



# Sponson BOX

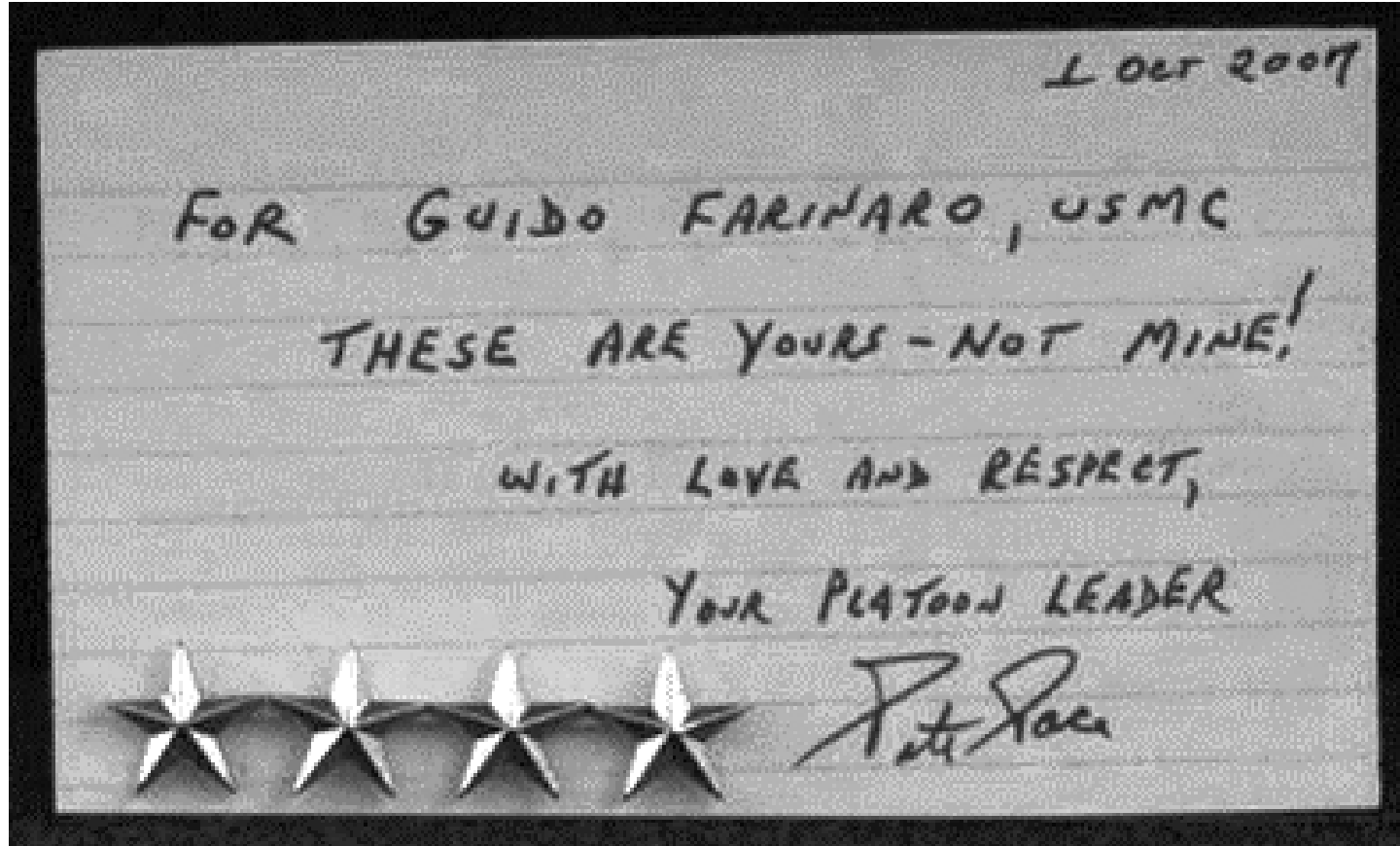
*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Photo by Danny Barton

- Featuring ♦ **DMZ Invasion** p. 17  
 ♦ **M48A3** p.20  
 ♦ **Fort Hannah** p.23  
 ♦ **The Search Continues** p.24  
 ♦ **Swim Call** p. 28



## Stars On The Wall

*General Peter Pace USMC, stepped down as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff on October 1, 2007. His last act as Chairman was emotional and spoke volumes of this great warrior's character and integrity. When General Peter Pace finished his official duties on his last day as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, he had one more item to take care of.*

*General Pace went to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and carefully placed three index cards side by side against The Wall. Each card was hand addressed to an individual Marine, the three who lost their lives in Vietnam during the Tet offensive of 1968 under the command of then-2nd Lt. Peter Pace in Hue City.*

*Pinned to each note was the four-star insignia worn by General Pace on his last day of duty.*

## Letter from the President

Greetings,

It is official. The dates for the next USMC VTA biennial reunion will be August 19 – 23, 2009. As you may recall, we were waiting on confirming the dates because the HQ at MCRD Parris Island had not published their recruit graduation schedule and we did not want to be in the area and not have a graduation ceremony to attend. Our reunion chairman, Sgt Major William "JJ" Carroll, USMC (ret), has secured our reunion hotel. Details will be coming out in a separate mailing right after the holidays along with a brochure on Charleston. One of the fantastic accomplishments that "JJ" has been able to do is that the room rate will be \$99 per night. Please be sure that you mention the "USMC Vietnam Tankers" when you make your reservations. We hope to have a hotel site link on <http://www.usmcvta.org> soon. You'll be able to visit the hotel site, register and check out the schedule of activities. The activity schedule will not be published until after the board of directors meeting in Atlanta in October. Speaking of the BoD meeting, we received several generous donations from the membership to help offset the meeting expenses for which we are extremely grateful. It has become apparent over the last few years that when we solicit for additional funds, it seems to repeatedly come from the same group of people: our annual members. We get very little continuing financial help from most of our Life Members. Maybe the feeling is that they made a significant contribution when the organization was first struggling to get off the ground. Don't get me wrong, it was greatly appreciated but in many cases that was 8 to 10 years ago. We have put some serious resources behind the Sponson Box over the last 18 months doubling it in size and quality. It is no longer the 8-page newsletter you used to expect 8 to 10 years ago. It takes money to produce a quality magazine like you are now receiving but this can come to an end without some financial help. I am asking our loyal Life Members to find it in their heart and their wallet to help keep the organization going. Currently it is the minority (40%) of annual dues-paying members that carry the entire organization. Any size donation would be most appreciated. I am going to thank our Life Members in advance and hope that this appeal makes them reconsider donating to the organization every now and then.

On another note, with the holidays not far off, I found a short story written about Christmas in Vietnam by Marine Capt Bob Brennan, the CO of Alfa Company, 1/12.

*My unit was in a place called Con Thien which was a little more than a half mile from the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). It was a place where we could view the "Arc Light" (B-52 strikes) to the northwest and "Freedom Bridge" (the bridge separating North and South Vietnam) to the northeast.*

*On December 23rd I was told that we were being relieved by Vietnamese Marines but there were not enough choppers (helicopters) to get us all back to Dong Ha so my unit would have to stay at Con Thien for several more days. Though disappointed, we knew it was necessary. However, on December 24th I was told that we now had enough choppers to take us all back. After we arrived, we cleaned our weapons, inventoried all equipment, and got our first real showers in over six months. We also received all our mail and Christmas packages from home and to be honest, we even got two beers each. During all of this it was great to see this diverse group of people taking care of each other and caring for each other.*

*In the early evening, a Sergeant and a Corporal came to my tent and asked if they could get a tree for Christmas. I told them "yes" but to be careful because the United States had to pay for trees that were knocked down in certain areas. Later that evening, while I was writing a letter home, these same men along with my Executive Officer came in and asked if I would come out and sing Christmas Carols with them. It was about 2345 (11:45 pm) Christmas eve and when I went out, there was this beautiful scraggly tree decorated with the bows, ribbons and little figurines that the Marines had received in their Christmas packages. One mother had cut out a canned ham tin where she put contact paper and built a Nativity scene. Another mother had sent her son a wind-up train set. These things and more had been placed under this beautiful tree. There were over one hundred Marines standing around that tree; Hispanics, African-Americans, and Whites; Catholic, Protestant, Baptist and at least one Jewish youngster. They were close to 10,000 miles away from home holding hands and singing Christmas Carols. When I went back to my tent to finish my letter home I wrote, with tears in my eyes, "If I couldn't be home with you and the kids tonight there is no place on earth that I would rather be than with these young Marines because this is what Christmas is truly all about."*

Wishing you and your families a very happy holiday.

Semper Fi,  
John

'No arsenal, no weapon in the arsenals of the world, is so formidable as the will and moral courage of free men and women.'

Ronald Reagan

## Board of Directors 2007-2009

### John Wear, *President*

5537 Lower Mountain Road; New Hope, PA 18938  
(215) 794-9052 · E-mail: Johnwear@comcast.net

### Robert 'Bob' Peavey, *Vice President*

304 Abbey Court; Canton, GA 30115  
770-365-3711 · E-mail: repv@comcast.net

### Jim Coan, *Treasurer*

5374 East Lantana Drive; Sierra Vista, AZ 85650  
(520) 378-9659 · E-mail: zzzjimco@aol.com

### Ronald C. Knight, *Secretary*

720 Quail Run Court; Alpharetta, GA 30005-8920  
(707) 623-9237 · E-mail: rcknight@mindspring.com

### Lt. General Martin R. Steele, USMC (Ret.), *Director*

16331 Ashington Park Drive; Tampa, FL 33647  
E-mail: MRSteele@aol.com

### Carl Fleischman, *Director*

P.O. Box 727; Keyport, WA 98345-0727  
(360) 779-1327 · E-mail: gflsich@sinclair.net

### Dave "Doc" Forsythe, *Director*

PO Box 52; Lackawaxen, PA 18435-0052  
(570) 685-2020 · E-mail: docnomo2@yahoo.com

### Carl Ludecke, *Director*

18650 U.S. Hwy. 441; Mt. Dora, FL 32757  
(352) 383-6104 · E-mail: CUBHOMES@aol.com

### Garry Hall, *Director*

508 Main Street; Vincennes, IN 47591-2008  
812-882-7510 · E-mail: tc\_charlie21@sbcglobal.net

### Lt Col Raymond Stewart, USMC (ret) – *President*

*Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation*  
707 SW 350th Court; Federal Way, WA 98023  
(253) 835-9083 · E-mail: usmctankers@comcast.net

## Committees & Chairmen

### Mike Burnett

Awards & Medals  
209-383-2261 PST

### Bruce "Boston" Manns

Association Archives  
603-448-3305 EST

### CWO4 Bob Embesi

CRCS/CR Representative  
406-821-3075 MST

### Lt. Col. Harris Himes

Chaplain  
406-375-0097 CST

### Terry "Bo" Bocchino

Chaplain, Asst.  
518-537-2509 EST

### David Zaslou

Database Manager  
760-758-0378 EST

### Bob Peavey

Fallen Heroes  
770-365-3711 EST

### Jim Guffe

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund  
804-744-1179 EST

### "Robbie" Robinson

National Recruiter  
usmctanker65@peoplepc.com

### "Pappy" Reynolds

Web Master  
626-574-0094 PST

Web Site: [www.usmctva.org](http://www.usmctva.org) -bravo3rd@earthlink.net

The *Sponson Box* is the official publication for the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association and the Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation. The *Sponson Box* is published three times a year, more often prior to the biennial reunion of the Association. *No portion of the Sponson Box is to be reprinted without prior written permission from the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.*

Publishers: USMC Vietnam Tankers Association  
Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation

Robert Peavey - Editor/Publisher  
E-mail: [johnwear@comcast.net](mailto:johnwear@comcast.net)

## New Member

### Phillip C Buffalo

21 Kipp Ave  
Hasbrouck Heights, NJ 07604  
(201) 288-4383  
Email: [sgt.buff.usmctanks@msn.com](mailto:sgt.buff.usmctanks@msn.com)  
B Co, 3rd Tanks '66 - '67  
MOS: 1811 / 2141  
Wife: Rose Maria  
DOB: 6/22/45  
Recruited by: Harvey (Robbie) Robinson

### Tom B Crossman

21469 Bear Valley Road (#1)  
Apple Valley, CA 92308  
(760) 240-9097  
Email: [tomcbarr@earthlink.net](mailto:tomcbarr@earthlink.net)  
C Co, 1st Tank Bn, '65  
B Co, 3rd Tank Bn, '66  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Peggy  
DOB: 6.23/45  
Recruited by: Bob Embesi

### Paul R Emmitt

557 Bradley Ave  
San Jose, CA 95128  
(408) 288-9523  
Email: [premmitt@pacbell.net](mailto:premmitt@pacbell.net)  
A Co, 1st Tank Bn '65  
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn '66  
MOS: 2841  
Wife: Teresa  
DOB: 8/13/46  
Recruited by: Bob Embesi

### David O Gehrman

1675 - 109th Ave  
Centuria, WI 54824  
(715) 825-3912  
No emai  
No Tank Unit  
No MOS  
Wife: Virginia  
DOB: 8/8/46  
Recruited by: Charles Fischer

### Robert H Gulbranson

17794 Game Road  
Preston, MN 55965  
(507) 886-2589  
Email: [odie@harmonytel.net](mailto:odie@harmonytel.net)  
A & C Co, 3rd Tank Bn '66 - '67  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Bettie  
DOB: 3/15/46  
Recruited by: Web Site

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.

