



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Featured Stories:

My First Taste of Combat	Page 27
Connecting the Dots.....	Page 28
Soldiers of the Sea.....	Page 43

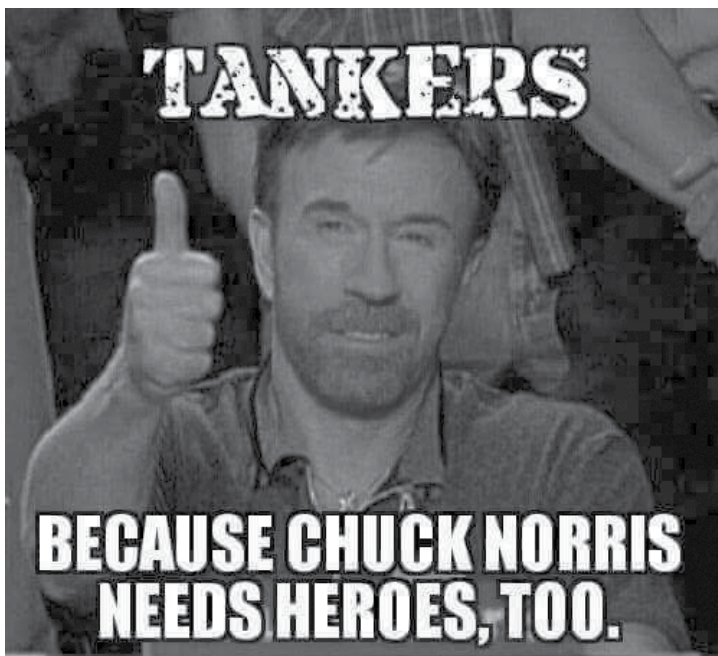
**April 1, 1965
A Moment in the History of the Vietnam War**

President Johnson authorized sending two more Marine battalions and up to 20,000 logistical personnel to Vietnam. The President also authorized American combat troops to conduct patrols to root out Viet Cong in the countryside. His decision to allow offensive operations is kept secret from the American press and public for two months.

If You Experienced An EXTREME Makeover In Less Than 30 Seconds...



Chances Are You Visited "The Barber" at MCRD SD or at MCRD PI



**If you are able,
save them a place
inside of you
and save one backward glance
when you are leaving
for the places they can
no longer go.**

**Be not ashamed to say
you loved them,
though you may
or may not have always.**

**Take what they have left
and what they have taught you
with their dying
and keep it with your own.**

**And in that time
when men decide and feel safe
to call the war insane,
take one moment to embrace
those gentle heroes you left behind.**

Major Michael Davis O'Donnell



Letter from the President

It's been just a few weeks since we held our reunion in St. Louis but due to publication deadlines I am writing this a few months before our actual get together. We plan to do a recap of the St. Louis reunion in the #1 – 2018 issue of the S-Box that should be in your mailbox right after New Year's Day.

During last month's reunion in St Louis we announced the location of the 2019 reunion. I think that most of us can agree that the West Coast is due for a reunion and so we will plan to be back in the Seattle area for our 11th biennial get together. When I say "back in Seattle" I am referring that we were there in 2003 and had a great time. Our most excellent webmaster and National Recruiter, Greg Martin, has found the **Flying Heritage & Combat Armor Museum** in Everett, Washington, which is just north of Seattle. That military museum has lots of airplanes plus wheeled and tracked vehicles. The most exciting find is that they have an M-48 and an M-60 tank that we can view and enjoy. We may even convince them to have one of their employees drive the tank around the parking lot.

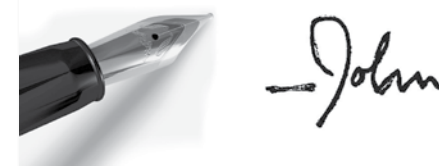
We are still looking for tankers who may, for various economic reasons, be less fortunate and cannot afford the annual membership dues. We would like to grant them a one-year gift membership. Please send their names and addresses to me or to any member of the board of directors. We want each and every eligible Vietnam Marine tanker as a member of our association so that they can share in the brotherhood. The more the merrier...and the stronger we will be.

This next story is about four people: Everybody, Somebody, Anybody and Nobody. There was an important job to be done and Everybody was sure that Somebody would do it. Anybody could have done it but Nobody did it. Somebody got angry with that, because it was Everybody's job. Everybody thought Anybody could do it but Nobody realized that Everybody wouldn't do it. It ended up that Everybody blamed Somebody when Nobody did what Anybody have done.

I just want to remind you that in life, if you want to get things done, if you want to move forward in your life, if you want to grow as a person, and even if you just want to stop wasting time waiting in line, then you have to take control of the situation and do something. Successful people don't sit there fidgeting, waiting for someone else to act or to find out what is going on. They do it themselves. So, the next time you seem frustrated, take action

"What matters in life is not what happens to you but what you remember and how you remember it."

