! I noted that he and I had overlapping tour dates so I started a communication with him about our service. He had recently discovered one of his platoon's Marines had died from devastating wounds, while all these years he had thought this Marine had survived. As it turns out, this sergeant had sent the WIA Marine to another platoon that day to help with squad leader duties. So his order to the WIA Marine contributed greatly to his guilt feelings. With the recent past knowledge, I determined his was not a BS scam of some sort and I told

him that the sister of the KIA Marine had been struggling for years to get more info about her brother's death. I also explained to him that I would contact her to determine if she wanted to get in touch with the platoon sergeant. She immediately responded that it was very important to her to follow up with the contact. She thanked me and thanked me. So, I gave her his e-mail and she contacted him. They both carried on an intense email correspondence for a few months and then it just ended. Both of them have been very grateful for my help. What a rush I got from being able to help them! Such a serendipitous type of thing to happen to the three of us! This was so many years after the action. Neither one wishes to talk about it since it is far too personal. I do believe it brought closure to this (then) little girl, and I also believe that the platoon sergeant got some release from his guilt.

conversations

TODD PHILLIPS WROTE: Hey John, I must be getting a little mellow in my old age there were a couple articles in the Sponson Box that brought a tear to my eyes, I especially liked the story "Where are my Marines?" about Ruthie. And the info on The Wall had a few things that I hadn't heard before, the Marines from Morenci and the childhood friends who were from-Beallsville Ohio, which is very close to where I'm from. My father was in the Army in WWII. He went to the Philippines with Mac. He twice brought home a Silver Star out of that one. He was on ship getting ready to invade mainland Japan when they pulled them back out to drop the bomb. He was a good man, the kindest, gentlest most honest man I ever knew. I'm not sure what the hell happened to me!!! When my father got older, he used to repeat things a lot. I can't tell you how many times he told me about the little Philippine kids not having any cloths. He said that the soldiers use to take sand bags, cut the bottom corners out of them and make shorts for the kids. Now I don't know for sure how they felt about it but if

I remember right the sand bags were made of burlap so can you imagine jungle heat and your nut's in burlap!!!

JOHN'S REPLY: Speaking of jungle heat and nuts...I don't know about you guys but we never wore skivvies or sox because the heat and humidity would cause us to get jungle rot. It was not an expression back then but we went "Rambo" for my entire tour. It was hell getting used to "whitey tighties" after I came home!!!

TODD'S REPLY: Talk about jungle rot! "Pipestone Canyon" was a very long operation. We were out in June, July and August. It sure was a long time without a shower. Talk about a bunch of stinking Marines! As luck would have it, it started raining one afternoon so we all got limp dick naked on the tank's armor plat and began to later up with a bar of soap. As soon as we got all soaped up it quit raining and wouldn't you know it? The soap dried on us!!!! Talk about itchy nuts! At least we smelled better in the close quarters of the tank. Come to think of it maybe "limp dick naked" wasn't such a good choice of words. What the hell? At 18 years old, the

From Todd Phillips

crack of dawn or a puff of wind could have changed things!!!

TODD'S SECOND THOUGHT: You know at our age, we tell one story and it reminds you of another, well after talking about the itchy nuts, it reminded me of a time when we had all three of our tanks on a perimeter, there was this 1000lb bomb crater that the crew from Sgt. Coin's tank, Ronny Lyons and I went swimming in. We started taking sniper fire since Coin's tank was closer to us, they manned it. Ronny and I just dove under the tank. The crew started it up as Ronny and I looked at each other and hoped that they were just keeping the batteries charged up while turning on the radios. Nope! You guessed it! They drove off, leaving Ronny and me bare ass naked out in the middle of nowhere and running for our own tank. Now don't you know that we had a serious conversation when that little fracas was over?

Todd Phillips
Bellaire, OH
Phone: 740-296-8184



Tiger Doctor

By Steve Patton

My Introduction to Vietnam

I arrived in country in January of 1967 aboard the World War II troopship, the USS General Walker. When we landed at Da Nang, it was like an old movie. With all my gear I joined 2,500 other Marines going over the side of the ship on rope ladders into landing craft and making a beach assault at a Da Nang schoolyard. With sea bag, duce-gear, flak jacket, helmet, rifle and of course no ammo, we arrived on the beach.

My orders were to proceed to a palm tree with the number 12 on it. Now picture a large treed area with 2,499 Marines

About that time, I was thinking of finding a chow hall when a small group in a rust colored Jeep came by and asked where I was going. I pointed to the number on the tree and in unison, they said, "Tanks." So I got in this Jeep with three young Marines who were wearing the same rust colored uniforms. My Marine Corps green gear looked too good as we headed for the tank park on a hill called "55."

When the Jeep arrived, Two Marines in those funny, rust colored uniforms greeted me and the big question was: What was

my MOS? When I told them, "2171 Optics," it was as though I was a visiting officer. And by the way, during our trip to Hill 55, my bright green uniform had mysteriously changed to that rust color like the rest of the troops.

A larger-than-life corporal took me in tow. His name was "Ollie" Olson. He'd proceed to explain the large shortage of optics and 2151 mechanics in Vietnam. To care for the fifty-plus M-48 tanks in a perfect world, a crew of twenty or so, plus staff and officers, were needed to do the job. In 3rd Tank Battalion there were two peons and a mustang warrant officer named WO Herring. The two men were composed of a short-timer who was leaving in two days and Ollie, who had less than two weeks in-country... and now me.

Ollie grabbed some of my gear and we headed in to camp. We stopped by his maintenance shack (office) and he grabbed a

big manual. Then we dropped my gear in a hardback tent and had a late lunch at the mess hall. For the next couple hours, I was introduced to the workings of the hydraulics and electronics of the M-48 Patton tank. At this time, a new "tiger doctor" was born. Ollie named me "The Little General."

Taking care of business

One of the most important lessons I learned from an old timer



standing around the trees and me, by myself, watching everyone being loaded up on trucks and all of us going off in all directions. Standing tall and proud, I waited. After an hour, I sat down and leaned back against my tree. I thought that after 23 days at sea and a beach landing, I "occupied" my tree in the Da Nang schoolyard, not knowing what type of unit I would be going to and not knowing that my stay in Vietnam would be composed of mostly working by myself.

was when you hear incoming rockets or mortars, they are already past you. He said, "You will never hear the one that hits you. So why worry? You just needed to get as close to Mother Earth as you can, then carry on Marine."

My routine of sorts was to visit as many tank companies a week as possible, do an inspection of the systems and record the condition of each tank. After I got to 3rd Tank Battalion (forward) at the Dong Ha Combat Base, I made a 4/8 billboard that showed every tank, its location and its status. After each day I would update the board myself or by calling the maintenance chief. Then I could order parts and many times go get them.

Dong Ha Tank Park

In the thick of the action after Tet, I took a trip by LCT from Dong Ha to Da Nang to recycle a couple of tanks. I went to the Dong Ha boat ramp (which was not much of a harbor). The two tank retrievers had brought down the deadlined tanks and the LCT backed up to the muddy landing with his boarding ramp down. The LST revved its engines high to keep in position as the retriever crew with their Confederate flag flying, pushed the first tank onboard. The operation went quite well. Then the number two tank started to get pushed on board the LCT behind number one. The boat crew had not had time to winch the first tank out of the way and even though we all speak English, the retriever crew did not understand the boat crew yelling for them too wait.

The retriever was at full power pushing number two tank against number one and sliding both on deck. All was going well when the LCT lost power and in a flash the LCT was pushed out in the channel. The retriever, unable to stop and still hooked to number two tank, dropped unceremoniously into the river. Being still hooked by the push bar, it languished for a second and then dropped down into ten feet of water. All that was showing above the water line was the antenna and that Confederate flag.