### John M Hunter

23838 Cabrillo Ave  
Torrance, CA 90501  
(310) 200-3123  
Email: [J.Hunter5773@sbcglbal.net](mailto:J.Hunter5773@sbcglbal.net)  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn '65  
B Co, 3rd Tank Bn '66  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: None  
DOB: 10/15/46  
Recruited by: Richard Tilden

### Morton D Hurt

16000 Foothill Lane  
Sisters, OR 97759-9622  
(541) 549-8320  
Email: [morton.d.hurt@emac.com](mailto:morton.d.hurt@emac.com)  
B Co, 1st Tank Bn '68 - '69  
MOS: 1802  
Wife: Sally  
DOB: 7/4/45  
Recruited by: Dick Carey

### James (Jim) R Knee

704 Rosemary Lane  
Pocahontas, AR 72455  
(870) 609-0053  
Email: [connieknee@suddenlink.net](mailto:connieknee@suddenlink.net)  
C Co, 3rd Tank Bn '67 - '68  
MOS: 1811  
Wife: Connie  
DOB: 5/31/46  
Recruited by: John Hancock

### Michael (Doc) A Pipkin

10427 Paradise Lake Rd  
Snohomish, WA 98296  
(425) 487-3364  
Email: [map2.1@juno.com](mailto:map2.1@juno.com)  
B Co, 3rd Tank Bn '68 - '69  
MOS: 8404 - FMFCorpsman  
Wife: Mary  
DOB: 11/18/47  
Recruited by: Fred Kellogg

### Claude R Vargo

5054 Civitania Road SE  
Mableton, GA 30126  
(832) 545-7600  
Email: [cvargo@comcast.net](mailto:cvargo@comcast.net)  
B Co, 3rd Tank Bn '67 - '68 - '69  
Wife: Gloria  
DOB: 1/16/48  
Recruited by: Web Site

## Meet Your Board of Directors

A feature that provides some history about one of your Board members.

Jim Coan grew up only three blocks from the campus of the University of Arizona in Tucson. Frequently observing what he considered "silly" uniforms worn by the Air Force and Army ROTC students walking to and from campus, Jim chose to join the reserves rather than be forced to take the mandatory two years of ROTC.

Several of Jim's family members were Marines. A great uncle was a machine gunner with the 5th Marines in France during WWI. An older stepbrother fought with the Marines in the Pacific during WWII. Jim decided at an early age that he, too, would someday wear the red and gold of the Marines.

After graduating high school in 1960, Jim completed boot camp and then enrolled at the University of Arizona. He majored in government and law enforcement. He was on the five-year plan and graduated in 1965.

Jim successfully completed his active military reserve commitment, having attained the rank of corporal. He applied for Marine Officer Candidate School and was accepted. In October of 1966, Jim reported to OCS at Quantico, Virginia. Out of 50 candidates in his platoon, Jim was one of 29 still around at graduation. He was commissioned a second lieutenant in December 1966. He then completed an abbreviated Basic School at Quantico in April of 1967 as part of TBS Class 4-67. Then it was off to Tank Officer's School at Camp Pendleton.

With orders to WESTPAC in his hand, Jim arrived in Vietnam in August 1967. After a harrowing, sleepless night spent in a tent by the runway at Da Nang hearing jets take off and land all night, he and eight other lieutenants reported the next day to 3d Tank Battalion near Phu Bai (Gia Le). All of them were eventually wounded or killed in action. Jim was initially assigned assistant S-3 under Major Bruce McLaren. He would report a month later to Alpha Company in Dong Ha, where he relieved 2/LT Tom Barry, the new 1st Platoon Leader, who had received two Purple Hearts from shrapnel wounds at Con Thien in a week.

For the next 40 days, his baptism under fire, Jim dodged NVA artillery, mortars and rockets during the siege of Con Thien. First 3/9, then 1/9 held the "Hill of Angels" while his tank platoon was there. His remaining tour saw 1st Platoon operating in support of 1/4, 2/4, 3/4, 2/9, and 2/26, covering most of Leatherneck Square from the DMZ to Cam Lo, and up into the DMZ with the 9th Marines during Operation Thor. After ten months in the field, during which time he was wounded during a mortar attack on Con Thien, Jim went back to Dong Ha to be the XO of Alpha Company. From 1969-70, Jim was the CO of Charlie Company, 2d Tanks at Camp Lejeune. He attained the rank of Captain, USMCR, after he left active duty in 1970.

Looking back on his Vietnam combat tour, Jim will never forget those young Marines he served with, many barely out of high school, who faced danger bravely and never failed to come through in a tight spot. And, he recalls how nothing he has experienced since Nam compares to the roar of a five-tank platoon moving out in formation, armed to the teeth and looking for trouble.

Jim subsequently earned master's degrees from San Diego State and Arizona State Universities, thanks to the G.I. Bill. He first worked as a budget analyst for the City of San Diego, and then went back to Tucson and took a position as Asst. City Manager. Bored with city government politics and feeling stifled in his job, Jim began volunteering at the Arizona Youth Center north of Tucson. He soon quit his city job and hired on as a correctional counselor at the Youth Center. Jim then became a parole agent with the California Youth Authority. During a 30-year career in youth corrections, Jim held several positions including Supervising Parole Agent, Institutional Program Administrator, and Superintendent. He retired from State service in 2000.

Jim's first project upon retirement was to commence working on a manuscript



about Con Thien. His first attempts at getting published went nowhere. Then, Eric Hammel, noted historian and prolific author, hooked up with Jim and mentored him on his book project. In 2004, The University of Alabama Press published Jim's book, *Con Thien: The Hill of Angels*. His book is now in its second printing.

When Jim learned he had prostate cancer in 2005, he resigned his position as vice president of the Vietnam Tankers Assn., missing out on the Philly reunion. After a successful surgery and recovery, VTA President John Wear approached him in 2006 about taking over the vacant Treasurer position. Jim accepted and still holds that office.

Jim currently resides in Sierra Vista, Arizona, with his wife of 31 years, Sandra. One of his daughters also resides there with her two children. He and Sandra like their role as grandparents spoiling the grand kids. He also has a son and a second daughter living in California. In addition to the Vietnam Tankers Assn., Jim stays busy as a life member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, VFW, and Marine Corps Historical Society. He is also an artisan of sorts, dabbling in stained glass, woodcarving, and model railroading. A Vietnam War scene diorama he made in 1999 is on display at Texas Tech University's Vietnam War Archive.

Jim is one of the charter members of the Vietnam Tankers Association. One of his missions in life is to do everything he can to help the organization grow and prosper in coming years. ♦



**ON THE COVER:** "I have attended and shot my camera at the last eight "Salute to American Veterans" motorcycle rallies. I am drawn to the event naturally as I am a biker and a veteran.

However, as a photographer, I come to the event because I feel I capture better images of people when emotion is involved. When thousands of great people come together to honor our brave veterans well to say it is emotional doesn't really get the message across.

The photograph above which I have titled "The Introduction" has generated more than a modicum of emotion in me as well as all who have heard the story behind it. I feel it is the best image I will shoot this year. While I am a firm believer that a good photograph needs no words and I to me, this one complies with that rule: I am compelled to tell this story.

After shooting the photo, I introduced myself to the man and his wife. We had a brief conver-

sation in which he said something I will never forget. As tears welled in his eyes, he told me while he and his best friend were in Nam; they vowed to each other that they both would live long enough to introduce each other to their grandsons. He said it was a terrible shame that he had to introduce his grandson to his friend this way and it broke his heart. It did mine too. I shook his hand and welcomed him home.

If you visit the Traveling Wall in Winter Park for the "Salute To American Veterans" rally next year you'll want to take some Kleenex."

Danny Barton  
12742 W. Florida Dr.  
Lakewood, CO 80228  
[dannyshoots2@yahoo.com](mailto:dannyshoots2@yahoo.com)

## Letter to the Editor

Hello,

I am the wife of a Vietnam vet who subscribes to your publication, The Sponson Box. I work at San Diego State University next door to the Veterans office and know Nick Popaditch, who was featured in an article in the May/June/July/August 2008 publication (page 29 & 30 of the Vo. XI-No II). My husband will not part with his copy of the Sponsor Box, and I would love to have a copy of this specific issue to put in the lobby of the VA office at San Diego State University. Is there a way I can either purchase or obtain a courtesy copy to present to the VA office on campus?

Thank you in advance,

Paula Ferguson  
(wife of Sid R. Ferguson)  
PO Box 1095  
Bonsall, CA 92003-1095

My phone rang this morning and on the line was VTA Life member **Henry Hicks**, Bravo Co, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks '66 - '67. Henry lives in Philadelphia (about ¾ of an hour drive south of me). He said that he was reading the latest edition of the Sponson Box and had read about me asking for old photos and stories from Vietnam. He said that he had a bunch of old photos that he'd be happy to drop by my home sometime since he is up my way pretty regularly to go fishing in the Delaware River. He said, "You can do what ever you want with them and get them back to me when you are done." I told him that when he comes up with the photos that I would probably mail them to Bob Peavey, the Sponson Box publisher, because Bob has worked for Kodak for several decades and besides being a professional photographer, Bob knows how to take care of our precious Vietnam photographic memories.

Then we got to shootin' the bull and he told me about being on perimeter watch at The Rockpile one very dark night when a trip flare went off directly in front of him and all of a sudden a tiger roared at him. He said that it was real close even though he never actually saw it. He did not know

whether to crap his trousers or go blind! He had heard some scuttlebutt that a Recon Marine had been attacked and eaten by a tiger the month before. He jumped back on his tank and got ready for the attack that thankfully never materialized!

He also told me about going on road sweeps between Camp Carroll and The Rockpile. When it was raining they'd drive into this little ville that was out the back gate of Carroll that they called "Dog Patch." (I read somewhere that most nameless villes were called "Dog Patch" all over Vietnam.) Henry said that they'd drive the tank into the center of the little town where there was a makeshift town square. They'd then put their tank in neutral gear and they make the tank do doughnuts. With the mud flying and the little kids & the grunts would scream & cheer them on. He said that it was some show!

I invited Henry to come up and we could spend a few hours looking at his old photos and telling sea stories. I wish more of our membership would do this sort of thing. We need to get our Vietnam stories recorded sooner than later.

John Wear

John,

While reading Bob Peavey's article on torsion bars in the last issue of the Sponson Box it reminded me of a minor repair job we did at Quang Tri in late '68 or early



'69 (I've got some "brain fade" here). We had to replace the right rear drive sprocket for some reason. As you can see from the photo it was not an easy job. By the way we broke the chain in the picture trying to get the sprocket off. Seems the copper sleeve between the sprocket and the drive gears was jammed and would not let the sprocket slide off. After a couple of hours someone hit the sprocket with a sledge hammer taking the pressure off of the sleeve and the sprocket fell right off.

Vax

Greetings John,

Received the latest Sponson Box today and it is another great issue. In response to your call for meeting support I am enclosing my check for my 2009 membership dues and the remainder can be earmarked for the meeting expenses. Trust it is not too early to pay the 2009 dues.

Additionally John, I received my VTA Jacket this week. Thanks to you and all for the terrific job. I ordered that black version and the patches come out first class. By the way "Medals of America" now makes sets of mini ribbons with all of the attachments: stars, "V's" and the like. I ordered a set just for the jacket and it really adds to it. These mini ribbons are also great for hats. It is way to hot (here in Arizona) to wear the jacket. However come winter I'll really piss off the Air Farce "zommies" at Davis-Monthan AFB when I go shopping at the commissary or exchange.

Thanks again for all your efforts on behalf of the VTA.

Semper Fi,  
George Search

John,

I saw your letter about the typhoon in Sgt. Grit's newsletter this morning. If memory serves me correctly, that was Oct 68. As I recall most of 3rd

Plt was up river from you during that not-so-light rainstorm at a place called Mia Xa Thi or My Loc (I can never remember the order we were there in). We slept on the fenders of the tank for a few days; the water was a bit deep (above the road wheels). Any way it was a great story. Thanks!

P.S. Gary Hall, Glen Hutchins, me and (soon to be member) Tony Simms are meeting at Darrell Clock's place in Indiana in Sept. for a 3rd Plt mini-reunion. Most of the reason for the meeting is to get Clock and Simms together.

See you next year in SC

Vax

To Sgt. Whithead,

It has been a lot of turbulent years since that day in May. My wife is an advocate for those of us that cannot afford to stay in that war for reasons of the emotional grief that we are still going through. She came upon this site in her search for all of us and those of our fellow comrades to continue the plight so that we will never be forgotten.

I was with A Co., 1st Bat, 9th Marines that day, and an 18-year old Marine Lcpl. that was in that Sparrow Hawk mission that flew into the middle of that cluster-fuck situation. It was the longest day of my life and will haunt me for the rest of my life. I was awarded the Bronze Star with V-Devise for my Valor in action that day.

I remember that day and I do remember the tanks coming through to save what was left of us. I was right next to Cpl. Cleveland Vines when he got hit; I also witnessed the annihilation of my comrades that day, to me the post that you wrote on his profile hit me with a lot of emotions.

I just figured I would drop you a line or two as I want to thank you for taking the time to write a post for him. I have always felt guilty not looking up the next of kin for him to pay my respects, but I have had to try and move on with my life and it has been a hard journey.

With Respect

Lcpl. H. D. Reed  
The Walking Dead.  
hdtenney@yahoo.com.