Gabriel Garcia Marquez



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Silver Star–Awarded for actions during the Vietnam War

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Sergeant Richard D. Cecil (MCSN: 1127963), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Commander with Company C, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces in the Republic of Vietnam. On 20 May 1966, Sergeant Cecil's tank was one of two occupying defensive positions with a platoon of infantry. In the pre-dawn hours, their positions were subjected to a devastating attack by anti-tank weapons and intense mortar and small arms fire from an estimated Viet Cong company. The initial fire killed one of his crewmen immediately and disabled the other two. In spite of the heavy fire, Sergeant Cecil mounted his tank alone

Action Date: May 20, 1966

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Sergeant

Company: Company C

Battalion: 3rd Tank Battalion

Division: 3rd Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

Tanks & Medals of Valor

Richard D. Cecil

Home of record: San Diego, California

AWARDS AND CITATIONS

and placed his guns in operation, repeatedly loading and firing the main gun in the midst of the vicious Viet Cong action in which his tank was penetrated three times by anti-tank fire. Learning that all local communications had been destroyed by enemy fire, he placed his damaged tank radio into operation and directed artillery fire upon the enemy. Completely disregarding his own safety, Sergeant Cecil, on numerous occasions during the hour-long battle, dismounted the tank under fire and calmly conferred with his platoon leader and the infantry in order to coordinate his tank fire. His actions were instrumental in repulsing the attack and inflicted numerous Viet Cong casualties. By his daring actions and loyal devotion to duty in the face of grave personal risk, Sergeant Cecil upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service.



ON THE COVER:

An official USMC Holiday post card from 1943

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

From Dick Carey

I love the last issue of the Sponson Box. You're doing a great job. Thanks for carrying the torch. On a more somber note: My cancer has returned, not in the pancreas but in my liver. It is a slow growing one and I am scheduled for another PET scan in September to determine the best treatment plan. The VA doctor said that I should live for many years to come, but will have the fight this disease.

I would very much like to be added to the Sponson Box as Founder and President, Emeritus. If you close the white space under "Committee & Chairmen" you can put my information below, just before where you have the website information. Also, I would like to be added to the web page members list with the same declaration as Founder and President, Emeritus.

In the next issue "Member Info Changes" please include the following:

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Thank you & Semper Fidelis,

Art Nash Has a Story



Editor's Note: Several of us were passing around the above photo showing a WM gunny and a NY State Trooper (the police officer had been a WM in a previous life) who were

holding a USMC flag during an evening meeting of Marine veterans who are NY State Troopers. The gunny happens to be quite a nice looking young lady so **Art Nash** wrote the following story:

Back around 1964 or so I did a short stay at Service Bn. on Camp Pendleton. The CO was a WM major. An older woman, but she was still HOT as Hell. She was also one of the nicest persons you could ever meet. She would come around to all the shops in the Bn. and visit the troops. She did not care if she got dirty because she was there to understand what each shop did. And we had a corporal I'll call "Numb Nut's."

THE SHORT VERSION: Cpl. Numb Nuts fell in love with the major. He requested mast to see the C.O. and got past the SgtMaj. He went into her office and proposed marriage. The major stopped the SgtMaj from putting old Numb Nuts into orbit and took the time to talk to him explaining that she was a little too old for him. She went on to tell him that if they got married, she would be 60 when he was 25, and that she could not give him children. She further explained that HQMC would not allow them to get married since he was a corporal and all. The major talked to Cpl. Numb Nuts like he was her own child...which he was in a manner of speaking. The boy was definitely not a rocket scientist. The two were still at Service Bn. when I moved on to 2d Tanks.

Remembering Top Jim Langford

We got a letter from Tom Hayes, who served in the Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks company office with 1st Sgt Langford. After reading Top's obituary in a past issue of our magazine, Tom felt compelled to write: It was with great sorrow that I read about Top Langford's death. I was the first person that he met when he reported into Charlie Co in July of 1968. I was company clerk at Cam Lo Hill. He was a gunny when he first got to us. At the time, Gunny Langford was always dragging me on night patrols with him. He didn't know tanks at all but he learned. Deep in his heart he was a grunt through and through. He made 1st Sgt. after I rotated home in Dec '68. He was a great acting 1st Sgt who was very fair. I really admired him and liked working for him. The entire company respected him and I don't ever recall hearing any bad mouthing or back stabbing about him from anyone. A few years ago, I contacted him by US mail and he wrote back. We exchanged letters for a while. I addressed him as "1st Sgt" and, after he learned that I too was a 1st Sgt in retirement, he told me to call him "Jim." What a great guy he was!

Steve Sets Us Straight

The picture caption on the first page of the article "I Remember Mike Brandi" has Mike Brandi identified at right. That happens to be Jim Cusack. What apparently happened is the pix w/ Mike on the tank (below) should have been there. That is Mike at the right.