One by one, the crew popped up from the muddy water, spitting and cussing. The LCT crew ran to secure the tanks and to keep them on deck. Once all was ok, the comedy of it brought raucous laughter from all. The retriever crew climbed up on to the bank and they were joined by a few rats that had made the retriever in their home. My sides hurt from all that laughing. With the help of six-by trucks, tow trucks, and a bunch of cables,

the retriever was pulled up the bank and onto the loading ramp area. Water poured out of every hole and the engine was sending up a plume of steam. The retriever door handle was pulled and a gush of water helped drain the crew compartment. Along with the water, several large carp-like fish that had been sucked in also shot out, and many of the local civilians dove in to the muddy mess trying to catch the fish.

I often wondered if someone of the 40 or 50 people who had gathered to gawk at the spectacle had ever got pictures. The LST returned to the beach and a few other busted trucks and some supplies were loaded up. Then I got on board for the ride to Da Nang. I was standing on the port side as we headed down the river headed toward the ocean when a crewman called to me to come in and have lunch. He told me that snipers shot at the boats as they went up and down the river so I should stay inside.

I love the Marine Corps, don't get me wrong. But when I entered the boat's galley, I was weak in the knees. Baskets of fresh fruit were lying on the tables and everything was spotless. Such quality I hadn't seen since my grocery store produce management days back in the US of A. As I sat down, I was asked if I wanted a steak. And what a steak it was! With all the trimmings!

After months of C-rations and maybe a trip to the mess hall once a week, I was wondering if I had joined the right branch of the service. After lunch, I crawled into a small bunk along the passageway and laid my head on my pack. I was out like a light. I stayed asleep until we arrived in Da Nang Harbor. I soon embarked the boat and turned in my paperwork when I found out that my new tanks would be loaded the next afternoon. For the over night I went to the in-country R&R center and spent the evening at the outdoor theater, drinking warm San Miguel beer in a tropical down pour. The movie was "Cool Hand Luke." The next afternoon, I boarded the LCT with two brand-new tanks and spent a beautiful night sailing to Dong Ha.

This was just a couple days as a "tiger doctor" in Vietnam.

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No reprints of this story is permitted without the consent of Steve Patton.

JUST A GRUNT

This could be the title. Not sure though because not everyone may understand exactly what it means. After all, more than 3 million served and another half as many claim they did, wish they did or "almost" did.

It's been said that the ratio of support personnel to those actually doing the fighting is somewhere around 85 to 15%. That said; the math looks like 450,000 young men actually had "a front row seat." I hate using statistics, but spread over the years '65 to '73 the count is about 56,000 per year. My tour and the following year had the unique distinction of having even higher numbers of "Front Row Seats." They say that timing is everything!

This story is not intended to diminish the service of support troops. They were absolutely vital to the effort and always will be. Besides, not many Marines got to choose what (or where) their job would be; the job was more or less assigned. I had a background in construction but

somehow my highest test scores were for the infantry. This was a surprise to me because I missed that class in high school. I guess I was predisposed to kill (or be killed?). Who knew?

For those who served in a "leg" or grunt outfit, the front row has a special meaning. There's just a difference between those who were mostly outside the wire and those who were not. There were no cots, no tents or bunkers, no clean sheets, no mosquito nets, no hot food or ice (Did someone say "ice"?). There weren't electricity or chow halls in our little slice of the war. We had what we carried on our backs or we did without. We sloshed through waste deep rice paddies, we walked into ambushes and set off IEDs (we called them "booby traps" back in the day). We endured mortars, artillery, snipers and short rounds; drank rice paddy water, got dysentery, climbed hill after hill, dealt with the bugs and leeches, bathed in bomb craters, ate cold

C-rats, drank warm beer, and wore the same set of utilities until they seemed to flake away. We walked in the rain, slept in the rain, ate in the rain, fought in the rain, and watched some die in the rain. We were certainly not on the Bob Hope USO Show itinerary. We traveled in a zone where mental strength trumped physical fatigue every day. Yeah, it was different, real different. I hear tell that there's now a ribbon for that 03xx MOS. Well, well.

Funny though, when asked, I reply..... "Yeah, I was there. I was just a..... grunt."

Editor's note: We are very thankful that Tom has taken the time to write several personal accounts from his Vietnam experiences that have graced the pages of our publication. We are also proud of his membership in the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

By Tom Fenerty
Foxtrot Company, 2/9
Vietnam '68 - '69

Hearts and Minds

(Continued from page 16)

defeated an enemy that was considered invincible.

As a witness to war I can attest that being shot at by a rifle, mortar, artillery piece, RPG or cannon does something to an individual's view of the enemy (and those who offer support). The emotions involved have a wide range: fear, anger, hatred, and sorrow quickly come to mind. Some men, those who have survived long enough, reach a point of numbness that is difficult to explain. Revenge is a trigger pull away some days and it takes strength and leadership to prevent atrocities from being the rule and not the exception.

I recall a company size patrol in

1968 when, as radioman for the platoon commander, I witnessed the eventual capture of an enemy soldier who had been following our movements. He initially sprung up and ran when spotted, but he was shot and wounded and crawled into a hole. It didn't take long to find him and when the Lieutenant and I came upon the half dozen troops surrounding the gook the conversation went like this-

"Let's kill the mother fucker!"

"Shoot him!"

"Waste the son of a bitch!"

Weapons were only a meter from his head and the tension was extreme. I can still see his terror-filled face.

Lieutenant Knight immediately took control and said, "We will not kill this man, he's worth more alive than dead. Call a corpsman and set up a medevac."

The Lt. was right on more than one count. We patched him up and choppered him out.

Word came back that he provided intelligence that would give us an edge (and save lives) in the coming week. Lt. Knight also prevented his men from the nightmares that the murder would have caused.

Suppose we had shot the prisoner on

(Continued on page 46)

Comments from our 2141s:

Does anyone remember that the M51 Tank Retrievers were gasoline powered?

I believe A Company, 3rd Tanks had two M51 Tank retrievers destroyed, they were Iron Mike and the Jolly Green Giant.

Bill "JJ" Carroll
Sgt Major, USMC (ret)
2141 / 1811

I only got to work on a tank once or twice during my entire time in Nam mostly because the lifers with more experience did the maintenance. Most of us new Marines spent our time wandering around in the bushes on day or night patrols and ambushes.

Jerry Sezar
2141 and grunt

GRUNT for a day

By Ric Langley

THE MOVE BACK TO CAM LO CAME NONE TO SOON FOR 1ST PLT. OR THE BRASS AT ALPHA COMPANY. WE HAD had enough of the rear area life and they had had enough of us. We moved to a small area east of the outpost at Cam Lo where they had moved some artillery to help support the troops operating in the vicinity of the Rock Pile. Even with the move east the artillery was stretched to its limit to reach the outlying areas around the Rock Pile. We arrived at the compound to find ramps bulldozed out of the ground for us to park our tanks in, giving the tanks enough elevation to be used as indirect fire platforms. With the ramps our range was a little greater than artillery pieces they had in the compound at the time. The good thing was once we set the tanks up we would not be moving them unless absolutely necessary. The tanks were situated on the ramps and the guns were registered. We were instructed on how to carry out our fire missions and within a couple of hours we were ready to blast away. The convoy that we had come out with had included trucks with extra ammo

so we immediately unloaded the trucks and began breaking open 90MM rounds. We were instructed to have fifty rounds of H.E. (High Explosive) and ten rounds of Willy Peter (White Phosphorous) rounds ready to go at all times. Most fire missions would call for H.E., but on occasion they would ask for Willy Peter to mark a target for aircraft or to enable them to adjust the rounds on to the target.

Tank rounds came two in a box, each round weighing between thirty and forty-five pounds. The wooden boxes had to be broken open to remove the two cardboard tubes that contained the rounds. You then had to hump the round from the ammo dump to a small ditch that had been dug next to the tank. From the very start we figured out that this was not going to be a whole lot of fun. With our sixty rounds of ammo in the ditch we had a chance to explore our new home. It was a small perimeter only about one hundred yards across with a slight rise on the north east side.