John,

I want to thank the VTA for sending flowers to Margie, she is in a long fight for recovery and with loss of short term memory it will take time for her to learn to walk and do the many other things that make life worth living. I am here and will do what ever is necessary to keep her comfortable, as always!

Donald R. Gagnon  
Semper Fidelis in God and Country

Back in Vietnam we used A-1 Sky Raiders and UH-1 B "Huey" Gunships for close air support. One day we were in a firefight and called for artillery support. We called in the target's coordinates and the next thing we heard was a "Volkswagen" go flying over our heads. Then there was no more enemy from the tree line where Charlie was. It was a 16" round from the USS New Jersey, which was steaming onto "Dixie Station" in the South China Sea for the first time. A very effective way to end an engagement with the bad guys! May God Bless the United States Navy.

Joel Leson  
(Then) Plt Leader 3 / 4 USMC  
(Now) retired Lt Col USA

John,

This photo is of me standing on top of my tank at Camp Evans that was located



north of Hue City, RVN. I am all dressed up and fixin' to rotate back to The World that very day.

From what you and the others have done with the USMC VTA, I have no reason to say anything about a couple of little things getting me upset. The last info that I sent to you about my Purple Heart, it was up to me and no fault of anyone else. It just takes me time to remember where I put things or just to remember at all. I guess I'm different than some about the time I spent In-country. I lived from day to day and place to place. All I wanted was my tank crews to come home alive and in one piece... and they did. The rest is just a blur. So I guess what I am trying to say is you and the others is for all of you to keep up the good work.

Semper Fi,

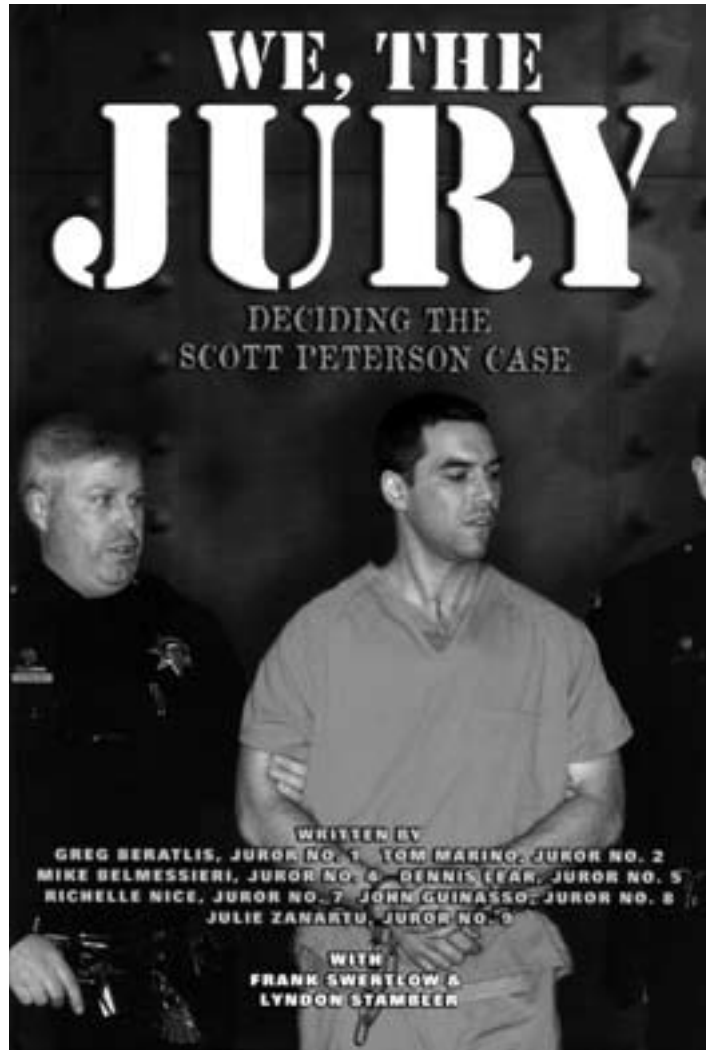
Jim Knee

## Social Security for Vets

Please share this with anyone who's had active duty service prior to January 2002 and planning for retirement. In a nutshell it boils down to this: You qualify for a higher social security payment because of your military service, for active duty any time from 1940 through 2001 (the program was done away with in January 2002). Up to \$1200 per year of earnings credit credited at time of application - which can make a substantial difference in social security monthly payments upon your retirement. You must bring your DD-214 to the Social Security Office - and you must ask for this benefit to receive it!

Soc Sec website: <http://www.ssa.gov/retire2/military.htm>

This is something to put in your files for when you apply for Social Security down the road. It is NOT just for retirees, BUT anyone who has served on active duty prior to January 2002. FYI - This benefit is not automatic, you must ask for it!



# We, The Jury

DECIDING THE SCOTT PETERSON CASE

BY MIKE BELMESSIERI

PHOENIX BOOKS, JANUARY, 2007

You are probably asking yourself what a book like this doing in a Vietnam veteran's magazine? But knowing how hard it is to get a book published, I am supportive of anyone who is able to make it through the difficult process, especially when it is one of our own members! Mike Belmessieri, or "Belmo" to those that know him, sent me an e-mail asking if I wanted to exchange books, one he had just written in exchange for a copy of mine. I had no idea what I agreed to other than I was happy to see a fellow tanker published. Imagine my surprise when Mike's book arrived only to learn that Mike had served on the jury of the biggest murder case of this young century— the infamous Scott Peterson case!

Scott Peterson, you may recall, was the fertilizer salesman whose seven month pregnant wife disappeared on Christmas Eve and whose body and fetus eerily surfaced months later in San Francisco Bay not far from the spot given earlier by Scott as where he went fishing that day. You may also remember the pretty blonde, Amber Frey, who came forward to testify that she was having an affair with Scott Peterson not realizing he was married. It was when the news picked up the story and broadcast his picture that Amber realized who she had been dating. Amber was wired-up by the police and Scott was subsequently caught in one lie after another which ultimately led to his downfall. But this is not what makes the book so interesting.

Mike brings you into the jury deliberation room with the unique personalities that 12 very different people bring to the table. The deliberations had all the excitement of any trial movie I had ever seen including jurors being thrown off the case by the judge. You learn what happens when an alternate juror now comes into the deliberations and how things have to start all over again. It was an eye-opening read into what transpires behind closed doors. At times it seemed like it would be impossible for 12 people to agree on anything. It was every bit as exciting as the book/movie, 12 Angry Men. I often found myself marveling that the trial system works even with 12 people as different from one another as this jury was. Keep in mind that this case was tried solely upon circumstantial evidence— something highly unusual in a Murder One case and had the potential of ending in a hung jury.

I highly recommend Mike and his fellow author's book; you will be amazed at the complexity of the deliberations and how such a diverse group of strangers can accomplish anything under such circumstances. You also realize the debt of gratitude society owes 12 ordinary people unlucky enough to be caught up in one of the most infamous of cases— all for \$15 a day! Mike and his fellow juror's lives were put on hold for almost 6 months. Some jurors lost their jobs and others worked for companies that wouldn't cover their time away. One individual had to work nights to keep his job and then sit through the trial during the day! It is a real testament to Mike and his fellow jurors. It seems so unfair that people have to give up so much when serving on a trial of this magnitude all for something they themselves didn't do.

Thank you, Mike for your jury service and for a fascinating book.

Review by Robert Peavey.

## Prostate Acknowledgement

AO & PROSTATE CANCER UPDATE 01: Veterans exposed to the herbicide Agent Orange are twice as likely to get prostate cancer as other veterans, UC Davis researchers found in a study published online by the journal Cancer. Prostate cancer in those men also comes on earlier and is more aggressive, said Dr. Karim Chaime, chief resident in urology at UC Davis and the study's lead author. The findings are a clear signal that men who worked with Agent Orange should be cared for differently, getting earlier biopsies and more aggressive treatment, he said. "This is a high-risk group." Chaime described the study of more than 13,000 Northern California veterans over eight years as "the biggest study ever done" on Agent Orange effects. It will be published in the 15 SEP print edition of Cancer, after online publication last week, and Chaime hopes it soon could lead to new Department of Veterans' Affairs treatment standards.

For Vietnam vet James McKasson, who participated in the study, the findings are a reminder that no one exposed to Agent Orange should delay prostate-cancer testing. McKasson, 62, a retired auto mechanic, said he's doing well after being diagnosed with prostate cancer last year – 40 years after he helped load Agent Orange onto planes in the 1960s. He worked with both liquid and powdered forms of the chemical, and "this stuff would slop around; it would drip on you," he recalled. "You'd walk through it and get it on your shoes, on your clothes, on your hands. ... They didn't give us any protective clothing at all." For decades, McKasson didn't worry much about studies

that linked exposure to diseases ranging from diabetes to soft-tissue cancer to birth defects in veterans' children. "I'm an advocate now," he said, telling his "stubborn" friends to have regular checks for prostate cancer.

The chemical was used widely during the Vietnam War to defoliate jungle areas where U.S. forces believed enemies were hiding. It also was used around U.S. military facilities at home and abroad as early as the 1950s, according to the Department of Veterans Affairs. About 375,000 men nationwide are on the military's Agent Orange registry of those exposed, and roughly one-third can be expected to develop prostate cancer, Chaime said. "This has huge implications for men, especially in the VA," but also for those treated by private insurance, whose primary care doctors and urologists may not have seen the latest data, he added. Of the 13,000 men followed by the study, just under half had been exposed to Agent Orange. Among the 6,214 exposed, 239 were diagnosed with prostate cancer over eight years, compared with 124 of 6,930 unexposed veterans. [Source: The Sacramento Bee Carrie Peyton Dahlberg article 5 Aug 08 ++]

Editor's Note: Don't delay in getting screened for this disease. We have had several members recently diagnosed with prostate cancer. Prostate cancer is something we all will get if we live long enough but our group has a high certainty we will see it around now. Please don't hold off and at least get a PSA blood test done which can be an early warning indicator.

## Two Ways to Win a Registration Fee at the 2009 Reunion

1. Most New Members - Bring in the most new members between now and July 1, 2009 wins you a free registration fee for the Charleston Reunion (You pay for your hotel room and we waive the registration fee.) All entries must come in on an application form with the sponsor's name filled in. Only entries received on an official application form and sent to John Wear by 7/1/09 will be eligible. Entry forms can be sent to you by John electronically or through the mail if requested.

2. Best Sea Story - If you haven't had a story published in the Sponson Box in the last two years, you are eligible for the Best Sea Story contest. Stories must be submitted by July 1, 2009 to be automatically entered. The winner will be selected and announced August 1, 2009 in the pre-reunion Sponson Box. Stories must be based upon your own Vietnam experience. The winning story will be judged on originality and interest; spelling and grammar will NOT count against you since the editor will polish everything submitted. The winning story will be determined by the Board of Directors. Entries must be 500 words minimum in length. Stories must be submitted to Bob Peavey to his e-mail address, repv@comcast.net on or before July 1, 2009.

## What members are doing?

At the last reunion in Las Vegas, NV, Fred Kellogg mentioned that his family always recognized May 19th to commemorate 1st Platoon, Bravo Co, 3rd Tank Bn battle outside the gates of the Khe Sanh in 1968. Since this year (2008) would be the 40th anniversary. I thought it would be fitting for those of us who were there and could make it to observe it in Washington DC. We also invited all who had been in 1st Platoon, B Co, 3rd Tk Bn during my tenure together with those whom I had adopted along the way.

As a side note, May 19th was Ho Chi Minh's birthday. For those not familiar with the May 19th battle, I will briefly review it. There was a large convoy scheduled to leave the Khe Sanh Combat Base. The usual mine sweep team operations were done by grunts from G/2/1. However, on this day, grunts from F/2/1, were assigned the mine sweep team duties. The mine sweep team was accompanied by two 1st Platoon tanks; one TC'd by Fred Kellogg and the other by Buzz Conklin. Fred's gunner was Carlos "Lupe" Trinidad, his driver was Stanley Williams, aka "Cricket" and his loader was Charlie Lehman aka "Sugar Bear". Buzz had Pat Baddgor for loader, Silvano Camadese for gunner, and Mark Anderson as driver.

The mine sweep team and the tanks triggered what turned into a huge ambush. They were out for about two hours of intense fighting. The mine sweep team and the two tanks were badly shot up and most of the tank crews were wounded and eventually medivaced. But the grunts and tankers gave better than they got.

Two other 1st Platoon tanks, TC'd by Rene Cerda and unfortunately, Rene Cerda and I cannot agree on who was the TC on the other tank, were assigned convoy escort duties that day and were waiting at the main gate for the mine sweep team to complete their assignment. Then, when I was finally given permission to relieve the first set of tanks, and I took out two more tanks. I took Rene's tank out; so, Jack Butcher, his loader, drew the shot straw and got displaced by me. John Cox was the gunner, and Rene was my loader. Clay (last name unknown) was our driver. Rick Oswood, a tank mechanic, was drafted to be the gunner on the second tank. I cannot remember who else was on the crew of the second tank.

We took out additional re-enforcements from Fox Co., 2/1 with us. When we arrived at the ambush site, F/2/1 command group was almost immediately wiped out. We fought for another three hours or so. Our tank took 13 or more RPGs and was left burning in the field. Rick's tank, the second tank, took about 8 RPGs. Most of tank crews were wounded and were medivaced. All fought with distinction, and all were decorated for the action. F/2/1 had eighteen Marines KIA and approximately 50-60 wounded that day.