Instead the caption that identifies "Corporal Mike Brandi at right" is really Jim Cusack from Scranton, PA (was in 1st Tanks, then 2/7). So, I thought I had better let you know & I wish that we had better pix of Mike, but now there are no pix of Mike. Otherwise, so far it looks great! Semper Fi, Steve Arnone



Phil McMath Writes:

I thought that the most recent issue of the Sponson Box was very good. The letter from JFK was a real find. Congratulations! It is an impressive historical document. Thanks for all of the hard work.

Jimmy Also Corrects a Gaff

I just received my copy of the Sponson Box. I was reading the post in it about the upcoming book on Vets and their Service animals. I noticed that my last name was misspelled. They had spelled my last name as Deidre it should be Didear.

Semper Fi,
Jimmy Didear

John Hunter Asks:

Another good job on the Sponson Box, but you left some unanswered questions:

First, when and why did you move to Colorado?

John Wear's reply: For 45 years I have wanted to "come home" to where my parents, two sisters, brother and now three of my four kids live with my five grandkids.

Second, what happened to Grace Moore after Vietnam, and what is she doing now?

JW: She lives north of Philadelphia in Bucks County



and she is very active in veterans' causes. She is also the step mother of the international singing star, Pink.

Third, from the back page on C-Rations, why did I always get L&M's and Pall Mall's. I suspect there was some way the senior NCO's could tell what brand was in the boxes, and they grabbed the Winston's, my favorite during the years I smoked those nasty things. I don't ever remember getting Winston's, or Marlboro's, or even Lucky Strike's. I think it was a conspiracy!

JW: Stranger things have happened.

Fred Goger writes:

COLORADO? YOU LUCKY BASTARD! I just got in from my stint as an almost Veterans Service Officer where I read the latest S-Box magazine. I was surprised to see you moved from PA to Colorado. This was the first time I saw your address even though you may have made the move a while back. I am so glad you got out of there and went west.

I have two sons who live in Great Falls and Hamilton, Montana. I used to go there in the hunting season, but haven't gone since 2015. The mind is willing but the body says no. My boy in Hamilton is a Service Officer and I send him my copies of the "Box."

I was surprised to see my name in this one where you wrote about the \$42 bounty put on our heads by the >>

VC when we guarded the schoolhouse at Phong Bac.

This reminded me of the issue of the magazine a couple years ago where I read that an "Ontos" man was stationed on Hill 34, south of Da Nang in '66. At that time he said he was operating a hot dog stand just off Exit 117 of the New Jersey Garden State Pkwy on Rt.36 South. For more than 18 years, I passed that exact same hot dog stand every day during the summers coming from work. I had stopped there maybe three times for a hot dog and only said "Semper Fi" to the owner. We never had a conversation. At the end of his story, he listed his name and phone number. I put the magazine down and I immediately called him, since we chewed the same dirt in Vietnam. When he answered and I explained why I called, we both realized we had spent our time over in-country together ... and up until now we never knew it.

I couldn't talk because I started crying. He told me to calm down and that we were lucky that we made it home. He offered to buy me a drink if I stopped in the tavern that is close by the hot dog stand ... but I never did.

If you print this and he reads it, I hope he will stop into the town hall of Hazlet and come up to the second floor

on any Tuesday between 1000–1400. I am there to point veterans in the right direction for benefits due.

Oh yeah, about Pennsylvania — This year they will not recognize Florida carry permits, so my trips there will be unarmed. Semper Fi.

A Bit of Marine Corps History

"WW I, 2,457 Marines killed, 8,894 wounded"

"WW II, 19,733 Marines killed, 67,207 wounded"

"A million Marines cannot take Tarawa in a hundred years." Japanese admiral speaking before Marines took the island in 3 bloody days."

"Korean War, 4,267 Marines killed, 23,744 wounded"

"During the Battle of Chosin Reservoir, the temperature plunged to as low as -35 F."

"Vietnam War, 13,067 Marines killed, 88,633 wounded"

"The Marine Band is the oldest musical organization in the United States."