The grunts had dug fighting holes and placed fence posts



with grating and sand bags on top to keep out the mortars. Each hole could accommodate two or three people comfortably. The artillery had set up their mess tent and also had tents to sleep in. They were even so gracious as to invite us to use their mess and sleeping facilities. We had hoped to find a shower but no such luck. We moved our gear into the tent the arty guys had assigned us and waited. Because we were unable to move the tanks it meant that we would not be standing any guard of any kind. Thoughts of sleeping all night ran through our heads, but guess what G.I., that is not going to happen. We learned quickly that a two-hour guard watch would have been a great improvement over humping ammo and fire missions all night long. Our first fire mission came late that afternoon. When called we scrambled out to the tank and took our positions. As driver I had no role in the actual firing of the gun, so I had to haul the ammo out of the ditch and up to the tank. Some times I could bribe a grunt with C-Rats or beer to give me a hand.

Siva got the azimuth and elevation numbers from artillery

fire control and relayed them to Sellers who put them on the gun. They both then verified the numbers, and when they were satisfied that everything was correct, Siva notified fire control that we were ready to fire. The order to fire was given and we fired three rounds of H.E. Immediately, a sudden order to cease-fire came over the radio from a panicked voice at fire control. The crews were ordered to stand down from the tanks but to not change the position of the guns. With no clue as to what was going on we did as ordered and dismounted the tanks. Within a short time several officers arrived at our position and wanted to check the azimuth and elevation numbers that had been put on the gun. Siva and Sellers complied with their request and showed them exactly what they had done when they had gotten the fire mission. Each tank that had been involved in the fire mission was checked and each crew questioned. The tank crews had no clue what was going on. Siva came over and enlightened us. Seems that the rounds we had just fired were way off target and had killed a grunt officer named Carroll. Later the fire base between Cam Lo and the Rock Pile would be named after him. After more question, one of the officers asked about our azimuth indicator. One of the crewmembers climbed into the tank and showed the officer where it was located and how it was used. I don't know if it is true, but we later heard that the fact that tanks use a three hundred and sixty degree azimuth indicator and artillery uses a one hundred and eighty degree indicator, which no one took into consideration, caused the dope they gave us to be way off. We were sorry that the officer had been killed but it was found to be no fault of ours.

The tank guns were registered again, this time taking in to consideration the azimuth indicator, and we were back on line. Fire missions would come in at all times of the day or night, usually about the time you were getting ready to catch a nap, eat, head for the latrine or when you were doing something else of great importance. They normally lasted about two hours from the time we would get the call to the time we finished restocking our ammo supply. We would get anywhere from three to ten missions in a day. On top of the missions called in by the grunts we would fire what were called H&I (harassment and interdiction) missions. These missions were fired into areas where it was thought the enemy might congregate like trail or stream crossings or areas where troops on the move might bed down for the night. We were given these missions with the times they were to be fired and the azimuth and elevation, and they usually consisted of about three to five rounds. If everybody was asleep, one crewmember could handle the H&I missions with no problem. We fell into a routine and as always made the best of the situation we were faced with.

One morning along toward the end of August we noticed the grunts on our side of the perimeter packing up their gear and moving out. When we questioned them they said they were being moved to the Rock Pile as reinforcements. We knew, from the number of fire missions we had been firing that the people at the Rock Pile had been catching hell. When asked who was going to take their place on the perimeter they had no answer. The thought never crossed our minds that they would leave the

whole northern side of the outpost unguarded. We got the word late that afternoon that the grunts that had left would not be returning and that no one would be sent to take their place. The decision was reached that we would man the two bunkers on our side of the perimeter and that artillery people would fill in the rest of the abandoned positions. Our crew and one other pulled the .30 cal. machine guns from our tanks, and with all the machine gun ammo we could find we moved into the empty bunkers. Sellers, Whittington and I manned one position, Siva and the guys from the other crew, about twenty yards to our right, in the other. We didn't really expect any trouble but we had learned, like good Boy Scouts, always be prepared.

As the sun dropped out of sight we settled in for the night. At least tonight there would be no fire missions for us. I was laying on some cardboard just to the right side of the bunker. It was around 1:00 AM when the pop of a trip flare on the other side of the perimeter brought me out of a sound sleep. This in itself is nothing to get excited about--someone got nervous, the wind set it off, or an animal got into the wire--it happens all the time. I had no more than laid my head back down when there was a second explosion; this time it was a mortar and it had landed right in the middle of the outpost. This time I was up and into the bunker no questions asked. The mortars rained in for what seemed like hours but in reality it was maybe fifteen minutes at the most. Along with the mortars, M-14 and AK-47 small arms fire broke out from the south side of the perimeter and steadily intensified as the mortar barrage continued. The mortars stopped as suddenly as they started and we then heard a new type of explosion. It was not a mortar or a hand grenade; it was much louder and was coming from just the other side of the hill from where we were located, not more than thirty yards away. The strange explosions continued along with the small arms fire. We started to see the glow of a fire coming from the area where we had heard the explosions. Our eyes were glued to the terrain in front of the bunker searching for anything that looked out of the ordinary. When one of us thought we saw something, Sellers would fire several bursts from the machine gun. Siva and the guys in the bunker next to us were doing the same thing, short bursts and only firing when we thought we had a target; that way, we thought the enemy could not pin point our position. Flares kept the area lit with their eerie glow and that funny noise they make as they descend on their little parachutes. Those flares always gave me the creeps. Maybe it was because they only used them when you were in deep trouble.

After some time we heard the rumble of a tank coming up the backside of the hill. The tank pulled up next to our bunker and the TC yelled down that the gooks had broken into the perimeter and were all over the place. They had used satchel charges on two tanks and a retriever, which had caught fire; this was the glow we had seen. He warned us to watch our backs, and if we saw anybody up moving around it was a gook. All the Marines had been told to stay in their positions. He asked if we needed anything, to which we replied we could use a spare barrel and any machine gun ammo he could part with. With the spare barrel and the extra ammo dropped down to us, the TC

wished us luck and moved the tank into the space between the two bunkers. It was decided that I would be the rear guard for our bunker, so I grabbed the M-14 I had brought with me to the bunker that afternoon and took up a position watching the area directly behind us.

The fighting would subside a little and then it would heat up again; it seemed to have its own ebb and flow. We were starting to see a lot more movement to our front and both our position and Siva's position were taking machine gun fire from a small farm house down and to our right about one hundred yards. They had located our bunkers and were trying to give cover fire to the troops to our front. We were able to get the attention of the tank that had stopped by and pointed out the machine gun fire coming from the farm house. WHAM! With one H.E. round we would not see another green tracer come out of that house ever again; in fact, we would never see that farm house again. The tank then neutral steered and headed off to help someone else.

I stayed glued to the back of the bunker watching the low scrub brush behind us for any sign of movement. The two machine guns were going almost non-stop, raking the hillside in front of the two bunkers. I spotted a figure moving, crouched over, up the slope directly behind the bunker to our right. I raised the M-14 and, just before I got it to my shoulder, Siva's M-1 carbine spit out a short burst and the figure dropped to the ground. I returned my attention to the area just behind us and became even more vigilant. Just as I had begun to think that the enemy had abandoned any idea of trying to overrun our positions, I saw a shadow appear about twenty yards to our rear heading straight for us. He too was moving crouched over and weaving back and forth. I knew from the shape of the pith helmet on his head that he was NVA. Shaking all over, I waited until he was only ten yards from us before I brought the rifle up, took aim and fired six rounds in rapid succession. The soldier disappeared and I waited. Had I killed him, had I missed and now he knew we were there, or had I just wounded him? I waited and watched. I knew any second he was going to jump up and the fight would be on.