At about midday, a fifth tank from 1st Platoon B Co. went out to assist in the "mop up" operation. Sgt. Cliffred Evans was the TC, Richard (LNU) aka "Surfer" was the loader, Richard "Rick"

Coulter was the gunner and Bill Dougherty aka "Doggie" was the assigned driver. However, according to the information received, Stanley Williams aka "Cricket" who was the assigned driver of Fred Kellogg's tank, who by this time Fred's tank had returned to the Khe Sanh base, got into the driver's seat and went out as the driver on the fifth tank. Apparently there was still a few NVA in the area and the tank encountered some light resistance. The tank engaged the NVA and took an RPG hit on the left side of the gun shield area. The RPG damaged the tank's turret, but the tank crew managed to hold off any further NVA attacks. The tank provided cover while the grunts picked up the dead and wounded. No one in this tank crew was wounded and as the tank returned to the Khe Sanh Combat base it passed by Lt. Himes' tank, which was still burning. Lt. Himes' tank was left out in the field that night so it could "cook off" any live rounds that were possibly left in the tank. All units returned safely to the base.

DC reunion; Rene Cerda, Fred Kellogg, Rick Oswood and I were the only attendees in Washington, D.C. who were with 1st Platoon, B Co and involved in the May 19th Khe Sanh battle. Attending the reunion were members of 2/1: Clyde Woods, the CO of G/2/1, Phil Leslie, a platoon sergeant of G/2/1 and Don Dennis of G/2/1. The corpsman for F Co, Michael "Doc" Pipkin and his wife was the only representative from F/2/1.

Fred Kellogg was accompanied by his son, Fred, Jr.; I was accompanied by my wife, Sandra. Other 1st Platoon members attending were Charlie Carson and his daughter, Bob Fornwalt, Jeff Griffith, Fred Mace, and Ron Shuppy and his wife, Emily and two daughters. Adopted were Harry Christiansen and his wife, Marsha; and Wally Young, his wife, Tonia, and daughter Amanda.

The pleasure of organizing this event brought me into frequent contact with some I hadn't seen for a while as well as others whom I talk to more often. However, it never would have happened had it not been for the help of Rick Oswood an excellent organizer and worrier. Through his connections and God's help we were able to work through the Annapolis-Old-Boy network and ended up dealing with the Commandant's senior aide. The aide got us into a VIP reception, which all in attendance rated the reception very high, prior to the Sunset Parade and then 50-Yard Line seats for the parade. And God held back the forecast rain.

On Saturday, May 17th, we all went to the new Marine Corps Museum near the Marine Corp Base at Quantico, VA and had dinner at the museum that night at Tuns Tavern, a replica of the original tavern where it all began in 1775. After dinner, we began filming in order to document and preserve the adventures and experiences we all had in Vietnam.

On May 18th, we continued documenting the Vietnam

experiences and continued filming. That evening we had dinner at a Mexican restaurant. Some went home after that.

On May 19th, those who were still in D.C., went to the Wall, returned to the hotel and finished filming that morning.

Semper Fi,

Col Harris "Alfie" Himes,  
USMCR



Craig and I got together during the Philadelphia reunion along with Rick Lewis of "C" Company, 1st tanks. That was a great reunion and as a result Craig came to Utah the following year for a week and in turn I went to Michigan for a week this year. During this past year Bill Dubose's sister Barbara found my name on the Internet and Bill made contact with me after 42 years. As we talked for an hour, it just seemed like yesterday that we saw each other the Christmas of 67 during which time we rotated home and promised to keep in touch... but we never did. After talking with Bill, I decided to get hold of Craig and go to see Bill in Chicago while I was in Michigan visiting Craig. Plans were made and the wives made plans to go to Niagara Falls while we were gone (one of my wife Patty's "Bucket List" items).

A six-hour drive led to one of the fondest reunion ever that three people ever had. We were able to stay in Bill's nice 5th wheel trailer. We spent countless hours swapping sea stories and remembering things good and bad. While Craig and I were there, Bill mentioned that the power company was going to charge him \$1500 dollars of remove trees from his power line and that his arthritis was preventing him from doing it himself. Craig volunteered our help and we took down three trees during our visit. We killed two birds with one stone by saving Bill a boat load of money and being able to visit our old pal. With this idea Craig thought maybe we could use the Vietnam Tankers Association to advertise asking anyone who may be needing help and with some of the members living close, maybe people would ask for help and members could respond in kind and offer their expertise. Anyway Craig asked me to send you some pictures and I hope they come through. Members can call Craig Newberry 810-735-4863 to try and establish a support program.

Semper Fi,

Joe Liu



Just thought I would let you know that the tanks that were next to the barracks on the circle at Camp Lejeune have moved to the Tank Park.

We are visiting our sons and their families this week. We were all at this past weekend's air show at MCAS Cherry Point and my oldest grand daughter, Brienne age 12, wanted a picture of her and me with a tank (she saw an Amtrack last evening I decided to grant her wish so we drove to Camp Lejeune.) When I went to the barracks and saw those pads empty my heart about stopped. I instinctively went to the Tank Park and sure enough at the entrance there were three Tanks; M48, M60 and one of those 120MM (can't remember the model number).

She now has her picture – see the attached.

Semper Fi,

Bruce  
Bruce C. Van Apeldoorn Sr.  
bvanapeldoorn@rochester.rr.com  
Home 585-527-0131  
Cell 252-514-5597  
73 Stanton Street  
Rochester, NY 14611



showed he had an outstanding arrest warrant for failure to appear in court on domestic violence and harassment charges. The driver was placed in custody. The passenger was told he would have to get out that's when the passenger pulled out a gun, pointing it in the face of Denver Police Officer Ryan Kobernick who began to grapple with the suspect. Lieutenant Curti, Deputy Guida and Trooper Wilder rushed to Officer Kobernick's aid. During the struggle, the suspect was able to fire his weapon twice, one round striking Lieutenant Curti in the left wrist, the second round striking Trooper Wilder in the left foot. Officer Kobernick also sustained a broken nose.

At some point during the altercation, the officers fell to the ground with the suspect still in possession of the firearm. Deputy Guida who had been pushed away from group, observed the suspect attempting to turn the gun in a downward position, aiming it directly at the head of Officer Kobernick. Deputy Guida was forced to quickly and decisively end the conflict by discharging his service weapon, fatally wounding the suspect.

It was later learned the suspect had an extensive criminal history, had been released on parole February 6, 2007, after serving time for burglary and had subsequently disappeared April 1, 2007.

Neither Lieutenant Curti nor Deputy Guida could have foreseen their personal risk when deciding to cover Trooper Wilder on July 26, 2007. However, they both performed in a commendable manner even after recognizing the great danger, ultimately preventing other officers and innocent citizens from being seriously injured or killed.

The Colorado State Police awarded two officers from the Arapahoe County Sheriff's Office and an Officer from the Denver Police Department with Certificates of Honor for their role in the incident. Lieutenant Steve Curti and Deputy Lewis Guida were working along with officers from a number of other metro-area law enforcement agencies on the evening of July 26, 2007 as part of the Metro DUI Task Force.

Curti and Guida and DPD Officer Ryan Kobernick responded to assist Wilder when it was discovered that the driver of a vehicle he had stopped had an outstanding warrant for his arrest. Once the driver was taken into custody, the passenger opened fire on officers wounding Curti and Wilder. The suspect was shot by law enforcement and later died at the hospital.

"Law enforcement officers across Colorado and around the nation face the many dangers of this profession on a daily basis in the pursuit of saving lives," said Colonel Mark Trostel, Chief of the Colorado State Patrol.



The Steve Curti of old with 2nd Platoon, Bravo Co., 1st Tanks.

John,  
I was driving through a remote area of Arizona on my way to the state convention of the Marine Corps League and came across this old M-60. Of course I thought of you and the guys and thought I'd forward this photo to you.

Semper Fi,

Richard A. Carmer  
(602) 363-4057  
carmer@cox.net



Steve Curti, right, accepts award.

#### ONE OF OUR OWN

On July 26, 2007, Officers from Denver, Northglenn and Wheat Ridge police departments, as well as deputies from Arapahoe, Douglas and Jefferson counties worked together with the State Patrol staffing the first checkpoint of the Metro DUI Task Force.

At approximately 10:30 PM Colorado State Patrol Trooper Dennis Wilder pulled over a car with a broken windshield in the parking lot of a 7-Eleven near West 10th Avenue and Federal Boulevard. Arapahoe County Sheriff's Lieutenant Steve Curti and Deputy Louis Guida were assigned to the Task Force and were already in the parking lot covering Trooper Wilder who initially suspected the driver was intoxicated. The driver was cleared by a sobriety test, however, a check of his license

This photo appeared in the 3rd Qtr., 2006 issue, on page 12, and one of the men was "unknown." Well, Vax has not only recalled who the "unknown" man is but he has found him and is going to (a) recruit him for the VTA, (b) have him get together for a mini-reunion with several other members of 3rd Plt, Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks and (c) make sure that he attends the next reunion!



Tony Simms, Tom Freeman, Bob Vaxter and Daryl Clock.

Editor's Note: This photo has never appeared in the Sponson Box. Could the sender have us mixed up with another tank publication? The horror! ♦

## JOKES

Marine and a sailor were sitting in a bar one day arguing over which was the superior service. After a swig of beer the Marine says, "Well, we had Iwo Jima."

Arching his eyebrows, the sailor replies, "We had the Battle of Midway." "Not entirely true", responded the Marine. "Some of those pilots were

Marines, in fact, Henderson Field on Guadalcanal was named after a Marine pilot\* killed at the Battle of Midway."

The sailor responds, "Point taken."

The Marine then says, "We Marines were born at Tun Tavern!"

The sailor, nodding agreement,

says, "But we had John Paul Jones."

The argument continued until the sailor comes up with what he thinks will end the discussion. With a flourish of finality he says, "The Navy invented sex!"

The Marine replies, "That is true, but it was the Marines who introduced it to women."



Some people just can't forget. God love 'em!

# New VA Information

**CHAP 61 CRSC CLAIMS:** About 20,000 veterans forced out of the military early by a combat-related injury could be eligible for hundreds in special compensation pay under new rules outlined by the services this month. Congressional researchers estimated the new program will cost the Defense Department about \$680 million over the next 10 years. The change, mandated by Congress last year, makes veterans who served less than 20 years (i.e. Chap 61, TERA, and TERA) eligible for Combat-Related Special Compensation payments from the Defense Department. Those funds are designed to restore money deducted from troops' military retirement accounts because they also receive veterans' disability payouts. The offset can trim a significant portion of the military retirement pay, and veterans groups have lobbied for years to end the deductions. Since 2002, service members with 20 years of military service and a combat-related injury have been receiving monthly Combat-Related Special Compensation, but those with fewer years were not eligible. Now, the new change is effective back to 1 JAN 08 making all combat veterans eligible to apply for six months of retroactive payments and future monthly compensation. Medical and TERA retirees must still provide documentation that shows a causal link between a current VA disability and a combat-related event. Department of Defense guidance defines a combat-related disability in one of the three following ways:

1. A Purple Heart disability, which is a disability with an assigned medical diagnosis code from the Veterans Affairs Schedule for Rating Disabilities, or VASRD, that was attributed to injuries for which the member was awarded a Purple Heart.

2. One with an assigned medical diagnosis code from the VASRD that was:

- incurred as a direct result of armed conflict;
  - as a result of hazardous service;
  - in the performance of duty under conditions simulating war;
- or
- through an instrumentality of war.

3. One with an assigned medical diagnosis code from the VASRD that was deemed presumptive or "presumed" by the VA to be incurred as a result of combat operations.

To receive the special compensation, veterans must be currently receiving military retired pay and veterans disability payments, and must have a 10% or greater rated disability recognized by the military as combat related. The amount of the monthly CRSC pay will be based on troops' rank, years of service and severity of their injury. In some cases the formula for Combat-Related Special Compensation could actually reduce a veteran's total monthly payments however, Defense Finance and Accounting service (DFAS) will calculate all of the disability pay impact to make sure veterans are receiving the highest payouts possible and begin CRSC payments within 60 to 90 working days of receiving the approval letter. All veterans, including recently separated service members, will have to apply to receive the new compensation by completing a DD Form 2860 with the required documentation attached. Required documentation includes a signed claim form and:

- a) Copy of Chapter 61 Board results (Chapter 61 claimants only).
- b) Copies of ALL VA rating decisions which include the letter and the narrative summaries
- c) Copies of ALL DD214's
- d) Medical records that support "HOW" the injury occurred for each claimed disability that meets the criteria for combat-related. Refer to CRSC website to learn what combat-related is.