"The Marines always stand at attention during the playing of the Marine Hymn. ■

Vietnam Veterans Memorial ■ The Wall of Faces

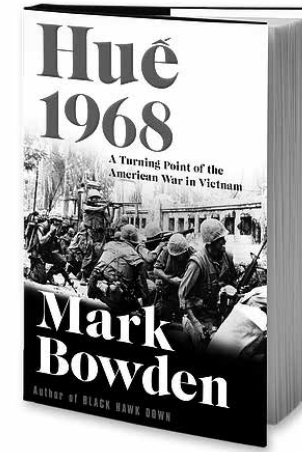
For almost 15 years, volunteers have been collecting photographs of the more than 58,000 names engraved on the polished black panels of the Vietnam Memorial in Washington. Now, they have a few more than 18,000 pictures to go, and Marcy Ellis of Keizer, Ore., has helped make the Wall of Faces a little more complete. Her brother, Army Pfc. Melvin Chloupek, was awarded the Silver Star, the Bronze Star and the Purple Heart after he died Feb. 28, 1968, trying to help a fellow soldier. A shadow box with all his medals hangs on the wall in her Keizer home. So does a framed flag, the one that was draped over his coffin. She has his official Army photo, too, in a frame in her living room. Now, a copy is with the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. Her older brother died three days before her 13th birthday. Janna Hoehn, a florist from Maui, Hawaii, is one of the volunteers of the Faces Never Forgotten project who is collecting photos. She got involved in part to help make up for how Vietnam veterans were treated when

they returned, and is focusing on California, Hawaii, Oregon and Washington. "Until this gets out in newspapers, it surprises me how many people have really not heard about this," said Hoehn, who has been at it for three years. "It's a very hard project and a very emotional project, but the rewards are priceless." She started out needing 323 photos for Oregon, has tracked down 128 so far, and has been promised about 40 more. You can search for your loved one or veterans who have died in your area at the Wall of Faces website <http://www.vvmf.org/Wall-of-Faces>. You can submit a photo electronically on the individual page that pops up.

Organizers are raising money for what will eventually become a two-story, underground Education Center at the Vietnam Memorial on the National Mall. A prominent feature will be larger-than-life pictures of those whose names are on the wall. The center also will feature displays of the more than 400,000 personal articles, letters

and gifts that have been left at the foot of the memorial since its dedication in 1982. "The photos are out there," said Executive Director Barry Smith of the Nevada Press Association, which put out an alert to its members last year. "We just need to make people realize this project is going on." Before Memorial Day, Nevadans were without photos. By Wednesday, that number was down to 24. The photos do not have to be of the service member in uniform. Many are high school yearbook photos or family snapshots. Though volunteers are looking for high-resolution copies of original images, even a low-quality photo will suffice until a better one can be found. "It is the very least we can do to show our honor and love for these American (service members)," said Andrew Johnson, a newspaperman from Mayville, Wis., whose son was killed while serving in Afghanistan in 2012. [Source: Statesman Journal (Salem, OR) | Capi Lynn | Feb. 11, 2015 ++]

Book Review



The first battle book from Mark Bowden since his #1 New York Times bestseller *Black Hawk Down*, *Hue 1968* is the story of the centerpiece of the Tet Offensive and a turning point in the American War in Vietnam.

In the early hours of January 31, 1968, the North Vietnamese launched over one hundred attacks across South Vietnam

in what would become known as the Tet Offensive. The lynchpin of Tet was the capture of Hue, Vietnam's intellectual and cultural capital, by 10,000 National Liberation Front troops who descended from hidden camps and surged across the city of 140,000. Within hours the entire city was in their hands save for two small military outposts. American commanders refused to believe the size and scope of the Front's presence, ordering small companies of marines against thousands of entrenched enemy troops. After several futile and deadly days, Lieutenant Colonel Ernie Cheatham would finally come up with a strategy to retake the city, block by block and building by building, in some of the most intense urban combat since World War II.

With unprecedented access to war archives in the U.S. and Vietnam, and interviews with participants from both sides, Bowden narrates each stage of this crucial battle through multiple viewpoints. Played out over 24 days and ultimately costing 10,000 lives, the Battle of Hue was by far the bloodiest of the entire war. When it ended, the American debate was never again about winning, only about how to leave. *Hue 1968* is a gripping and moving account of this pivotal moment.

Reviews of Mark Bowden's *Hue 68*:

"I am a US Marine Vietnam veteran who participated as a tank crewman in the Tet 1968 battle for Hue City. I have read just about every written account of the month-long battle, and I have to say that all of the other well-written, well-documented accounts of the battle pale in compari-

son to Mark Bowden's *Hue 1968*. There is no more complete, accurate and detailed book. It reads like a novel even though is it made up almost exclusively of very personal accounts."—John Wear, president of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

"*Hue 1968* is, by far, the most comprehensive (and balanced) coverage on this battle I've seen. Like never before, I've come to realize how narrow a perspective we low-level participants unavoidably had. While giving due respect to the abilities, actions and fighting spirit of the U.S. and ARVN Marines and soldiers who participated, Mark Bowden brought clarity to the larger intelligence, political and strategic shortcomings that made the prosecution of this battle so much more challenging and costly than it needed to be."—Brigadier General Mike Downs, USMC (ret.)