The sky finally started to brighten, and with that the gun fire slacked; and as the sun broke over the horizon it quieted altogether. Forty five minutes passed and then the all clear signal was given. We were told to check around our positions for any dead or wounded and to search the bodies and turn in any papers, maps or weapons that we found. I moved to the spot where I thought I had shot the NVA soldier and found him laying face down, in a pool of blood, right where I had shot him. Three bullets had found their mark; one had hit him in the right hip, one in the lower chest and one right in the Adams apple. Rolling him over I could see he was about my age, a lieutenant, and all he carried was a .32 cal. revolver. I removed the pistol from the lanyard it was attached to and emptied the cylinder that contained four spent rounds and two unfired rounds, putting them in my pocket. I still have one of those rounds to this day. I also found a wallet that contained the same things that I carried in my wallet: a small amount of cash, an ID card, some business cards, and pictures of his family. After going through the wallet I felt a need to move on, so I walked up the hill to check in with

Siva. Siva was standing over the guy he had shot earlier, going through a large bag the person had been carrying when he was killed. There was nothing of importance in the bag, so I stuck the pistol and the wallet I had recovered along with a few items Siva had found in the bag and told Siva I would turn it in to who ever took care of these kinds of things. I looked down at the body lying on the ground and realized he could not have been more than twelve or thirteen years old. He had been carrying a wooden rifle painted black.

I made my way down to where Sellers and Whittington had been searching the area in front of our bunker. They had turned up two bodies, a mortar tub and ammo, a couple of rifles, and lots of blood trails. The bodies were marked so that someone could pick them up and haul them to a designated area for disposal. We hiked up to the bunker and were astonished to find that the whole top layer of sand bags and the fence posts holding them up had been all shot up. We had no idea that we were taking that kind of fire. We were extremely lucky no one was hurt. I collected all the gear that we had found and headed off to the headquarters tent. I dropped off the articles and reported how many dead we had counted and then slowly made my way back to our area.

On the way back, I passed by a cargo net they had lain on the ground. In the center of the net there was a large pile, eighty or ninety I was later told, of dead NVA. I made it back to our tent and broke open a C-rat meal, whipped up some coffee and had breakfast. It just goes to show you how callous you can become when put under certain circumstances. The chopper came and lifted the cargo net full of dead bodies out of the perimeter, where they took them I have no idea but you can bet it was not to a glorious funeral. It had been a terrifying night and not all that great of a morning, but it was back to the routine. For the first time I had come face to face with the enemy and had found that he was much like me. From then on during my time in Vietnam, I would never again go through the enemy's personal belongings.

We learned some new lessons that night at Cam Lo; for one, new respect for the grunts that man those bunkers day in and day out. We didn't want to ever have to do that again. We saw our first use of satchel charges; they had damaged two tanks and destroyed a tank retriever. Another first was the discovery that the NVA now had RPG rocket launchers; one was found on one of the dead NVA along with several anti-tank rounds. We had a hard time believing that this piece of bamboo with a handle could knock out a tank. Granted, this was an RPG-2, but it would not be long before the NVA would be sporting the RPG-7. The NVA had attacked our little compound because of our fire support of the troops out around the Rock Pile, hoping that we would pack up and head for Dong Ha -- ain't going to happen, Charley. We would play artillerymen for a while longer and then we would be off on another adventure somewhere along the DMZ.

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Marines ride USMC tanks near Con Thien

TIME IN THE BARREL AT CON THIEN

By: James P. Coan

Our abbreviated tracked vehicle officer's training course at Camp Pendleton ended in July, 1967. The first week of August, my classmates and I were on our way to Vietnam. No parades or patriotic speeches sent us off

to war. We quietly boarded a military passenger jet at LAX and off we went, blissfully unaware of what lay ahead.

Another military passenger jet flew us from Okinawa to Vietnam, arriving in country on 5 August, 1967. I'll never

forget that hellish first night in Da Nang, lying wide-eyed on a dusty cot in a large tent right next to an airfield runway. Sleep was impossible. Jet fighters screamed up and down those runways all night long. By morning, I would have volunteered

for anything to get me away from that hellhole. I didn't have to, as it turned out. My group found out where we were going later that morning. Half of the 18 tank officers in my group were assigned to 1stMARDIV Headquarters in Da Nang. I was in the other group of nine going north to 3rdMARDIV, where much combat action had occurred that summer near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing South and North Vietnam. The other officers in my group were Jim Georgaklis, Steve Fitzgerald, Tom Barry, Jim Block, Bill Brignon, Paul Marken, Roger Luli, and Jim McCollum. We had no way of knowing at the time, of course, but nearly everyone in that group going north would either be wounded or dead before we reached the end of our 13-month tour of duty.

Third Tanks was headquartered at Gia Le, just outside of Phu Bai. The battalion's three companies were heavily committed to providing direct support for Marine infantry units spread out just below the entire length of the DMZ from Khe Sanh to Gio Linh and south to Quang Tri.

On 3 September, an NVA artillery attack from the DMZ devastated the Marine base at Dong Ha. The towering pillar of smoke from burning fuel and exploding ammunition dumps was visible to us as far south as Phu Bai. I knew my turn was coming soon to head north. It finally arrived on 9 September. The colonel called me into his hootch and informed me I was going to take command of the 1st Platoon of Alpha Company located at Con Thien. Lieutenant Tom Barry, the platoon leader, had received two Purple Hearts in a week from shrapnel wounds and he was being pulled out of the field. It was my turn in the barrel (as in the expression, "Like shootin' fish in a barrel").

On 10 September, Tom and two of his tank crews met me at C-2, where we shook hands and I took over the platoon. The platoon sergeant was Gunny Hopkins, a Korean War veteran from West Virginia. He had only arrived at Con Thien three days earlier. The 1st Platoon had six "short-timers" due to rotate home that month: Guivara, Johnson, Aranda, Martin, Apodaca, and Augustine. All

of them had that "thousand-yard stare." They'd been through the bloody spring and summer battles fought in and near the DMZ during Operations Prairie, Hickory, Cimarron, and Buffalo. Most had at least one Purple Heart—some had two. I was acutely self-conscious of my clean, green gear and "new guy" status among these hard core combat vets. In due time, though, I would be just like them—pessimistic about surviving, only too aware of the odds of being killed or seriously wounded before my time in the barrel was over.

The Marine firebase at Con Thien was a key piece of real estate. Whoever held that high ground had an unobstructed view for a dozen miles in every direction—an artillery forward observer's paradise. Situated only two miles from the southern border of the DMZ, Con Thien had been designated as a key anchor of the much maligned Strong Point Obstacle System (also labeled McNamara's Wall by cynical news reporters) designed to prevent the NVA from infiltrating their troops across the DMZ into South Vietnam. The NVA had attempted on 8 May of that same year to overrun the base, but suffered the loss of two battalions of their best assault troops in the futile attempt. After the battle, Marine engineers buried over 200 NVA in a common grave outside the northern perimeter. On 2 July, B/1/9 was ambushed and nearly wiped out in a day-long battle within sight of Con Thien. Then, the end of August, increased enemy activity around Con Thien indicated a new fall offensive by the NVA.

The 3rd Bn., 9th Marines held Con Thien when I arrived. My first week on The Hill was spent learning how to survive on that "red-clay bulls eye" being shelled intermittently by mortars, rockets, and artillery secreted in caves within the DMZ. The worst days had us taking up to 1,200 rounds of incoming. The arrival of medevac and resupply helicopters was a bad time to be caught out in the open. Even a truck driving by could muffle the sound of enemy mortar rounds leaving the tube. My short-timers rarely set foot outside of their tanks that week. I understood, but that option was not available to me. As platoon leader, I had

to make the daily trek through "death valley" to attend the CO's briefing, then traverse the perimeter to share info with my tank crews. Especially perilous was the path over the saddle between OP#1 and #2. Barbed wire-lined minefields lay on both sides of the path. More than once I cheated the grim reaper by lying flat on my face dodging incoming. Many Marines were not so lucky, as evidenced by the numbers of medevac choppers flying in and out of the LZ.