PDF Claim forms can be downloaded at [www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd2860.pdf](http://www.dtic.mil/whs/directives/infomgt/forms/eforms/dd2860.pdf). For additional info and where to send applications refer to

- USA: [www.crsc.army.mil](http://www.crsc.army.mil)
  - USN/USMC: [www.hq.navy.mil/corb/CRSCB/combatrelated.htm](http://www.hq.navy.mil/corb/CRSCB/combatrelated.htm)
  - USCG: <http://www.uscg.mil/adm1/crsc.asp>
  - USAF: <http://www.afpc.randolph.af.mil/library/combat.asp>
- [Source: Stars & Stripes Leo Shane article 18 Jun 08 ++]

**SALUTING THE FLAG UPDATE 02:** President Bush signed on 28 JAN 08 a law amending federal code to allow a veteran to salute the U.S. flag while not in uniform in certain, but not all, situations. The amended federal code addresses actions for a viewer of the U.S. flag during its hoisting, lowering or passing. In these instances, the law allows a veteran in civilian attire to salute the flag. All other persons present should face the flag, or if applicable, remove their headdress with their right hand and hold it at the left shoulder, the hand being over the heart. Citizens of other countries present should stand at attention. All such conduct toward the flag in a moving column should be rendered at the moment the flag passes. However, another section of federal code that specifically relates to actions of those reciting the Pledge of Allegiance was not amended. In this case, a veteran in civilian attire is not specifically authorized to render a hand salute during the Pledge. In any case, a veteran in civilian clothes is authorized to place their right hand over their heart as has been tradition. [

**PTSD UPDATE 23:** In response to the growing number of veterans denied the mental health treatment needed to address their post traumatic stress who end up in legal trouble after self-medicating to suppress their anxieties, Sens. John Kerry (D-MA) and Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) on 1 AUG introduced the Services, Education, and Rehabilitation for Veterans (SERV) Act to create veteran drug treatment courts to support veterans combat the cycle of alcohol or drug addiction. A similar program is operational in Buffalo, NY and has already seen great success. The SERV Act would authorize funds to go to the Office of National Drug Control Policy for the development and implementation of veteran's treatment courts or to enhance operational drug courts to serve veterans. The grants would be administered by the Department of Justice in consultation with the Department of Veterans Affairs. To be eligible for funding the veteran's treatment court or drug court serving veterans must effectively integrate substance abuse treatment, mental health treatment, mandatory drug testing, sanctions and incentives, and transitional services in a judicially supervised court setting with jurisdiction over nonviolent, substance-abusing offenders that have served in the

United States military. Also included is the authorization for the National Drug Court Institute (NDCI). The NDCI is a bipartisan supported organization that conducts national, comprehensive training programs for State and local communities for the purpose of improving the professional skills of drug court practitioners and enhancing the ability of State and local communities to expand drug courts to reach all addicted citizens in need

"These treatment courts will address the specific challenges with drugs and alcohol too many veterans face when returning home from their honorable service overseas," said Senator John Kerry. "For those who have given so much for our country, we should address the serious issues of drug and alcohol addiction in an appropriate forum that recognizes that some veterans fall victim to substance abuse as a way to handle post-traumatic stress. It's well past time we offered our veterans services worthy of their sacrifice." Sen. Murkowski said, "Some of the brave men and women who have served our country fall victim to alcohol and drug addiction and end up in our criminal justice system. Drug courts are an effective way to break this cycle of abuse and help these veterans re-enter society. The Alaska Court System already has successful drug courts in Anchorage, Fairbanks, Bethel, Juneau and Ketchikan, and there is a Veterans Court in Anchorage. This bill would provide additional funding for some of Alaska's existing therapeutic court programs and would allow more nonviolent-offender programs to be developed across the state. The SERV Act is particularly important for Alaska, which has one of the highest veterans' per capita rates in the nation." [Source: Military.com AP article 1 Aug 08 ++]

## VA DISABILITY RATING CRITERIA:

A former 30-year employee of the Veterans Administration wrote the following after his retirement. He is also a disabled vet. It addresses the lack of knowledge many applicants have about what is involved in processing their disability claims. His statements are not to be interpreted in any way as being officially sanctioned by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The information is meant for general understanding only. There are always exceptions and the law is subject to change. We hope this helps alleviate some of the anger and frustration many experience due to the seemingly endless delay in processing their claim. When a veteran submits a claim to the VA, he/she should understand there are several prerequisites for a successful disability claim. Among them are:

1. The evidence of record must show the claimed condition was incurred in (first occurred or diagnosed) during military service. That means the medical evidence provided by the veteran and/or the service department (usually the Fed. Records Center in St. Louis) must show the claimed disability. If the disability pre-existed service, such as a knee condition, the evidence must show that the condition became worse during military service. That is one reason it is important to insist on a discharge physical examination. It is your last chance to make certain disabilities are in your record. REMEMBER, if the claimed disability is not shown in your service medical records it DIDN'T happen. Exceptions to this rule are conditions, which may not manifest until after military service is complete. For example: PTSD. In such cases, the veteran's service record is requested to determine if his/her service was under such conditions, that the present diagnosis can clearly be

associated with military service. The fact that your drill sergeant was mean to you would not qualify.

2. Assuming service medical records show the claimed disability exists then it must be determined how disabling the condition is at the present time. Usually the claimant is scheduled for an examination at the nearest VA Medical Center. The examining physician completes a report showing his/her diagnoses and clinical findings. Keeping with the knee example, the doctor will check for range of motion, looseness of the joint, pain, etc. For sake of our discussion, we will assume the knee was initially injured during military service.

3. The report is sent to the Regional Office for review. The rating specialist reviews all the medical evidence, with special consideration to the examining physician's report. The rating specialist then consults a rating schedule. The diagnosis tells him/her under which disability to rate the knee. For example, chronic knee strain, torn ACL, traumatic arthritis, etc. The clinical findings will be compared to descriptions given to various percentages. The percentage, which closest agrees with the physician's findings, will be given as the evaluation of the disability.

4. If the veteran has more than one disability, each of which is considered at least 10% disabling, they will be applied to a combined rating schedule to yield a combined evaluation. The individual disabilities are not added to give a final percentage. For example, assume our hypothetical veteran has 3 disabilities: knee, heart, and psychological. Each disability is considered 50% disabling. The veteran is not considered 150% disabled. What happens is each % is applied to the remaining healthy person. With no disabilities the veteran is considered 100% healthy. When the knee condition is considered, the veteran is now 50% disabled and 50% healthy. The 50% evaluation of his heart is applied to the remaining healthy 50% and he/she is considered 75% disabled and 25% healthy. Since evaluations are only in even 10%, the evaluation is rounded off to 80% disabled and 20% healthy. The final 50% psychological condition is applied to the remaining 25% healthy person. Remember the actual combined evaluation was 75%. It was just rounded to 80%. He/she is now 88% disabled. The evaluation is rounded to 90% disabled and 10% healthy.

5. The veteran would automatically be considered for individual unemployability. The rating specialist would determine that if based on the veteran's education, skills, etc. are his/her disabilities so severe as to render him/her individually unemployable. If the answer is yes, he/she is paid at the 100% rate although his/her disabilities only warrant a 90% evaluation. Although the monetary benefit is the same, there is an important distinction between a combined scheduler 100% and 100% due to individual unemployability. If the 100% is by the schedule, the veteran may, if able, hold a regular job. If the 100% is due to being unemployable, he/she may not engage in anything other than marginal employment. The VA checks annually through the individual states for veterans, who are considered unemployable and are holding a regular job. It can become very ugly financially for the veteran, if he/she is caught. It could result in anything from a reduced evaluation, to full repayment, to jail time. Contrary to popular belief, the mind set in the VA is to resolve all doubt in favor of the veteran. Consider, if the claimed benefit can be granted, there is a happy veteran and one less file someone must review. ♦



## I never left Vietnam

BY SISTO SANDOVAL

I dried my tears as the sun rose above the jungles canopy. I cried last night for my buddies who left in peace. I stared in numbness as the winds blew off the ponchos from their tangled bodies. The rains cleansed their souls. I reached out to heaven to touch the face of God. I heard the choppers in the distance bringing angels to take home the brave. I sat in silence with sounds still ringing.

I pray today as I did those nights, that the fright of not awaking leave my side. I never left Vietnam; I carry her in my heart, my soul for those I left behind. I wonder if the dreams will ever leave. If the dragon will fly away or will it devour my mind and cause pain once more.

I dried my tears as the sun rose above the jungles canopy. The darkness called my name and knew my fear. The winds carried my prayers. The rain bathed my soul and the sun brought hope once more.

I never left Vietnam; I carry her in my heart, my soul for she took all innocence from me. She took my youth and gave birth to dreams of pain and anguish. I pray for those who did their part, now and then to let me walk alone in this my country. I am not as free, like those who have never seen.

I am not free for in my heart I still dry my tears as the sun raises above the skies each morn. I still cry at night in remembrance of those who fought for freedoms sake, my brothers who stood with me in the pains of rain, the dusts of time the heat of days and nights.

I reach out to heaven to touch the face of God and ask our Lord to bless our brothers/sisters who do their part.

Sisto Sandoval,  
Vietnam Veteran (1968-1969)  
3081 Shoshone Dr.  
Lake Havasu City, AZ 86406-8669  
spsls@npgcable.com  
928-780-1597

Sisto is a retired building inspector and investigator for the City of Los Angeles and now lives in Lake Havasu City, AZ. He spent almost two tours in Vietnam with the U.S. Army in 1968-69. ♦



## Part II DMZ Invasion



After the abortive May 8 attack on Con Thien, General Giap's forces ensconced in the DMZ commenced daily bombardments of the Marines along the Trace. To ensure that the NVA would not be able to disrupt construction of "McNamara's Wall," General Westmoreland and MACV authorized III MAF to invade the southern half of the DMZ.

Supported by Companies A and B, 3d Tank Battalion, eight U.S. Marine and five ARVN infantry battalions were poised for the first-ever incursion into the DMZ on May 17, 1967. The basic concept for the allied invasion of the DMZ involved ground, amphibious, and heli-borne operations in the eastern portion of the DMZ as far north as the Ben Hai River.

Operation Prairie IV would be suspended, and that operation area would become Operation Hickory for the Marines and Operation Lam Son 54 for the South Vietnamese. SLF Alpha would make an amphibious landing off the southern DMZ coast with BLT 1/3 and advance inland. That operation was named Beau Charger. SLF Bravo, BLT 2/3, would join the Hickory invasion forces on May 20 in a heli-borne operation code-named Belt Tight. Once the allied forces reached the Ben Hai, they would do an about face and drive south, destroying all enemy units and fortifications. A major objective was the removal of all indigenous persons from the area to create a free fire zone. Perhaps 10,000 noncombatants

would be uprooted from their ancestral homes and relocated at the government resettlement center being constructed near Cam Lo.

### OPERATION HICKORY

The first day of Hickory, May 17, saw the largest single mission fired by artillery during the entire operation. A massive prep fire mission was carried out in the pre-dawn hours on 1/9's nemesis, the heavily fortified bunker complex northwest of Phu An. After the arty ceased firing, extensive air strikes pummeled the area. Sweeping through the still-smoking complex that had held out against 1/9 for four days, the Marines were relieved to find nearly all of the 75 enemy bunkers damaged or destroyed.

To the east of 1/9, 2/26 continued to advance north along with 2/9 following in trace. Golf Company, 2/26 was only 1,000 meters east of Con Thien, just north of the Trace when they came under intense small arms and mortar fire from an L-shaped ambush. The Marines called for helicopter gunships to strafe the enemy position. In all of the smoke and confusion, one of the gunships opened up on the Marines. L/Cpl "Pappy" Reynolds, driver on B-11, heard his buddy in B-14, Sgt. Hambleton, come over the open radio net cursing at the helicopters that had just strafed them. "You \*%#&&\*s strafe us again and by God I'll return fire!" Reynolds buttoned down his hatch just in case, but the friendly fire ceased.

The Push North. The Marine firebase at Con Thien was defended by the 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., 4<sup>th</sup> Marines. Directly south of 1/4 was the bloodied 1<sup>st</sup> Bn., 9<sup>th</sup> Marines, responsible for protecting Con Thien's rear and ensuring that the vital MSR from Cam Lo remained secure. The two maneuver battalions, 2/26 and 2/9, plus 20 tanks from Alpha and Bravo, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks, had pushed north and were headed directly into a bombed-out no-man's land fraught with danger lurking every step of the way.

The NVA were determined to hold their ground. Undeterred by his devastating defeat at Con Thien on May 8, General Giap intended to make the allies pay with their blood for every yard they advanced towards the DMZ. The terrain east and north of Con Thien was ideal for a defense-in-depth strategy. Densely wooded treelines amidst shrub-and-tree-covered hedgerows provided perfect cover for the NVA lying in wait for Marine units to advance towards them across open fields and abandoned rice paddies.



The four Marine tank platoons supporting the drive north had made a difference. They were usually able to keep attacking through the firestorm of popping bullets and exploding mortar shells, knocking out bunkers and suppressing the enemy's automatic weapons fire. But the tankers had suffered numerous casualties from RPGs, and anti-tank mines were also taking their toll of the armored force.

"Pappy" Reynolds tank had hit a mine the previous evening, blowing off two sets of road wheels. He was towed back to the grunt CP where his tank commander, 2d/Lt Rivero, took command of a different 1<sup>st</sup> Platoon tank so he could continue leading his platoon on the operation. As Reynold's tank and another mine-damaged

tank were being towed back to Con Thien by two other tanks, the four armored vehicles came under fire. RPG trails zipped past them as they returned fire with their 90mm cannons and machine guns. Reynolds managed to climb up into the turret and fire his cupola-mounted fifty—three or four shots at a time until it jammed.

When the shooting died down, Reynolds heard someone rattling and banging the water cans strapped down on his tank. "What the hell you want?" he growled to the grunt. The man explained that his buddy had been shot, his intestines were hanging out, and he needed water to put on his buddy's intestines. Reynolds gave him his last five-gallon water can, the one he had stashed under the gunner's seat. As Reynolds watched the Marine crawl away, dragging the water can, he disappeared in a dirty black and pink explosion. A mortar round had hit him right between the shoulder blades. His headless body did a little flop and laid there.