"*Hue 1968* unravels one of the great mysteries of our time—how a puny force of North Vietnam regulars and local sympathizers could without warning occupy South Vietnam's second largest city, hold it for a month, then disappear into the mountains, beyond reach and largely unbloodied. It turns out the force wasn't puny, but fanatical warriors who gripped their prey by the throat and wouldn't let go. They were unfazed by waves of counter-attackers, Vietnamese and American soldiers, but mostly Marines rushed in to defeat them. *Hue 1968* shows the enormous challenges facing both sides and how they overcame them, or tried to. Did the Battle of Hue end up as a victory or defeat? The answer depends on who's asking and who's telling. Bowden takes on both roles and does it well."—Lieutenant Colonel Charles A. Krohn, US Army (ret.), author of *The Lost Battalion of Tet*

"Mark Bowden uniquely describes the battle from both sides of the front lines and vividly captures the remarkable courage and valor of those that participated in the crucible of war that was Hue City in January to March 1968. Surely to be an historical standard for the recollection of that Tet 1968 battle."—Colonel Chuck Meadows, USMC (ret.), former commanding officer of Golf Company, 2nd Bn., 5th Marines ■

Vietnam: The War That Killed Trust

BY KARL MARLANTES, “VIETNAM ‘67”

January 7, 2017—THE NEW YORK TIMES

In the early spring of 1967, I was in the middle of a heated 2 AM hallway discussion with fellow students at Yale about the Vietnam War. I was from a small town in Oregon, and I had already joined the Marine Corps Reserve. My friends were mostly from East Coast prep schools. One said that Lyndon B. Johnson was lying to us about the war. I blurted out, “But ... but an American president wouldn’t lie to Americans!” They all burst out laughing.

When I told that story to my children, they all burst out laughing, too. Of course presidents lie. All politicians lie. God, Dad, what planet are you from?

Before the Vietnam War, most Americans were like me. After the Vietnam War, most Americans are like my children.

America didn’t just lose the war, and the lives of 58,000 young men and women; Vietnam changed us as a country. In many ways, for the worse; it made us cynical and distrustful of our institutions, especially of government. For many people, it eroded the notion, once nearly universal, that part of being an American was serving your country.

But not everything about the war was negative. As a Marine lieutenant in Vietnam, I saw how it threw together young men from diverse racial and ethnic backgrounds and forced them to trust one another with their lives. It was a racial crucible that played an enormous, if often unappreciated, role in moving America toward real integration.

And yet, even as Vietnam continues to shape our country, its place in our national consciousness is slipping. Some 65 percent of Americans are under 45 and so unable to even remember the war. Meanwhile, our wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, our involvement in Syria, our struggle with terrorism — these conflicts are pushing Vietnam further into the background.

All the more reason, then, for us to revisit the war and its consequences for today. This essay inaugurates a new series by The Times, “Vietnam ‘67,” that will examine how the events of 1967 and early 1968 shaped Vietnam, America and the world. Hopefully, it will generate renewed conversation around that history, now half a century past.

What readers take away from that conversation is another matter. If all we do is debate why we lost, or why we were there at all, we will miss the truly important question: What did the war do to us as Americans?

CYNICISM

Vietnam changed the way we looked at politics. We became inured to our leaders lying in the war: the fabricated Gulf of Tonkin incident, the number of “pacified provinces” (and what did “pacified” mean, anyway?), the inflated body counts.

People talked about Johnson’s “credibility gap.” This was

a genteel way of saying that the president was lying. Then, however, a credibility gap was considered unusual and bad. By the end of the war, it was still considered bad, but it was no longer unusual. When politicians lie today, fact checkers might point out what is true, but then everyone moves on.

We have switched from naïveté to cynicism. One could argue that they are opposites, but I think not. With naïveté you risk disillusionment, which is what happened to me and many of my generation. Cynicism, however, stops you before you start. It alienates us from “the government,” a phrase that today connotes bureaucratic quagmire. It threatens democracy, because it destroys the power of the people to even want to make change.

You don’t finish the world’s largest highway system, build huge numbers of public schools and universities, institute the Great Society, fight a major war, and go to the moon, which we did in the 1960s — simultaneously — if you’re cynical about government and politicians.

I live near Seattle, hardly Donald J. Trump territory. Most of my friends cynically deride Mr. Trump’s slogan, Make America Great Again, citing all that was wrong in the olden days. Indeed, it wasn’t paradise, particularly for minorities. But there’s some truth to it. We were greater then. It was the war — not liberalism, not immigration, not globalization — that changed us.

RACE

In December 1968, I was on a blasted and remote jungle hilltop about a kilometer from the demilitarized zone. A chopper dropped off about three weeks of sodden mail and crumpled care packages. In that pile was a package for Ray Delgado, an 18-year-old Hispanic kid from Texas. I watched Ray tear into the aluminum foil wrapping and, smiling broadly, hold something up for me to see.

“What’s that?” I asked.

“It’s tamales. . . from my mother.”

“What are tamales?”

“You want to try one?” he asked.