As dusk fell on 13 September, L/Cpl Bert Trevail backed our tank, A-12, into our firing slot for the night. That portion of the northern perimeter was aptly named "Dodge City." At about 0300, an NVA heavy machine gun opened up at our side of the perimeter from about 500 meters away. Green tracers were zipping close overhead. Moments later, shadowy figures could be seen running across the minefield in our direction. "Where were the damned mines?!" Then it dawned on me that the engineers had not completed that part of the minefield. Corporals Sanders and Johnson were in the turret with me. Even though it was only my third night in a tank, we acted like a well-drilled team, knocking out the heavy machine gun position with an HE round, and spraying the area to our front with our .30 caliber co-ax machine gun. Soon, the scene before me was one of grunt machine gun tracers criss-crossing the open terrain, flares floating down, our artillery and mortars blasting everywhere. A U.S. Army "Gypsy," an armored 6X6 truck mounting four .50 cal. machine guns, pulled up beside us, literally pouring a fountain of red tracers into the NVA attackers. My adrenalin was pumping; I was totally charged up. When the cease fire was sounded about 30 minutes later (might have been an hour as I'd lost all track of time), an eerie silence followed. I noticed my hands were shaking once the excitement died down. Unbelievably, none of the hordes of attacking NVA had reached the wire. At first light, to our surprise, we couldn't see any NVA bodies left lying on the ground out there. The 3/9 Battalion S-3 estimated that a reinforced company had been the attacking force. It

was dismissed as a probe. "Some probe," I thought. "I'd hate to see a major attack!!"

The night of 15 September, the monsoon arrived. A gentle mist commenced after midnight, soon followed by torrents of rain and wind. Seventeen inches of rain fell in 48 hours. The downpour flooded out bunkers and trenchlines, and the Main Supply Route from Dong Ha to Con Thien was washed out. The vital bridge at Cam Lo was under water. Helicopters became our only means of resupply. Our tanks helped turn the roads into quagmires inside Con Thien's perimeter. It was not uncommon for a Marine to get stuck in the mud up to his knees while attempting to cross one of those mud bogs, and have to have help extricating himself. The entire 5th Tank Platoon had to be abandoned southeast of Con Thien. Saturated ancient rice paddies could not be negotiated by tanks, no matter how badly the infantry needed them to move. All of 5th Platoon's tanks were eventually retrieved, no worse for wear. Two of them were integrated into

1st Platoon as replacements for damaged 1st Platoon tanks.

For forty days, 1st Tank Platoon had endured the siege in support of first 3/9, then later 1/9. Some of the tankers remembered how B/1/9 had been nearly wiped out on Operation Buffalo back in July; they were not happy campers to have 1/9 take over defense of The Hill in October. The word circulated that 1/9 was a jinxed outfit. After all of the daily incoming that had rained down on us, the last thing we needed was to have 1/9 there with us. Then, shortly after 1/9 arrived, an errant TPQ strike dropped three 250 pound bombs inside our northern perimeter, killing three Marines and wounding 21.

We had lost "Piggy" Bores, Manchego, and Murray medevaced during the siege, and Sgt. Weicak had been hit in the face by a piece of shrapnel, but not evacuated. The rest of us, semi-shell shocked, filthy dirty, were hanging on until we could get relieved by another Alpha Company platoon. On 13 October, we got the

wonderful news that we were being pulled off of Con Thien for some much needed R&R at C-2. Gunny English and his platoon would be our replacements.

Little did we suspect, that long-awaited morning of 14 October when we were finally pulled out of Con Thien, that the 1st Platoon had not seen the last of "The Hill of Angels." We would spend a total of six more months on that damned red-clay bull's eye. It was never again as bad as the siege of '67, but death could still fall from the sky at any moment. After 10 months out in the field, I finally turned over 1st Platoon to 2d Lt. Frank Blakemore and assumed the duty as XO of Alpha Company at Dong Ha. The remainder of my tour in Nam was like being reborn as a human being: luxurious warm showers, real mess hall food; and, oh yeah . . . did I mention the steaks and cold beer?

To read more on the Con Thien story, visit the web at www.hillofangers.com. ▲



V. A. News & Updates

Go to our website for more health related info.
www.USMCVTA.org

CHAMPVA Update: The Civilian Health and Medical Program (CHAMPVA) is a program very similar to TRICARE. But, they are not the same. When a veteran is retired from the military, both the veteran and their family members are eligible for TRICARE. People eligible for TRICARE are not eligible for CHAMPVA. Additionally, veterans are not eligible for CHAMPVA care for themselves. Only family members qualify for CHAMPVA assuming:

The veteran has a 100%, permanent and total, service-connected rating.

The veteran dies while rated 100% permanent and total. An important part of the previous sentence is the permanent and total part. This does not include IU which is a temporary rating.

The veteran dies of a service-connected condition. Thus, for example, the widow of a veteran rated 60% service connected for diabetes who died of a kidney condition would not qualify unless the VA acknowledged that the kidney condition was caused by the diabetes. In such situations it would be prudent for veterans suffering from secondary life threatening conditions submit a claim to the VA in advance that their secondary condition was caused by their rated service connected condition.

A service member dies in the line of duty after 30 days of entry into service for reasons other than misconduct.

The surviving spouse remarries after age 55. Remarriage prior to age 55 terminates eligibility.

CHAMPVA can save a veteran, and their family, thousands of dollars a year. It does meet the definition of insurance for the anticipated Healthcare Reform. However it is not subject to the requirements of providing coverage until their child

reaches the age of 26. A bill has been introduced in Congress to correct that. For more information call (800) 733-8387, enter the veteran's SSN, and follow the prompts or refer to <http://www.va.gov/HAC/forbeneficiaries/champva/policymanual> If you only want an informational flyer instead of the entire policy manual go to <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/champva/brochure/CHAMPVABrochure.pdf>. If you want to apply for CHAMPVA complete VA Form 10-10d <http://www.va.gov/vaforms/medical/pdf/vha-10-10d-fill.pdf>. The address and fax number and other instructions for submitting the 10-10d are on the informational flyer. [Source: Veteran Advice David Peters article 28 Dec 2011]

VA Diabetes Mellitus Care Update: November was American Diabetes Month, a nationwide campaign to encourage all Americans to know their risk for diabetes, and to take action steps to decrease their risk of developing diabetes. The Veterans Administration estimates that nearly 25% of veterans being treated at the VA have diabetes. The high rate among veterans is attributable, in part, to the older average age of veterans being treated by the VA. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention estimate that nearly 26 million people, or about 8 percent of the US population, have diabetes. That includes about 11 million persons 65 and older, or about 27% of seniors. In the United States, about one-in-four persons with diabetes are not aware that they have the condition. While exact numbers are not available, it is likely that the number is lower for Veterans receiving regular VA primary care. However, many Veterans of all ages are at risk for diabetes because of the high rate of obesity and those who are overweight receiving VA care.

An individual does not have to achieve drastic weight loss. Losing about five percent of one's weight will help. In recent studies, a weight loss and exercise program

was more effective than medication in both younger and older individuals. The medication was not effective in persons older than 60. The VA offers a weight management program called MOVE! to all Veterans who are overweight or obese and for whom weight management is appropriate. It supports Veterans in developing plans that work for them to lose or maintain weight through balanced diet, physical activity, and behavior change approaches. For the program to be tailored to the individual's needs, the Veteran can complete a 23 item questionnaire. MOVE! is available in multiple convenient formats including group sessions, telephone-based care, and a new home messaging program called TeleMOVE! which uses the telephone line, provides daily support, and is interfaced with a scale for weekly home weigh-ins. Additional information on this program can be found at <http://www.move.VA.gov>. Talk with your Primary Care Team about MOVE!.