By 1600 of the second day of Hickory, 2/9 and 2/26 had

advanced north as far as the road junction near the "marketplace" indicated on their maps beside Route 561. The sun's heat was mind-numbing in intensity as harassing sniper fire, mortars, and mines dogged the Marines all along the line of advance. No sooner was one enemy pocket eliminated, then another opened fire a few hundred meters further away.

During a lull in the action, an Alpha Company tank crew climbed out of their "mobile oven" to cool off. An RPG team fired from nearly point blank range, hitting the vehicle's searchlight knob. The explosion sprayed all four crewmen with shrapnel, seriously injuring two of the Marines.

Riddled by several jagged chunks of shrapnel, PFC Robert

Stokes had blood shooting out of one arm. Then mortars started impacting. Stokes instinctively crawled under the tank. A corpsman crawled under there with him and got the bleeding stopped. Then the corpsman shouted, "The tank's on fire, we gotta get outta here!" He dragged Stokes out from under the tank and hoisted him onto his shoulder and carried him to safety. Smoke poured from the rear turret gypsy rack, but only some tarps and extra clothes had caught fire. It looked much worse than it really was.

Despite his wounds, the rookie driver, PFC Joe Harrigan, jumped back into his driver's compartment to turn on the master switch so the tank turret and guns could function electrically, all the while thinking, "the tanks going to blow up and I'm gonna die!" To everyone's relief, it only took a few minutes for the fire on the back of the turret to burn itself out. With the power restored to his tank, Cpl John Chambers and a nearby grunt climbed into the turret and fired a dozen rounds of HE and canister at the NVA who were maneuvering for another attack. The combined firepower of the tank and nearby 2/9 grunts again forced the enemy back.

Day 3. Combatants along both sides of the DMZ were awakened early on the morning of May 19 by the sounds of artillery booming in from three directions:

Gio Linh to the east, Cam Lo and Camp Carroll to the south, and from the NVA in the north. The Marines anticipated another day of bloody fighting as they forged ahead towards the DMZ.

At 0800, ten 60mm mortars hit G/2/26, wounding 16 men. An hour later, Lieutenant Fred Rivero had a French female war correspondent named Cathy Leroy sitting on the back of his tank taking photographs. More mortar shells whooshed down, seriously wounding her along with several nearby Golf Company Marines. Lying on the ground, her shirt front bloody, passing grunts could only stare and wonder who she was and what in the hell she was doing out there in no-man's land with them.

Capt. Robert J. Thompson's Hotel Company, 2/9, the easternmost company in the battalion, came under heavy attack near the intersection of Routes 605 and 561 at the "marketplace." Two Alpha Company tanks moved up to attack the enemy fortifications, firing canister rounds. The dozer tank, A-42 ("Earth-movin' Mama"), was hit by several RPGs and exploded in flames. Cpl Ratliff was killed instantly in the gunner's seat. The tank commander, Cpl Lozenski, later succumbed to his injuries. PFCs Kennedy and Summerlot, both unconscious, survived because a few brave grunts pulled them out of their burning tank.

A second tank, "Soul Sauce," came up to assist A-42 and was also disabled by RPGs. Altogether, three crewmen were killed and four wounded on the two tanks. Capt Thompson led his company forward to where they were able to lay down enough firepower to recover the casualties and withdraw. He then called in supporting arms to plaster the enemy stronghold.

The 1<sup>st</sup> Battalion, 9<sup>th</sup> Marines, and especially Bravo Company, would come to know that "marketplace" area quite well on July 2 during Operation Buffalo.

Into the DMZ. The next objective facing 2/9 was a bombed-out village located 2,500 meters northeast of Con Thien and less than a mile from the southern border of the DMZ. On May 20, 2/9 prepared to assault this village named Gia Binh. The NVA had built an 800-meter long bunker complex there. At 0930, accompanied by two flame tanks and one gun tank, the attack jumped off. The flame tanks torched the bunker complex while the gun tank blasted away with all weapons firing. Enemy resistance was surprisingly weak. Much to the relief of the battle-weary grunts and tankers, the main NVA force had apparently pulled out in great haste just prior to the tank assault, leaving behind large quantities of equipment and ammunition.

Another huge vacated complex was discovered two miles north of Con Thien, just inside the southern DMZ boundary, by 2/26. The constant pressure from allied air, ground and artillery forces had forced the NVA to abandon their many fortified complexes surrounding Con Thien.

The Third Battalion, 4<sup>th</sup> Marines had been heli-lifted into positions on the southern bank of the Ben Hai on May 18. They were pushing south through the DMZ as 2/9 and 2/26 were moving north. Resistance had been light for 3/4, but they discovered numerous bunkers, trenches, and rice caches as they advanced.

At midnight on May 28, all operations to clear the DMZ ended. Enemy contact had diminished dramatically. More than 50 tons of rice and ten tons of ordnance had been destroyed or captured. Total enemy casualties for the combined Marine/ARVN operations were 789 killed, 37 captured, and 187 weapons taken. The Marines lost 142 killed and 896 wounded, while the ARVN lost 22 killed and 122 wounded.

The Marines and their South Vietnamese allies had been extremely successful. Later assessments would conclude that it was one of the better coordinated offensives of the war. Some historians have even stated that there was never a better time during the entire Vietnam conflict to carry the war into the enemy's back yard by crossing the Ben Hai River and continuing the attack north. The North Vietnamese had been caught off guard. But capital hill politicians prevented the Allies from pursuing that golden opportunity. Perhaps it was fear of Chinese intervention if the Allies came across the DMZ en masse. No one in our government relished the idea of that nightmarish Korean War scenario, when hundreds of thousands of Chinese troops counterattacked the UN forces approaching the border with Manchuria in 1950.

Hickory was regarded as a daring escalation of the war at the time. In retrospect the analogy could be made that Hickory was only a Band-Aid, when a tourniquet was needed to stem the flow of men and materiel from the north and neutralize the NVA's artillery capability from above the Ben Hai. Despite stopping short of creating a serious setback for the North Vietnamese, Hickory did accomplish two goals: removal of the local citizenry to create a free-fire zone; and, it bought some time for work on the barrier plan to proceed with less disruption by General Giap's forces. ♦

# History of the Patton Tank Part III

## The M48A3

BY GERRY HODUM

Though the Corps passed on the M48A2 it did realize that the shortcomings of the M48 series had to be addressed. It had monitored the experimental vehicles and different up-grade programs ongoing and was looking for the best bang for the buck as it has always done. It appears that the feelings were nothing really offered that much over what the Corps had in hand. The Army was considering an upgrade to the M48A2 of a diesel power package and a 105mm gun. One major shortcoming was the M1 cupola; it would not permit the installation of the upcoming night vision equipment in development and was cramped, had limited vision and a small ammunition supply. A new tank program, XM60, was addressing that problem with a new cupola, the M19 and a new hull configuration. This program initially used an M48A2 turret with a 105mm gun installed, modified to accept the new M19 cupola using an adapter ring. The cupola used a newly developed short receiver 0.50 caliber machine gun (M85). The Corps however looked at the stock of 90mm gun tubes and the 90mm ammunition stocks including the new T300 HEAT round (MV4000 fps) and felt the upgrade program was best at the time but not with the 105mm or the new M19 cupola and the newly developed and scarce M85 machine gun. Modification and upgrade of the M48A1's (approximately 420-425 initially) for the Corps was to be done at two Army Depots, Red River Texas and Anniston Alabama. The tank went through a number of designations but was fielded as M48A3 Patton tank early on in 1963.

The Corps sent enlisted and officer maintenance personnel to the New Vehicle School at Detroit Michigan, located at the site of

the Chrysler tank plant which was producing M60 and M60A1's. There were three phases to this training, automotive, turret, and fire control. This schooling showed that the M48A3 was a vast improvement over the M48A1. The automotive improvements were the AVDS-1790-2A engine. One note here, the -2A engine was called the "smokeless" engine. Having operated an XM60 with a -2 engine installed I can truthfully say that "smokeless" part was true, a -2 engine at high RPM's emitted a LARGE BLACK CLOUD of exhaust smoke that disclosed positions and made crewmen sick from the fumes. An improved CD-850-6A transmission, improved drivers controls, large aluminum fuel tanks (385 gallons, vs. 200 A1) gave a longer operating range (300 miles vs. 70/90 miles M48A1). This capacity was made possible because the auxiliary generator could be deleted since the diesel engine at idle supplied sufficient power to maintain the six (6) batteries. The upgraded suspension included removal of any track tension idlers, improved compensating idlers, road wheel arms and housings. One particular change was the addition of an access port so the anchored end of a torsion bar could have a drift pin and sledge used to assist in removal when required. Major rework included new top deck armor and rear grill doors that improved power pack cooling and reduced the infrared signature from anti-tank missile seeker observation.

Some of the M48A3's were received with only three support rollers and two removed with armored plates bolted to the hull. This practice was stopped and parts were received to install support rollers. An M60 type diesel heater was installed along with a two shot CO2 fire extinguishing system. New and



upgraded wiring and routing of linkages away from the hull floor and into the "V" of the hull increased protection from mine damage. Fender mounted side loading removable filter air cleaners were installed to supply the vast air requirements of the diesel engine and making it easy to service them.

Engine air could be through the turret (for fording or dusty area's) or from the engine compartment (for cold weather operations) depending on how the air filter access plates were installed. The hull and turret were machined in the race ring area for the installation



of a fording seal. Mounted to the hull, this seal was inflated by a hand pump in the driver's area. This made installation of the fording kit much easier (remember that "belly band"?).

In the turret area the mounting of the Cadillac Gage constant displacement hydraulic system was a vast improvement over the Oil-gear system with it's LOUD electric motor used in the

earlier series M48's. A large hydraulic accumulator permitted some traverse and/or power elevation without the electric motor running. The super elevation actuator, in the system, kept the reticules (gunners sight and TC'S range finder) on the aiming point as the tank commander introduced range. The fire control improvements included a "split image" coincidence range finder (M17 series) (NO MORE FLYING GEESE!!), a new ballistic drive (M10B1 series) that include a "temperature compensating link" that maintained the correct parallelograms in the ballistic drive as the turret expanded and contracted from solar radiation. This insured that bore sight and zeroing inputs were retained and not compromised. The M31 eight power daylight periscope and M44 infinity sight were provided for the gunner in a new mount. An articulated telescope (M105) mounted to the gun mount had the eyepiece at head height for the gunner. This replaced the straight tube telescope of earlier tanks and was welcomed by all. The ballistic computer had updated cams and designations installed. All fire control items were presented in metrics and bore sight was at 1200 meters rather than 1500 yards as in the past. The Corps retained

the 0.30 cal machine gun (M1919A4/M37) and rejected the new design 7.62mm M73. Some one had good sense in this! Searchlight mounting points were installed on the gun shield along with a new waterproof gun shield and storage points on the ventilator bulge. Electrical wiring changes included a permanent searchlight cable connector on the turret roof. At first the 18" searchlight was modified mount wise and cable connector wise to fit the mounts and connector.

These units were old and worn but did the job while new equipment was being developed and procured. As new AN/VSS-1 2.2 KW xenon/infrared searchlights became available the 18-inch lights were replaced. All M48A3 vehicles came with the installed NBC M13A1 gas particulate units in the hull and turret with hoses routed and secured at all crew stations.

Along with the procurement of the M48A3 vehicle was the development of the M67A2 flame tank at the same time. The Corps M48A1 fleet had M67 flame tanks based on the M48A1 structure, The M67A1 was a flame tank used by the US Army based on the M48A2 vehicle. Thus when the Corps requested conversion along M48A3 lines the result was M67A2. However the Corps again turned down the troubled M73 machine gun and retained the reliable Browning M1919A4/M37 0.30 caliber. The Corps took its M48A3's and it's M67A2's into Viet Nam and Dominican Republic combat with many very happy Marine tankers glad not to be using gas fueled M48A1's or M48A2's. However complaints and combat user data became available from the tanks use in Viet Nam. Units sent complaints to headquarters both system wise and some backdoor efforts. It is to be



There were changes with the “Mod B” program. These included the vision ring with hatch cover, modification of the rear grill door area with protection of the grills to prevent them being bent in the bush and reducing the cooling of the power pack. The taillights were also protected by added armor. The tank infantry phone box was raised and moved away from the right rear fender area to prevent damage when fenders were raised or damaged by the jungle during trail busting. A gunners M32 daylight and infrared sights replaced the M31 day sights to be used with the new AN/VSS-1 day/infrared searchlights. Most Mod B’s were completed by Bowen- McLaughlin-York (BMY) at York PA. Though still with shortcomings the M48A3 gave reliable service and powerful and accurate firepower and holds a special place in the Marine Tankers history with the Patton series of vehicles. ♦

noted that the M1cupola was high on the list and was never to satisfy any one. Units mounted the fifty on top, on the side of the cupola, the turret roof and fired from exposed positions. Various attempts were made but NONE ever solved the space, poor vision, constricted mounting of the M2 and a proper ammunition supply. One attempt was to install the vision ring (“Doughnut Ring”) between the cupola and turret structure. This gave 360 degrees of vision and some space improvement, particularly if the new extended (bulged) commanders hatch was installed (not all were done) but it still didn’t solve the gun problem. Various “modified” chutes for the links were tried (longer, shorter, lined rigid and flexible) links still jammed. Front mounting pins were modified to permit easier mounting and dismounting of the gun. The available ammunition supply was never solved to satisfy anyone. The attempt to mount the M19 cupola was terminated, as it was determined that the loaders hatch was blocked when the cupola was rotated to the right preventing the hatch from being opened.