“Sure.” I looked at it, turned it over, then stuck it in my mouth and started chewing. Ray and his other Hispanic friends were barely containing themselves as I was gamely chewing away and thinking, “No wonder these Mexicans have such great teeth.”

I was from a logging town on the Oregon coast. I’d heard of tamales, but I’d never seen one. Until I joined my company of Marines in Vietnam, I’d never even talked to a Mexican. Yes, people like me called people like Ray “Mexicans,” even though they were as American as apple pie — and tamales.

Racial tension where I grew up was the Swedes and Norwegians squaring off against the Finns every Saturday night in the parking lot outside the dance at the Labor Temple.

President Harry Truman ordered the integration of the military in 1948. By the time of the Vietnam War, the races were serving together. But putting everyone in the same units is very different than having them work together as a unit.

Our national memory of integration is mostly about the brave people of the civil rights movement. Imagine arming all those high school students from Birmingham, Ala. — white and black — with automatic weapons in an environment where using these weapons was as common as having lunch and they are all jacked up on testosterone. That’s racial tension.

During the war there were over 200 fraggings in the American military — murders carried out by fragmentation grenades, which made it impossible to identify the killer. Almost all fraggings, at least when the perpetrator was caught, were found to be racially motivated.

And yet, the more common experience in combat was cooperation and respect. If I was pinned down by enemy fire and I needed an M-79 man, I’d scream for Thompson, because he was the best. I didn’t even think about what color Thompson was.

White guys had to listen to soul music and black guys had to listen to country music. We didn’t fear one another. And the experience stuck with us. Hundreds of thousands of young men came home from Vietnam with different ideas about race — some for the worse, but most for the better. Racism wasn’t solved in Vietnam, but I believe it was where our country finally learned that it just might be possible for us all to get along.

SERVICE

I was at a reading recently in Fayetteville, N.C., when a young couple appeared at the signing table. He was standing straight and tall in Army fatigues. She was holding a baby in one arm and hauling a toddler with the other. They both looked to be about two years out of high school. The woman started to cry. I asked her what was wrong, and she said, “My husband is shipping out again, tomorrow.” I turned to him and said, “Wow, your second tour?”

“No, sir,” he replied. “My seventh.”

My heart sank. Is this a republic?

The Vietnam War ushered in the end of the draft, and the creation of what the Pentagon calls the “all-volunteer military.” But I don’t. I call it the all-recruited military. Volunteers are people who rush down to the post office to sign up after Pearl Harbor or the World Trade Center gets bombed. Recruits, well, it’s more complicated.

When I was growing up, almost every friend’s father or uncle had served in World War II. All the women in town knew that a destroyer was smaller than a cruiser and a platoon was smaller than a company, because their husbands had all been on destroyers or in platoons. Back then it was called “the service.” Today, we call it “the military.”

That shift in language indicates a profound shift in the attitudes of the republic toward its armed forces. The draft was unfair. Only males got drafted. And men who could afford to go to college did not get drafted until late in the war, when the fighting had fallen off. But getting rid of the draft did not solve unfairness.

America’s elites have mostly dropped out of military service. Engraved on the walls of Woolsey Hall at Yale are the names of hundreds of Yalies who died in World Wars I and II. I counted three who died in Vietnam and none since.

Instead, the American working class has increasingly borne the burden of death and casualties since World War II. In a study in The University of Memphis Law Review, Douglas Kriener and Francis Shen looked at the income casualty gap, the difference between the median household incomes (in constant 2000 dollars) of communities with the highest casualties (the top 25 percent) and all the other communities. Starting from almost dead-even in World War II, the casualty gap was \$5,000 in the Korean War, \$8,200 in the Vietnam War, and is now more than \$11,000 in Iraq and Afghanistan. Put another way, the lowest three income deciles have suffered 50 percent more casualties than the highest three.

If these inequities continue to grow, resentment will grow with it. With growing resentment, the already wide divide between the military and civilians will also widen. This is how republics fall, with armies and parts of the country more loyal to their commander than their country.

We need to return to the spirit of the military draft, and how people felt about service to their country. The military draft was viewed by most of us the same way we view income tax. I wouldn’t pay my taxes if there wasn’t the threat of jail. But as a responsible citizen, I also see that paying taxes is necessary to fund the government — my government.

People would still grumble. We grumble about taxes. People would still try to pull strings to get more pleasant assignments. But everyone would serve. They’d work for “the government,” and maybe start to see it as “our government.” It’s a lot harder to be cynical about your country if you devoted two years of your life making it a better place.

Let the armed services be just one of many ways young people can serve their country. With universal service, some boy from Seattle could find himself sharing a tamale with some Hispanic girl from El Paso. Conservatives and liberals would learn to work together for a common cause. We could return to the spirit of people of different races learning to work together in combat during the Vietnam War.

The Vietnam War continues to define us, even if we have forgotten how. But it’s not too late to remember, and to do something about it.