Although the focus of American Diabetes Month is to identify individuals at higher risk for developing diabetes, it is important to remind persons who already have diabetes of the importance of weight loss and physical activity in managing diabetes. Additionally, persons with diabetes or at risk for diabetes should manage other conditions, such as hypertension or high lipid levels, appropriately, and if they have diabetes, they should be screened at regular intervals for early signs of kidney, foot or eye conditions. Some other risk factors associated with diabetes are:

- Family history of diabetes
- Pre-diabetes (high fasting blood glucose — ask your doctor)
- Hypertension (high blood pressure)
- Low good cholesterol
- (HDL) and high triglycerides
- Presence of heart or other vascular disease
- Very low physical activity

Refer to <http://www.va.gov/health/NewsFeatures/20111115a.asp> for additional information on VA's diabetes care program. [Source: Off the Base Bobbie O'Brien article 16 Nov 2011 ++]

Awards Replacement Update 03: The military recognizes that military medals are often a cherished part of family history and makes replacement medals, decorations, and awards available to veterans or their next of kin if the veteran is no longer living or able to make the request on his or her own behalf. Requests for replacement medals, decorations, and awards should be made to the veteran's respective branch of service, with the exception of Army and Air Force (including Army Air Corps) veterans; requests should be sent to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis where the records will be reviewed and verified. The NPRC will then forward the requests to the respective service where the medal, decoration, or award will be issued after

verification of entitlement from the veterans records. The military won't issue replacement medals or awards to just anyone. You typically need to be the veteran or next of kin to receive a replacement medal or decoration. When it comes to military records requests, there are three categories of people who can make a request. They include the veteran, Next-of-Kin (NOK), and the general public. It is important to note that Next-of-Kin doesn't include all familial relationships. According to the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), NOK includes:

- For the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps & Coast Guard, the NOK is defined as: the un-remarried widow or widower, son, daughter, father, mother, brother or sister.
- For the Army, the NOK is defined as: the surviving spouse, eldest child, father or mother, eldest sibling or eldest grandchild.
- If you do not meet the definition of NOK, you are considered a member of the general public.

Replacement medals, decorations and awards should be requested on SF 180, Request Pertaining To Military Records. This form can be downloaded from <http://www.va.gov/vaforms>. Each request should be filled out neatly, and should include the veteran's branch of service, social security number, dates of service, and it should be signed by the veteran or the next of kin if the veteran is incapacitated or deceased. Where to forward it to is indicated by an address code on the back of the SF 180. Supporting documentation such as discharge paperwork or the veteran's DD Form 214 can help speed the process. Additional information on where to send the form and who is eligible to make the request can be found at the NPRC website. In general, requests made by the veteran are fulfilled at no cost. This includes requests made by family members who have the signed authorization of the veteran. There may be an associated fee for requests made by next of kin, especially if the request involves archival records (records are considered archival records 62 years after the veteran's date of separation from military service). Members of the general public may be able to request a copy of the service member's military records, but are not able to receive a medal issued by the service. However, they would be able to purchase these from commercial sources. [Source: The Military Wallet Ryan Guina article 22 Nov 2011 ++]

Vet Benefits ~ Seniors: Caring for aging loved ones can be difficult, but challenges can multiply when dealing with veterans. According to the National Alliance for Caregivers, caregivers of veterans are twice as likely to remain a caregiver for 10 years or longer, and are often unable to retain a job while providing adequate care for their veteran. With stress and pressure stacking up, these caregivers—often the adult children or even grandchildren—may wonder where to turn for assistance, and may be unaware of resources that are

available for veterans. In Georgia alone, there are more than half-a-million veterans and most aren't utilizing the resources provided to them by the government. According to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, only 36 percent of eligible veterans are currently receiving VA benefits. There are several options for seniors. Here are three important benefits you or the veteran in your life may be missing out on.

■ **VA Aid and Attendance:** For caregivers who are no longer able to provide the amount and quality of care their loved ones need, the Aid and Attendance benefit can be a huge help. This benefit, provided by the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs, helps to offset the cost of rent in assisted living communities for veterans and their spouses. Veterans may qualify for up to \$1,632 monthly and surviving spouses may qualify for \$1,055 monthly. For a couple (married veteran and spouse), the maximum benefit is \$1,949. For more information, visit this Web site for a step by step guide to applying.

■ **Veterans Non-Service Connected Improved Pension Benefit Program:** One of the most significant benefit programs for veterans is the Veterans Non-Service Connected Improved Pension Benefit Program, which was formed to provide aid to veterans and their surviving family members. The program gives financial assistance to veterans over the age of 65 who have served for at least 90 days and whose income is below a set amount by Congress. Retired veterans often meet these requirements and can receive substantial government aid. To learn more visit this Web site.

■ **Driving evaluations:** With many of our residents, their driving skills decrease as they age. Through the VA healthcare system, veterans are eligible for an extensive driving evaluation. Veterans can receive benefits like an in-depth personal driving evaluation, patient and family education on the issue, and behind-the-wheel instruction. In addition, veterans can benefit from lessons on defensive driving techniques and vehicle and equipment evaluation by certified professionals. [Source: Georgia's CummingPatch Susan Tidwell article 13 Nov 2011 ++]

VA Burial Benefit Update 11: Burial allowances are reimbursements of an eligible veteran's expenses and/or funeral costs. The person who paid the veteran's burial expenses may be reimbursed if the expenses were not paid by another government agency or someone else like the veteran's employer. These expenses are divided into 2 categories. The first category is funeral and burial expenses. The second category is a plot (internment) allowance. There are a few factors used to determine the reimbursable amount. For example, if the veteran had a service related death on or after September 11, 2001, the VA may pay \$2,000.00 in burial

expenses. If the veteran passed before September 11, 2001, the amount is limited to \$1,500.00. Additionally, if this same veteran is interned in a national cemetery, some or all the transportation expenses may be paid.

Most veterans however, do not have a service related death. If the veteran was in receipt of VA Pension or VA Compensation, or if the veteran was hospitalized by the VA, or hospitalized under VA care at a non-VA hospital, or under VA care in a nursing home, the VA may reimburse burial expenses at a lower rate. For deaths on or after October 1, 2011, VA will pay up to \$700 toward burial and funeral expenses (if hospitalized by VA at time of death), or \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses (if not hospitalized by VA at time of death), and a \$700 plot- interment allowance (if not buried in a national cemetery). For deaths on or after December 1, 2001, but before October 1, 2011, VA will pay up to \$300 toward burial and funeral expenses and a \$300 plot-interment allowance. The plot interment allowance is \$150 for deaths prior to December 1, 2001. If the death happened while the Veteran was in a VA hospital or under VA contracted nursing home care, some or all the costs for transporting the Veteran's remains may be reimbursed.

To apply for a reimbursement, the person who paid the expenses should complete VA Form 21-530 available at <http://www.vba.va.gov/pubs/forms/VBA-21-530-ARE.pdf>. This form also provides easy to understand information and instructions for completion applicants should find helpful. The applicant should also submit a copy of the veterans DD 214 (military discharge document), a copy of the death certificate, and copies of the paid funeral/burial expenses. To obtain information on veteran burial benefits refer to http://www.cem.va.gov/cem/bbene_burial.asp VA offers the following additional benefits and services to honor our Nation's deceased Veterans:

Headstones and Markers: VA can furnish a monument to mark the grave of an eligible Veteran.

Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC): VA can provide a PMC for eligible recipients.

Burial Flag: VA can provide an American flag to drape an eligible Veteran's casket.

Burial in a VA National Cemetery: Most Veterans and some dependents can be buried in a VA national cemetery.

Time Limits: There is no time limit to claim reimbursement of burial expenses for a service elated death. In other cases, claims must be filed within two years of the Veteran's burial. [Source: VeteranAdvice David Peters article 29 Dec 2011 ++] ▲

I REMEMBER GARY

By John Wear, A Co, 3rd Tanks

Several years ago I picked out a book from my personal library. The book is the "memory book" that the US Marines gave to me when I graduated from Marine boot camp back in October of 1966. This book is filled with "official" USMC stock publicity photos that were popular back then. It also contains individual photos of each Marine graduate and, as a bonus, is that it also has five or six pages filled with photos of the actual recruits from my platoon performing the rigors of daily life...including the obstacle course, pugil stick fighting, the rifle range, and our final inspection...all of which we endured to become one of America's Finest.

When I got out the book, I decided to visit "The Virtual Wall" website so that I could do a search to find out how many of these wonderful young men who became United States Marines at the same time as I did so long ago might have perished during the war in that not-so-wonderful country. Surprisingly I found that out of the 80 or so young men that are pictured in the book, only four were killed in action. To be perfectly honest, of the four, I only truly recalled one of the men...but while visiting the website, I left a short memorial statement for each of the four names. One of the provisions of the memorial site is that you are

allowed to leave your name and a contact e-mail address which I complied with while thinking that maybe one of my long lost brother recruits might see my name, remember me, and contact me in the future.