# Fort Hannah

BY RON KNIGHT

Things were pretty quiet around the An Hoa Combat Base, the ammo dump hadn’t been hit in several months, nor had Liberty Bridge been overrun lately. The monsoons had subsided, and the sea of mud in the tank park reverted to bedrock. It was March, 1969.

For the most part, the morning road sweeps up Liberty Road to Phu Loc (6) were uneventful except for the booby traps the grunts tripped on a daily basis. Second and Fourth Platoons, B Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks were enjoying the good life! Yes, for you historians, B Company had a 4<sup>th</sup> platoon of M48A3’s in support of 5<sup>th</sup> Marines at An Hoa.

Why all of a sudden Staff Sgt. Hannah decided we needed a bunker in the tank park is still a mystery. Maybe he was getting short and wanted to see the “world” again, who knew? And it wasn’t going to be your ordinary bunker; no, it had to be a big structure. In typical Marine fashion, he procured a Vietnamese work party, made up mostly of old pappasons from the local ville. I remember providing them with C-rations, but can’t recall if any MPC changed hands. As a side note, I can still picture one of the old pappasons pouring instant coffee into a Coke bottle full of tepid water, shaking it up and drinking it— no doubt an early Starbucks fan.

SSgt Hannah supervised the entire process, as the other Staff NCO’s were preoccupied with more important things like the proper preparation of C-rations, rotating their beer stock and looking for the next cup of coffee. The finished project would have made King Tut proud for it was only exceeded in size by the Great Pyramids at Giza. Needless to say, he took a lot of ribbing from the young Marines over Ft Hannah, as it became known.

showers. It was mid-day so we weren’t expecting much of anything to take place; we were glad to be out of the field. It was then that we heard the crack of 122mm rockets hitting south of the tank park—and they were “walking our way”. No one said a word, there wasn’t a single siren or alarm sounded, no one even hollered, “Incoming!” We must have been getting too salty for everyone calmly headed for Fort Hannah. SSgt Moore and I arrived at the entrance about the same time and after exchanging proper military protocol, i.e. enlisted first, no you go lieutenant, no you go Sgt, he pushed me into the bunker just as a rocket landed in our vicinity! SSgt Moore came flying into the bunker and landed in a heap on the ground.

We were in Fort Hannah for about 10 minutes when the “all clear” sounded— at least that part of the warning system worked. We exited the bunker and came face-to-face with a huge crater about 15 feet in diameter and 7 feet deep. A rocket had hit the corner of the SNCO/ Officer hooch on the pallet walkway where I had been standing, shootin’ the shit with somebody when the rocket attack started. SSgt Moore complained of a backache and when he took his T-shirt off, he had a welt across his back the same size as a nearby board that had blown off a pallet on the sidewalk. No broken skin – no Purple Heart.



Minutes after the rocket attack



Several weeks later, my Second Platoon came in from several days in the field. We were busy restocking the tanks and hitting the

SSgt Hannah suddenly earned the eternal admiration of the younger Marines and this lieutenant. For had it not been for the Great Pyramid at An Hoa, I would not be relating this story today. ♦

## VTA BUMPER STICKERS

Minimum order = 2 stickers for \$5.00  
They are \$1.50 each for additional stickers.  
Free postage  
Send order with a check made out to: USMC VTA

USMC VTA  
c/o Ron Knight  
720 Quail Run Court  
Alpharetta, GA 30005-8920



BY ROBERT PEAVEY



# The Search Continues

The last issue of our magazine had a story that deeply moved me when I first read it in the New York Times Sunday Magazine, it was titled, *Ferguson*, and was written by a Michael Norman. It was a sad story but an endearing tribute to a man no one knew. The story began with an FNG stepping off a chopper in a remote firebase on the DMZ and says to the first person he comes across, "Hi! I'm Ferguson. Where's the CP"? That question was directed at the story's author, Michael Norman. Ten seconds later the new guy was dead— the victim of an enemy artillery round. No one knew who the man was; he had only spoken but a few words to a single person. And because they couldn't find any dogtags, it became the author's unfortunate duty to have to go to Da Nang to ID the body. Being asked to ID someone you didn't know seemed a dumb thing to Michael— but that was Vietnam.

The author has carried that name with him ever since that day; he felt it his duty to remember someone no one else will. After all, the stranger uttered but a few words and then was gone. "Ferguson" was an encouragement for us all to carry the names of Marines we served with. In the author's words, "Remembering was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another". And let's face it; many of us knew a Ferguson.

But before I could publish Michael's story and share it with you, there are copyright issues I have to respect, namely getting the author's approval as well as the original publication's permission. This can be a tedious process filled with lengthy delays. I only had the author's name and a brief bio at the end of the story stating that Michael was now a Professor of Journalism at New York University. This little tidbit made it possible, through the miracle of the Internet, to track him down

and obtain an e-mail address. I e-mailed him and explained that I wanted to publish his article in our newsletter. He was thrilled that his story would appear in a Vietnam veteran's publication, especially a Marine one; he instantly gave his permission. He went on to tell me that appearing in a tanker's magazine made it all the more special to him because he was endeared to tanks. Naturally, I had to ask how the romance started?

He explained that on that April 19, 1968 on Route 9, between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh, at a spot called Bridge 28, a sizeable ambush was unleashed on a unit of Marines from 2/9. As bullets and men fell around him, Michael instinctively dove for the nearest cover, which turned out to an M48A3. During moments like this, one doesn't always think rationally but reacts instinctively; it is what keeps many people alive. He dove under the nearest thing he could find and soon found himself permanently lodged under 52 tons of Marine steel.

There is one minor detail I failed to share with you: Michael was the infantry platoon's radioman, meaning he had a PRC-25 radio on his back. He was wedged under the tank tighter than a fat tick on a dog with no legs! There was no backing out! He screamed to his fellow grunts to be pulled out as bullets impacted the ground around him. Suddenly, from directly overhead, a big hairy arm came out of nowhere and yanked the radio off his back! He could now crawl back out; he dashed to the far side of the tank putting as much between him and a dozen AK-47s as he could. He attributes his survival to one very strong tank driver.

His description of the event baffled me for I couldn't imagine how a driver, who was most certainly buttoned-up, was even aware that a

grunt was stuck under his tank in the middle of a firefight? I e-mailed back to Michael telling him it was a miracle he wasn't run over.

I promised him that I would try and find the tank and its driver through our organization to which he replied, "There's a bottle of single malt Scotch for that driver if you find him".

I posted a short description of the ambush in the same Sponson Box that ran Michael's story, "Ferguson", but in the section called, "Looking For" in the hopes someone would recognize the title, "April 19, 1968 - Route 9".

To my surprise my phone rang just days after our publisher mailed out the Sponson Box. It was from John "Beaner" Juarez who said he was at the very ambush site mentioned in my posting. He said he was part of a reaction force from Ca Lu. Naturally I assumed that John and his tank came racing out of Ca Lu to support the beleaguered grunts— and that's when the wind was taken out of me!

"Beaner" explained that he arrived at the ambush site in a six-by loaded with grunts. Naturally I was awestruck and said I had no idea that 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks ever operated without their tanks. And that's when it got weird! He said he wasn't with 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks but rather 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks! I tried to correct his obvious mistake for it was impossible in 1968 for 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks to be operating that far north just outside Khe Sanh. After all, it was 90 miles outside their TOAR!

John went on to relate the rest of his story. Two months earlier his platoon, from Bravo Company, 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks, was on float when it was ordered to make a landing at Cua Viet, about 8 miles below the DMZ. They were part of a reaction force for some hot situation, which no one remembers now, but it required no tanks. In other words, the tank crews landed as grunts, leaving their vehicles on ship! "Beaner" was to live every tanker's nightmare— humpin' in the grass, draggin' his ass with the mud and the bugs! He was living the quintessential, "Every Marine...".

After my returned to its normal rhythm, he shared with me his



Tanker now M-60 gunner Juarez (on right) hadn't seen a tank in 2 months! Photo by John Juarez

story of the April 19<sup>th</sup> ambush. He was at Ca Lu when his grunt unit was quickly loaded on six-bys, which flew to the ambush site at breakneck speed, determined to break any ambush they might encounter along the way. The ambush site was at a bridge simply called, Bridge 28— a nameless little nothing of a bridge; in fact the term "bridge" is an overstated use of the word. Bridge 28 was one of a score of little overpasses that dotted Route 9, so many so, that each had been given a number and all were too obscure to rate a name. He described the truck ride as the most terrifying ride of his life, surrounded by cavernous drop-offs on one-side and cliff walls on the other over a narrow dirt road, which was Route 9. Anyone who's traveled far western Route 9 knows that "Route" was another one of those much overused words only because it was called that on a map. It should have been called, "Country Dirt Road 9"— any map in the US would have shown it as a series of brown dashes and not the red line that appeared on I-Corps maps.

The convoy reached the ambush site and discovered what was left of an almost wiped out Marine rifle company. "Beaner" described the site as one he will never forget, not only because of the dead and wounded scattered all over the road, but because it was the first time since leaving ship, two months earlier, that he got to see a tank again! Sitting near the bridge was a flame tank and a gun tank. Juarez said he never imagined he would be looking up at a tank in envy.

I was astounded after hearing his story and asked if he could help identify either of the tanks or crew members for me, but he reminded me that he was from 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks— "Who would I know?"

He shared with me a number of photos from that day which I forwarded to Michael Norman to see if he recognized anyone in the pictures. He confirmed that it was, indeed, Bridge 28 and that chills went down his spine as he was suddenly taken back after a 40-year absence.

But I still wasn't any closer in identifying either of the tanks let



Ambush site and battle at Bridge 28

Photo by John Juarez

alone discovering Michael's savior. And then I received a phone call from Darrell Clock.

Darrell explained he was with Charlie Company, 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks and that he was definitely at that bridge that day. He confirmed that the

grunts had taken a horrible beating. He was the TC of the gun tank seen by Beaner that day. His tank had been just up the road at Bridge 32 waiting repairs for a few minor problems— little things like no brakes and a pair of RPG holes in the turret. Darrell explained that the holes weren't a bad thing; they helped with airflow on those especially hot days. He also mentioned that the tank had also lost its driver's escape hatch. It sounded like a fine specimen of a tank and certainly up to spec for a 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks' vehicle having survived Tet, Khe Sanh, and mini-Tet, which was currently underway. Who had time to fix vehicles?

On April 19, 1968, Darrell's tank was ordered, with no brakes, to accompanying a flame tank and rush to the aid of a unit from 2/9 ambushed at Bridge 28. The two tanks arrived minutes after the firefight started and they immediately began engaging NVA on both sides of the road. He confirmed that some of the grunts were immediately drawn to the protection offered by the steel giants— any port in a storm!

But Darrell does not remember anyone getting stuck under his tank adding, "It could have happened, but as TC I was a little busy at the time". Darrell was, however, able to give me one important piece of

information: the driver's name: "Madisongale" and that he was from Texas. I immediately went to our membership list only to find he is not a member. I am still trying to track him down. But I am certain it was the missing escape hatch that saved Michael Norman from becoming just a stain on Route 9. It could only have been that open hatch that made the driver aware of the commotion underneath him. My detective story continues as I continue looking for the owner of one very strong, very hairy arm as described by Michael. I have to find him. After all, he has a bottle of single malt Scotch coming to him!

Note: Michael Norman has written a book about the incident at Bridge 28 titled, *These Good Men*. It is a memoir that centers on the comradeship shared by a platoon of mud-Marines and the consequences of April 19, 1968. Much of his story is his tracking down those surviving comrades and weighing the effects of that brutal day amongst themselves some 15 years later— not unlike what we do as an organization every two years. ♦

## Pass this on to anyone you know that may have been a Marine from 1957 to 1987. Thank you

Subject: FW: Camp Lejeune Water Study Posters

Good Afternoon,

Thank you for your cooperation in posting the Camp Lejeune Water Study poster in your perspective VFWs/ newsletters, etc. last November. I have attached an updated poster for you to print and post in all newsletters, establishments as a continuing venue to reach as many former Camp Lejeune residents.

As you are aware, Headquarters Marine Corps (HQMC) Washington DC is conducting along-term outreach plan regarding past water contamination at Camp Lejeune water to help notify former residents of possible exposure to contaminated water and encouraging them to register at our website. We would like you to print this poster and post in your commissary late November or early December as another venue to inform our Marines, family members and former residents.

Also, if you can respond to me the venues of where you have posted in order for me to keep track of how new registrants heard about our campaign, that would be appreciated.

We appreciate your assistance. Please contact Captain Amy Malugani at (703) 692-1450 or e-mail amy.malugani@usmc.mil with questions.

Thank you,

Barbara C. Mendoza  
Associate  
Booz | Allen | Hamilton  
8283 Greensboro Drive  
McLean, Virginia 22102  
Tel. (703) 377-1733  
Email: mendoza\_barbara@bah.com  
www.boozallen.com

## Looking For . . .

I have been searching all over for the members of my Marine tank platoon. I have found nine so far and three have become members. I'm having trouble finding these Marines:

Michael J. Anderson	Donald A. Rowe
Jerry M. Burrell	C.I Thorpe
Philip K. Garza	F. A. Martinez
Robert E. Payne	A. A. Williams

For a bit of history my platoons were:

2nd Platoon, Alfa Co, 1st Tanks - 1965 – We left the States and sailed to Okinawa.

3rd Platoon, Alfa Co, 3rd Tanks – 1966 – We changed platoon numbers and battalions when we got to Vietnam in December. 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks – 1966 - We changed company designation in April.