Karl Marlantes, the author of *What It Is Like to Go to War* and the novel *Matterhorn*, was a Marine in the Vietnam War. This is the first in a series of essays about the Vietnam War by veterans and historians that will appear in the NY Times newspaper. ■

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“One lives in the hope of becoming a memory.”
Antonio Porchia

Mike Nolan

We got a phone call from Chris Olsen on Sunday, July 30th, telling us that Mike had passed away over the weekend. Chris had indicated that he had called and texted Mike almost every day after he learned that Mike's cancer had re-appeared. Earlier Mike had told Chris that about two months prior, when Mike finally went to the doctor for an exam, the doctor told Mike that he was surprised that Mike was still alive. Mike will be missed. As soon as Mike's obituary is published, we will run it.

Leroy Kramer

Leroy was born on June 14, 1943, and passed away on Wednesday, July 10, 2013. Leroy was a resident of Kulpmont, Pennsylvania, and was a long time member of the USMC VTA. We truly are sorry that this obit is so tardy.

Barnett Person, Sr.

June 11, 1930 ~ May 21, 2017 (age 86)

BARNETT PERSON completed 28 exemplary years of service in the U.S. Marine Corps, as indicated below. Barnett Person enlisted in the Marine Corps on July 23, 1946, in Montgomery, Alabama. His life in the Marines started at Montford Point, Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. Upon completion of recruit training, he left the United States with the 7th Replacement Draft and was stationed on the Pacific Islands of Saipan and Guam.

Upon completion of his tours of duty in the Pacific, he was returned to Camp Lejeune for further assignments. In January of 1951, he departed to Korea with Company D, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division, and participated in combat actions against North Korean and Chinese Communist forces. Sergeant Person, upon return to the United States, re-entered civilian life. He re-enlisted in the Corps in 1954 and was again stationed at Camp Lejeune until 1956. In November, 1956, he served with Company A, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, on the island of Okinawa, and in 1958 he returned to Camp Lejeune, NC and back to Company A, 2nd Tank Battalion. From 1961 to 1962, he was stationed in Japan with Company C, 3rd Tank Battalion, followed by duty with the 1st Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton.

Later, in the 1960's, Gunnery Sergeant Person was engaged in numerous combat actions against Viet Cong and North Vietnamese Army forces in South Vietnam. Barnett was wounded on May 8, 1967, and received the Silver Star after repelling a fierce NVA attack on Con Thien. Gunnery Sgt. Barnett Person led his tank into the oncoming NVA and directed his 90mm canister fire at them. After the battle, his tank was the only one of three on Con Thien still operational.

On July 29, 1967, he was again engaged in a major operation within the demilitarized zone of South Vietnam in support of the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marine Regiment. During the battle, his tank was hit by 3 RPG's, but that did not stop him from loading as many wounded Marines as possible onto his tank to drive them out of harm's way. For his actions

in successfully leading his tank platoon in this major engagement, he was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal with 'V' device for Valor, and his 2nd Purple Heart Medal for wounds received during that engagement.

In addition to First Sergeant Person's Silver Star, Navy Commendation Medal and his two Purple Heart Medals, he is also the recipient of National Defense Service Medal, Presidential Unit Citation w/1 star, Vietnam Service Medal w/2 stars, United Nations Medal, Korean Presidential Unit Citation, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. As an Original Montford Point Marine, he is a 2012 recipient of the Congressional Gold Medal.

Colonel Paul Lessard, USMC (Ret.)

HAMPTON—Local Marine Corps legend, Colonel Paul F. Lessard, USMC (Ret.), whose service to our nation spanned 35 years, including combat tours in the Korean and Vietnam Wars, passed peacefully on to his Heavenly Father on Wednesday, May 30, 2017, surrounded by his family after courageously battling a long-term illness. Lessard graduated from Hampton Academy, where he played on the undefeated football team that won the State Championship in 1948, with his best buddy, Donnie Walker. He was married to Dorothy Quintal Lessard for 61 years, and together they raised three children: Paul J. Lessard of High



Point, N.C.; Beth Schottman of Lenexa, Kan.; and Sharon Folan of Austin, Texas. He was also a loving and doting grandfather of seven, and a great-grandfather of three. During his retirement years in Hampton, Lessard served in local politics as Town Moderator; in leadership at his church, Our Lady of the Miraculous Medal, where he ushered and was an officer in the Holy Name Society. Col. Lessard was an active member of the Hampton's American Legion Post 35 where he served in leadership and greatly enjoyed the fellowship of his brothers-in-arms.

The Colonel enlisted in 1951 as a PFC and rose up through the ranks, attending Officer Candidate School via the "Meritorious Noncommissioned Officer Program" and later graduated from both the Armored Officers Career Course at Ft. Knox, Ky., and the Armed Forces Staff College in Norfolk, Va. Throughout his career, in which he was affectionately known as the "Godfather of the Tank Corps," he was proud to be a hard charging "Mustang" who held a deep commitment to and affection for "his Marines."