Fast forward six months or so...I was contacted by the former fiancée of Gary Lynn Irig, one of the Marine boot camp recruits who died in Vietnam. She thanked me for remembering "Lynn" and indicated that to this day, despite grieving for a very long time, moving on and marrying another man, having a family of her own and, even after all of these years, that she still loves and misses him. Those words were pretty powerful for me to hear and with them ringing in my ears she and I became internet friends. Back at the time, she was also in contact with the mother of the KIA Marine, so I made a copy of my boot camp memory book and mailed the copies to her to share with the Gold Star Mother. My new friend told me that it made the mother's heart soar to know that one of her son's old buddies remembers him. It has been (maybe) ten years since we first met and we still contact each other on a fairly regular basis...mostly sharing "stuff" that we get via e-mail.

VIETNAM SHORT ROUNDS

Short Round: On January 12, 1962 the United States Air Force launched Operation Ranch Hand, a "modern technological area-denial technique" designed to expose the roads and trails used by the Viet Cong. Flying C-123 Providers, the US personnel dumped an estimated 19 million gallons of defoliant herbicides over 10 – 20 percent of Vietnam and parts of Laos between 1962 and 1971. Agent Orange – named for the color of the metal containers – was the most frequently used defoliating herbicide. The operation succeeded in killing vegetation, but not in stopping the Viet Cong. The use of the agents was controversial, both during and after the war, because of the questions about long-term ecological impacts and the effect on humans who either handled or were sprayed by the chemicals.

Short Round: On February 22, 1965, General Westmorland, commander of Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MAC-V) cables Washington, DC, to request that two battalions of US Marines be sent to protect the US airbase in Da Nang. Ambassador Maxwell Taylor, aware of Westmorland's plan, disagreed and cabled President Lyndon B Johnson from Saigon to warn that such a step would encourage South Vietnam to "shuck off greater responsibilities." The Joint Chiefs of Staff, however supported Westmorland's request and on February 26, White House officials cabled Taylor and Westmorland that the troops would be sent, and that Taylor should "Secure GVN (Government of South Vietnam) approval." General Westmorland later insisted that he did not regard his request as "the first step in a

growing American commitment" but by 1969 there were over 540,000 American troops in South Vietnam.

Short Round: On February 14, 1970, despite increasingly active antiwar movement a Gallup Poll shows that a majority of those polled (55 percent) oppose any immediate withdrawal of US troops from Vietnam. Those favoring an American withdrawal had risen from 21 percent in a November poll to 35 percent. President Nixon had taken office in January 1969 promising to bring the war to an end but a year later the fighting continued and support for the president's handling of the war had began to slip significantly. ▲

DOG TAG RETURN TO FELLOW TANKER

By Ronald Colucci

Many are not aware of the two Vietnam Dog Tag Committees in NJ. There is one batch of found Vietnam dog tags in the holding of the POW/MIA Awareness Committee of NJ, and the other batch is held by the Senator James Beach Dog Tag Committee. Both Committees are in the process of identifying and locating the veterans and/or families of these dog tags to return them. For more information on the projects, go to www.powmiaawareness.org

Just prior to our recent reunion in San Diego, one of the dog tags was connected to a member of our organization by Sue Quinn-Morris, who is on this committee as well as a member of my home American Legion #372 Cherry Hill, NJ. While talking to my wife Carol about our plans for the reunion, Sue took a chance at matching her roster of tags to our member roster and was shocked to find a match. That started the ball rolling which took my wife and me to Palatka, FL to personally deliver John (Jack) S Hahn (Alpha 3rd '67) his tag.

Sue contacted Jack to confirm they were in fact his, which he was able to do this, of course, after she convinced him it would not cost him anything. In this day and age you have to expect a scam, especially for something so special. She sent him a picture of the tag which was in fact his. Carol and I then started to plan how to get it back to him. It took longer than expected due to the fact we are still recovering from our motorcycle accident in July. Then we were up to the holidays.

We decided to make the tag return our "Christmas present" to each other and made reservations to go to Florida in mid-January.

Another member of our American Legion Post 372, Wes Barnett, who is in the process of moving to Jacksonville invited us to stay with him, and also arranged his local VFW #7909 Jacksonville to accompany us to Jack's

VFW #3349 Palatka for the return. Jack chose to have it done at his home post where he is an active member. We arrived at Post #3349 to a warm welcoming crowd with members of the Jacksonville VFW including quite a few Marines.

Wes took the microphone to explain the Dog Tag Project, I then gave a brief summary of my Marine/Navy service as some background as to the "special" bond Jack and I had as a Marine Tanker. Though we had never met, we are brothers



and understand each other. A letter was read which Senator Beach (D-NJ) had sent with us thanking him for his service to our country.

Prior to our trip, Carol had contacted John Wear to arrange to pay for Jack's membership. We wanted to present Jack with his new card; John had it mailed out immediately. Carol read the back of the card and then presented it to Jack.

This was a special day for all of us. For Jack his dog tag is home; for me, I was able to return it to a fellow Marine. My wife understands more about what it means to be a Marine tanker and the special bond that it entails. We were also able to spread the word about this wonderful organization's mission.

Both Wes and I have lost our dog tags when wounded in Viet Nam. Maybe someday they will find ours. Here's hoping.

Semper Fi

Ronald Colucci Bravo 1st 69 ▲

GET SOME!!!

By John Wear, A Co, 3rd Tanks

We're working on our tank on the perimeter of Con Thien one afternoon.

"Gooks in the open!" we hear cry from up the hill behind us...and it echoes down the perimeter.

I jump in the cupola and jack back my .50 as "Flash," our gunner, grabs the binoculars to see if he can spot them. One of the gun tanks pulls up on the road up the hill above our position and began cranking off bee hive and HE out into The Trace...I see the first round hit and I make my .50 chatter like no body's business in the same direction. I am sure my rounds are short but what the heck? This is fun!!!

Then an Ontos pulls next to the tank up on the hill and the "pig" begins salvo after salvo of its 106 reckless rifles in the same general direction.

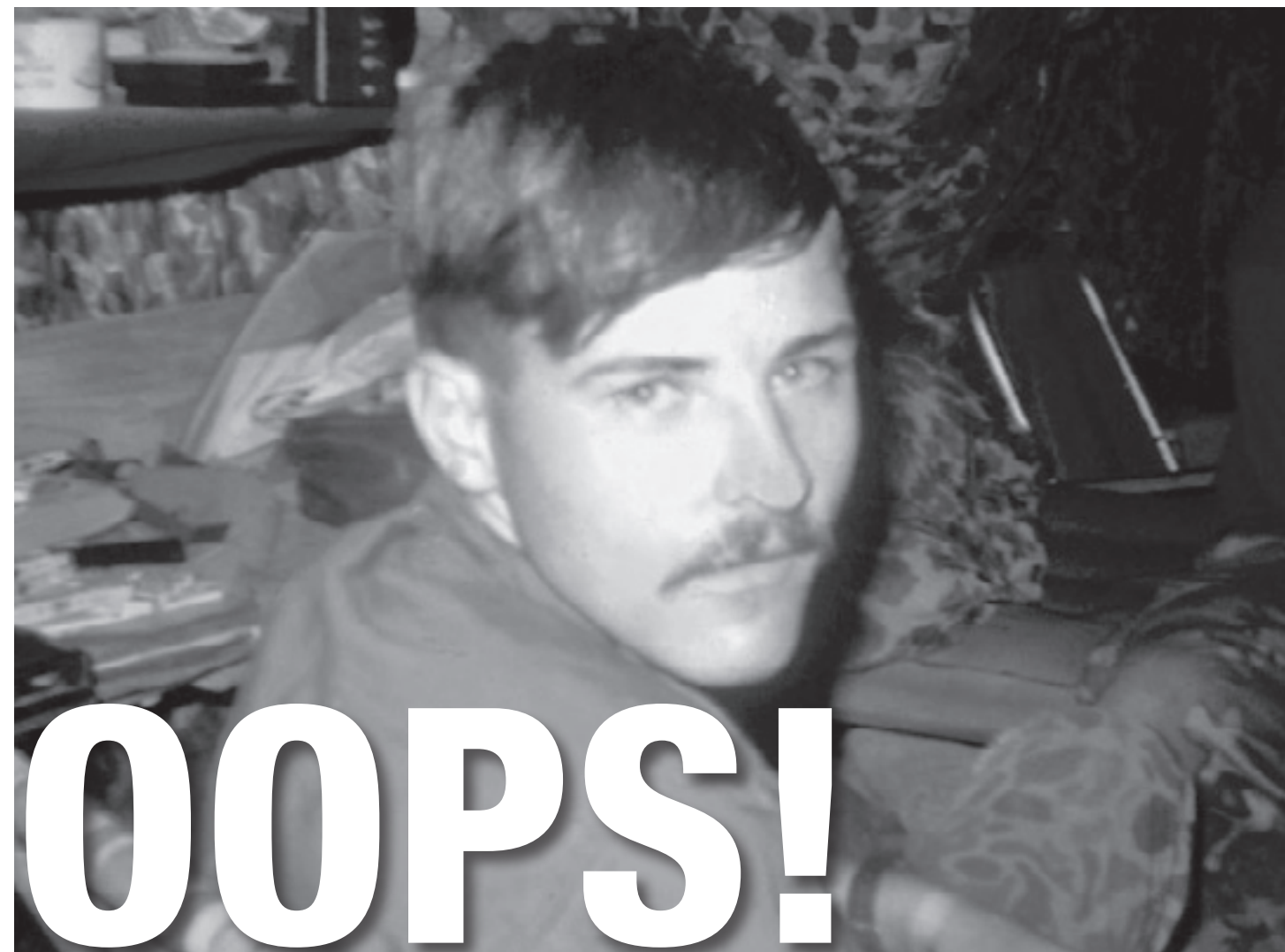
Not fifteen minutes goes by when we get a "Cease Fire!" order. Someone on the line says this is so CAS (close air support) can come in and make a bombing run.