Harvey "Robbie" Robinson  
6500 Burns Drive  
Silsbee, TX 77656-9120  
(409) 385-6399  
usmctanker65@peoplepc.com

### Sergeant Gram & Glen

Christopher G. Hicks of Morganton, NC is trying to find two Marine tanker buddies Sergeant Gram or his tank commander Glen. They were together in Charlie Company, 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Marine Division in 1967 – 1968.

If anyone has any information, please contact:

Don Smith  
206 Rink Street  
Morganton, NC 28655  
(828) 438-9337  
morgantonnc@yahoo.com

### Tank Crew at Khe Sanh

A brother Marine grunt "Big John" Pessoni of the Khe Sanh Veterans Association wants to locate the tank crew that took out an NVA recoilless rifle position that was firing on them at Khe Sanh Base in Jan or Feb of 1968.

From:  
"Ken Zebal"  
zebalk@wbhsi.net  
John's Phone #: 732-948-980

### Richard Barraza

I am looking for anyone who knew my father. He served in H&S 3rd Tank Bn, 68-69 as battalion armorer.

If any info email at  
sportytj@hotmail.com or  
tiffany.peterson1@us.army.mil

Tiffany Peterson

## Above & Beyond

Thanks to the below individuals for answering our organization's call for donations to help offset some of the expenses for our Board of Director's meeting this month.

*Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri*

*Phillip Buffalo*

*Fred Cruz*

*Steve Curti (2<sup>nd</sup> time)*

*Justin Donnelly (2<sup>nd</sup> time)*

*Sid Ferguson*

*Charles Fischer (2<sup>nd</sup> time)*

*Robert Fornwalt*

*Robert Gates*

*David Gehrman*

*Robert Gulbrandson*

*John Harper*

*Gerry Hodum*

*Fred Hoekstra*

*John Hughes*

*Terry Hunter*

*Mort Hurt*

*Tom Kelly*

*Jim Knee*

*Pete Laminek*

*Bob Lynch*

*Tom "Sparrow" Moad*

*Ted Quackenbush*

*Tom Quillen*

*Pete Ritche (2<sup>nd</sup> time)*

*George Search*

*Frank Slovik (2<sup>nd</sup> time)*

*Bruce Van Apeldoorn*

*Jerry Wahl*

*Ken Zebal*

# Swim Call

BY HARVEY "ROBBIE" ROBINSON

We left the States in August, 1965, for Camp Hanson, Okinawa. I was a short timer with eight months to go on my initial enlistment and I kept asking myself, "What am I doing here?" I was the gunner on A-21, 1<sup>st</sup> Tanks, when we made a practice landing in the Philippines after the gunner on A-24 broke his jaw; I was assigned to replace him. Alfa Company was attached to 1/1 (1<sup>st</sup> Bn of the 1st Marines) doing the "Dragger Thrust" raids off RVN. We were the lead tank off an LCU near Chu Lai. "Pop" Kelly was the TC, Jerry M. Burrell was the driver, and the loader was H. C. Baker. I think Gunny Thorpe was standing on the back armor plate outside the tank.

The tank started to depart the Mike boat. I had the gun tube in the one o'clock position so Burrell could exit the driver's hatch in an emergency. I also had the turret ring lock tightly in place and the fording bladder pumped up to keep water out of the turret. As we crept down the ramp and into the water, the squids assured us that the water was only 4 1/2 feet deep. Seconds after entering the water, the driver, Burrell, said water was over his closed hatch. Pop Kelly barked, "Give it more power!"

All of a sudden seawater was pouring in through the loader's hatch

but the loader was sitting on top of the turret so it was no big deal for him. Meanwhile, sitting in the tight gunner's position, I quickly realize through the periscope that we are below the waterline and the turret was filling fast! I was wearing a com-helmet, a flak jacket and my .45 and the water was up to my butt before I knew it. I yelled over the intercom that I was getting wet. Pop Kelly told me to stay in my seat until the tank completely filled with water before leaving my position. I began to wonder if he really liked me or not. Suddenly the TC yells to crank the turret more to the right to help the driver get out and I'm thinking, "Good for him, but what about me?!" Somehow the driver's hatch got hung up but eventually opened.

Before the water reached my eyes, and without anyone telling me to bail out, I took a deep breath and managed to exit the loader's hatch to open air. The tank just slid around me as it disappeared into the South China Sea. We all made it to shore, lost our .45's and flak jackets and could just see the tip of one of the aerials sticking above the waves.

I always thought the Navy was a bunch of dumb-asses. ♦



Don't worry Marines, it's only 4-feet deep."

# With Delta Company Back In The World

BY HARVEY "ROBBIE" ROBINSON

When I got my issue of the 1<sup>st</sup> Trimester Sponson Box, 2008, I noticed that Jim Coan had an article on Delta Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Tanks in Iraq and he was sending care packages. I thought it would be nice to send the troops some candy from La Grange, Texas.

I made some calls to the candy makers at Katy Sweet Confectioners and talked to Paula Wicke and had her fill an order for 125 pieces of candy. I called Camp Lejeune and talked to S/Sgt. Jones and he said, "Delta Company was safe and sound and back from Iraq." Well, that was a surprise to me! Now I had all this candy coming and didn't know what to do with it! I decided that I would hand-carry it to them and welcome them home at the same time. With many phone calls, I got a time to be at Camp Lejeune to visit with the troops.

On July 20, 2008 I left my home in Silsbee, Texas to make a 1206 mile trip to see the troops of Delta Company 2<sup>nd</sup> Tank Bn. On Monday July 21, 2008 I drove into Jacksonville, NC. I meet an old platoon mate of mine, Glenn C. Hutchins, whom I haven't seen since 1966.

Glenn asked, if I'd like to see the base before dinner, and I said, "Sure!" We toured the base after I put my gear in my hotel room. Camp Lejeune didn't seem like a Marine Base to me because I was used to the wide-open spaces of Pendleton, not miles and miles of pine trees. Odd too was the company office was located at Mainside and not across the street from the barracks like Camp Pendleton.

1<sup>st</sup> Lt. Matt Luke, CO of Delta Company, allowed me to visit the troops. They all commented on the care packages that Jim Coan helped organize and sent to them in Iraq; it was greatly appreciated by all I talked to. My visit lasted only one day but it was one of the best days I've had in a long time. I was allowed to sit inside an M1A1 and ask how things work. The TC and Gunner gave me a quick lesson on the tank.

As Mike Burnett said, "If we had those tanks in Vietnam we would have ended the war in a month," and I think he'd be right. I told Lt. Luke that with about 12 hours of classes and twenty of us Vietnam tankers, we could kick some serious ass— he agreed with



me. I had noon chow in the mess hall and I am here to tell you that the food was not as good as the old days. There are no more Marine cooks or servers and Mess Duty is no more. Before I left I ask some of the combat Marines to write down their thoughts on the war in Iraq and send them to me and I'd add them to the Sponson Box one at a time. It was good to look into the eyes of these young men and see



ourselves 40 years earlier. I learned a lot and shared some stories to which they listened with big eyes. I didn't hear any war stories about Iraq, only good times. One young man ask if I had read, *Praying for Slack* and I said yes and that I knew the man who wrote the book. I showed him a photo of Bob. He said the book was awesome and Operation Allen Brook must have been something else.

To the young men of Delta Company, 2<sup>nd</sup> Tanks: Thanks for the job you are doing!  
Semper Fi.

Sgt. Harvey Robbie Robinson  
A Company 1<sup>st</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks 1965/1966

Editor's Note: Is it possible that Robbie has let time cloud his memory? He states in the same sentence that there are no longer Marine cooks, which should be a good thing, yet he says the food is not as good as he remembered it back in the 1960s. It is unfathomable to imagine that the food got worse over the years! I remember complaining about never getting wings when chicken was served in the Los Flores mess hall, only to find out they were serving Pendleton rabbits. ♦

## New age, new arsenal

*Army adapting weapons to irregular war scenarios*

BY KRIS OSBORN

KOSBORN@MILITARYTIMES.COM

SEPTEMBER 01, 2008

In five to seven years, the Army intends to deploy a new tank round that can take out tanks, unleash high explosives against a building or tear into enemies with one-eighth-inch tungsten-steel balls.

"We will have all three of these munitions blended into a single round" with a special fuse, said Army Col. Jeff Swisher, capability manager, Heavy Brigade Combat Teams for Training and Doctrine Command.

The new round means a lighter burden in combat and faster switching between weapons — key abilities on a shifting battlefield. That's a common theme for the Army, which is adjusting its arsenal — built to destroy tanks, armies and buildings — to handle the irregular, guerrilla-style warfare that prevails in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The Army is firing more tank rounds, artillery shells and even Hellfire missiles engineered to destroy small vehicles and insurgents while reducing the risk to nearby civilians and buildings. Also, the Army is using its tube-launched, optically tracked, wire-guided missile's Improved Target Acquisition System to perform surveillance, even when no missile firing is planned.

Besides reducing the logistical burden of transporting

three kinds of rounds, the new advanced multi-purpose round will allow tankers to switch ammunition quickly.

For instance, an attack on a building or armored vehicle might require a high-explosive round, whereas killing three insurgents on the run might need a round loaded with pellets.

"There is no tank-on-tank combat any more," said Army Staff Sgt. Tim Hartmann, who is just back from Iraq.

Since 2005, Army tanks in Iraq have increasingly been using 120mm anti-personnel canister cartridges loaded with 1,200 tungsten-steel pellets.

"Canister rounds provide the commander with more options when the target is a group of enemy troops or light-skinned vehicles. Also, they limit collateral damage in the sense that it is a large shotgun shell. You do not have that secondary explosion," Swisher said.

The Army's Tank Automotive Armament Command at Picatinny Arsenal, N.J., bought 3,600 canister rounds from General Dynamics for \$5.8 million in 2005. In July, ATK won the next Army contract for M1028 120mm canister cartridges in a \$30 million deal to begin delivering rounds in the next few months.

# Wild Ride

BY JOE GARZIK

I was one of a half-dozen replacements who checked-in with MAG-13 on August 2. We were not all assigned to VMFA-314 though. There were two other combat squadrons in the Air Group: VMFA-115, the Able Eagles, and VMFA-323, the Death Rattlers. All three squadrons flew the McDonnell Douglas F4B Phantom II and shared common living areas. Although we may have been in different squadrons, eventually we all got to know each other very well.

The first thing we six rookies did was to attend an Air Group briefing in an underground bunker protected by a thick layer of sandbags. This bunker served as our group intelligence center. Suddenly, an urgent radio call interrupted our briefing. We listened as one of VMFA-115's aircraft radioed-in to report a problem. The aircraft had been hit by enemy ground fire and could not lower its landing gear. The pilot was going to attempt a belly landing on the runway. At that news, we all raced outside near the runway to grab a good spot from which to watch the crash landing.

Crash crews raced to cover the runway with a layer of fire retardant foam while the damaged F4 circled overhead, burning down its load of fuel. Two arresting cables were strung across the middle of the runway. The cables were anchored on each end by a chain made with heavy, 40-pound links. The plan was for the F4 to lower

his tail hook, to belly-land in the foam, to catch one of the arresting wires, and to come to a screeching halt. It did not quite happen that way.

After burning off most of his fuel, the pilot gingerly lowered the airplane onto the foamed runway. A spark set off the fumes in the jet's empty wing tanks and they erupted into flames. All one could see racing down the runway were two wingtips protruding from an orange and black ball of fire heading toward the arresting cables. The F4 hit the first arresting cable. We watched the cable snap and hurl its 40-pound chain links skyward. Then the plane hit the second arresting cable. It also parted and flung its chain links. The aircraft was now just a ball of fire heading toward the end of the runway.

Then we heard, "Boom! Boom!" The pilot had lit his afterburners. He was attempting to take-off without wheels! As the aircraft roared toward the end of the runway, it slowly struggled skyward. It got airborne and began to climb nearly vertically. Then, both the pilot and his backseater, the Radar Intercept Officer or "RIO", ejected.

We stared in wonder as the aircraft crashed into the nearby ocean. The two crewmen slowly floated down in their parachutes. The wind carried them over the ocean and they too soon splashed down.

A rescue helicopter was on the scene immediately. Both of the F4 crewmen, treading water, raised their

right hand. This was a signal to the chopper that they were unharmed.

The helicopter slowly lowered itself and plucked the pilot out of the water and into the safety of the helicopter. The helicopter then turned its attention to the RIO. As the helicopter slowly lowered itself over the RIO, the helicopter pilot suddenly lost control of his chopper, and he crashed into the water atop the RIO. As soon as the chopper hit the water, its pilot regained control, got airborne again, and yanked the RIO from the water. Although the RIO was rescued safely, his leg was broken when the helicopter crashed atop him.

That night at the Officers Club, the RIO sat with his leg elevated and encased in a full-leg cast. As he imbibed a few, he related his story: "First, we got the daylights shot out of us. But, hey, that's okay. We weren't hurt. Then, we survived a belly landing. But, that was okay too. We weren't hurt. Then the pilot decided he'd take off without wheels, but that worked out well too. Then we survived an ejection and a water landing, but that was also okay. We weren't hurt. Then, the damn rescue helicopter crashed on me and broke my leg."

Joe Garzik  
cityhall@pobox.com

Published with author's permission.♦





**USMC Vietnam Tankers Association**  
5537 Lower Mountain Road • New Hope, PA 18938

Please remember that your 2009 annual membership dues will be payable on January 1, 2009.