Not two minutes later, two Air Force F-100s make several high altitude dives on to the last place where the gooks were spotted. They drop their ordinance and skedaddle back to Da Nang.

Right behind these silver birds comes two blue Navy (...what ever you call 'em...) jets and they make almost as high altitude bombing runs as the Air Force jets. Then they're back to their ship...I guess.

When they are all done...the silence is broken by two Marine F4 "Phantoms" come screaming in just above the treetops! They make a recon run and decide to make their dive approach from over our hill. As the jarhead jets approach the target they are so freakin' close to the ground that I swear to God that I can see the color of eyes of one of the pilots!!! After they drop all of their "snake & nape"...they make several strafing runs. As they pass overhead their 20 mm casings are landing all around our tank!!!

Get Some!!!v



Andy Anderson

Written by Andy Anderson, 3rd Platoon Mechanic and tank crewman, Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, Vietnam 1968- 1969; with input from Chris Vargo & Pete Ritch.

IN THE SPRING OF 1969 OUR TANK SECTION WAS ASSIGNED TO SUPPORT AN ARVN OPERATION ALONG "THE TRACE" THAT WAS BELOW THE DMZ BETWEEN GIO LINH AND CON THIEN. MILITARY INTELLIGENCE INDICATED THAT THERE WAS A COMPANY SIZED NORTH VIETNAMESE ARMY UNIT BETWEEN GIO LINH AND A NEW COMBAT BASE NEAR CON THIEN.

It was an unusually warm spring day and every possible insect in the country seemed to have gotten a jump on their particular new lives at the exact same time and in the exact same spot where our tanks were located. I had removed the small plate between the turret and the engine compartment in order to have the giant cooling fans of our air cooled V-12 engine drawing their air through the turret and thus providing

a nice bit of airflow within the fighting compartment. It is my understanding that this modification was not uncommon.

Our tank platoon's objective was to sweep and clear that area from Gio Linh west to that newer strongpoint, which was being built by the Sea Bees called "Alpha 4." I don't know if this base ever really became operational. We were told that there was supposed to

be a battalion of ARVN establishing a blocking force at that position.

By the time we got within half a 'click' of Alpha 4... which took us over two days of flushing out the NVA and driving them into the blocking (ARVN) position...it had been a very hot and sweaty, stop & go movement. As we anticipated, as we operated in that area of Leatherneck Square, we probably had at least a company or more of NVA forces moving to the west. The enemy soldiers seemed to be in good order...as opposed to any similar ARVN disorderly movement, under similar conditions. And, when the ARVN, who we Americans were fighting and dying for, saw a few hundred NVA reacting to our sweep and were headed toward their position in an assault formation...the South Vietnamese soldiers took a communal moment to crap in their pants, abandon their fortified position, and run like hell toward their little chicken coops at Con Thien.

Someone on the open battalion radio net (not an Asian voice) called in a fire mission to the ARVN 105 mm artillery batteries at Gio Linh. I guess that the caller wanted to spice up the lives of the NVA that we were slowly herding. Whoever called the arty mission in really needed a bit more experience with map coordinates and positioning. It actually might have been one of our doc's or maybe a tank platoon mechanic...who had only OJT (on the job training) in this kind of deadly thing. Either that or the ARVN arty batteries experienced "a hiccup in their giddyup" as all (a great majority) of the arty that they fired was long (for a change). It all seemed to fall mostly within the ARVN movement (retreat?) to Con Thien. In certain

respects; the results of this misplaced 105mm cannon fire, as we who had been doing this shit for the last two days saw it, was not all that saddening.

Does this story jog any memories? There were only a few of us (tanks) who could monitor all three radio nets at the same time. Our grunts didn't immediately get the whole picture of what was happening and sometime during the confusion of the OP falling apart, the NVA either hooked a right (northward), or went underground in one of the many bunker complexes, east and north of The Washout. I heard that there were massive ARVN casualties, as their own arty was well placed among themselves but typical to the skeletal record keeping back in the rear, nothing was ever looked into, from what I know. But when it really gets down to it; the ARVN screwed up a nice fire mission and overshot the area where the NVA were making their usual orderly bird, in fine battle order, despite our efforts to disrupt them. I don't believe there was even an enemy body count. And I never heard the ARVN body count or any casualty figures. There is also no mention of this mishap in the official Command Chronologies that I can find. But it had to have been a good one. I'm not the only one to say so...but I believe from what I knew then, that our enemy was most likely the best light infantry at the time (our time) in the world.

Thus the question continues to beg: How come THEIR gooks were so superior to OUR gooks? Semper Fi,

Andy ▲

Hearts and Minds

(Continued from page 33)

the spot. With the exception of the Lt. we would have understood and accepted because of the revenge and hatred that we harbored. It would have felt good. Yes, it's madness alright—savagery even.

On another occasion in February '68, I was part of a squad of Marines that were providing security for a mine sweep that ran daily between Cam Lo and Charlie 2.

There were dead enemy just off the road who had been killed by an ambush the previous night. There was also unexploded ordinance (grenades and mortars) at the ambush site.

The mine sweep crew attached the

duds and added a bit of C-4 to the corpses and then yelled, "Fire in the hole" and BOOM! It was raining body parts.

From my position about 100 yards away I could see villagers in the distance standing on a knoll watching this madness unfold. It was over in a flash and the sweep moved forward as if it was just part of the job.

The destination of the dead NVA was that nearby village. There they would receive additional orders and a bit of R&R for the evening. Hearts & Minds anyone?

Imagine what the mental state of

mind must have been for this to just casually happen. We're talking about 19-20 year old youths who only a year or so ago were graduating from high school and probably never saw anything more tragic than a car accident.

Certainly gives one pause for thought...

I respected Lieutenant Knight for his leadership and strength, but even though I did not agree with the road sweep's actions – I completely understood. ▲

Can anyone identify these mechanics?



USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

5537 Lower Mountain Road • New Hope, PA 18938

Please get your 2012 dues paid up! Make your check out to USMC VTA plus \$30 and send to:
John Wear, USMC VTA, 5537 Lower Mountain Road, New Hope, PA 18938.
We have included a mailing envelope in this issue to make it even easier.