He served in 19 duty stations and was decorated on 14 occasions, including two Legion of Merits with Combat "V" for gallantry in combat, and the Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry. Col. Lessard retired from active service as Colonel of Marines serving as Chief of Staff at Quantico Marine Base, where he had attended Officer's Candidate School 27 years prior. Colonel Lessard was a patriot, loving husband, devoted father, loyal son and brother, and a United States Marine through and through, who was to the very end "Always Faithful."

What Members Are Doing



◀ **Ohio Vietnam Veterans Memorial**
 Todd Phillips and Jan "Turtle" Wendling visited a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park in Clinton, Ohio on 6/2/17. There are the names of 3,095 Ohio service members who died in the Vietnam War.



Bob's Trout ▶

One that did not get away from Bob Skeels. A "Lunker" brown trout from Rat Pond 15" ADK trip May 5, 2017



◀ Tiger Comp 2017

Joseph Tyson: Here I am at the 2017 Tiger Comp tank competition at Camp LeJeune this past June. The guy standing next to me (on my right) is Butch Kirsh. We grew up together. He was a Marine Amtrak driver in Nam. Was wounded in a mine incident in 1967.

Beloved musician to return for Columbus performances

COLUMBUS — Popular accordionist Gene Hackmack will perform in Columbus both Friday, May 19 at The Courtyard Wine Bar and Saturday, May 20 at the Columbus Farmers' Market.

A fifth-generation Texan and Vietnam veteran with a long career at NASA, Hackmack is probably most renowned in this area for Hackmack's Hofbräuhaus, his German/Texan restaurant built in 1986 on State Highway 109 in Frelsburg, where he and other accordionists entertained guests every weekend. The restaurant closed in 2002.

Now a resident of McQueeney, Hackmack continues playing the "Squeezebox" throughout Southeast Texas mostly as a solo accordionist, but also is a member of Columbus' John Holub Polka Band and helps out several other bands. He also regularly assists in several area opry shows.

On Friday night, Hackmack will perform at The Courtyard Wine Bar on Milam Street beginning at 8 p.m. The Courtyard fea-

tures and incredible selection of dozens of craft beers, and more than 65 unique and wines from all over the world. Also included is a menu of delicious small plate fare.

The Courtyard is open at 4 p.m. Thursdays, Fridays and Saturdays, and is located at the Live Oak Art Center. Its proceeds benefit the community programs of

the Art Center.

For more information visit www.courtyardwine.com or call (979) 732-8389.

Saturday morning, from 9 a.m. to noon, Hackmack will stroll the grounds of the Columbus Farmers' Market on the Colorado County Courthouse square in downtown Columbus.

The market is held every Saturday from 9 a.m. to noon. Vendors sell everything from ready-to-eat foods, fresh produce, baked goods, hot coffee, gulf shrimp and grass-fed beef, to handmade jewelry, crafts and more.

Visitors may enter a weekly drawing for \$50 in Farmers' Market Merchandise Certificate.

Visit www.columbusFMtx.org or call (979) 732-8385 for more information.



◀ **GENE HACKEMACK**

Letter Home

A Letter Home from Vietnam

HAROLD RIENSCHKE

Sunday—30 May 1965

Dear Mom, Dad and Roger,

I haven't written for a while, I suppose you wonder what's wrong. Well, I'm not sick or anything like that. I'm in South Viet Nam now and have been for the past 2 weeks. Right now I'm with C Company tanks. They are at a place called Chu Lai. That's where the Sea Bees are building a new air strip. We are set up about a mile and a half inland from the air strip. It is hot as Hell here during the day. Around 120 – 130 degrees with very little breeze, so you know it hot. It's been raining here for the last three nights and in the morning the sun comes out and bakes everything. The humidity is something else. All I've done here is worked my butt off on these tanks and sweat. You sweat here from the time you get up until it's dark. I must drink about 2 gallons of water a day and it still doesn't seem like I get enough water. This area we are in now is full of Viet Cong. All night long there is firing up and down the lines. They haven't bothered us right here yet but all the other outfits have been hit. It's hard to tell who they are

because in the daytime they are farmers and at night they are Viet Cong. This thing is going to last a long time but I'll be able to go home when my tour is over here.

See what I am doing here is flying from one place to the other, working on tanks. I spent 5 days at a place called Hue – Phu Bai and several days at Da Nang before coming down here. The only thing I don't like about this is moving my gear around all the time. I haven't had my mail for a week now. I guess it will catch up with me sometime. Since I am in A Company now and they are just outside Da Nang, I hope they are holding the mail there. We will be flying back their next Thursday, that is if we get done here in time.

Well, Mom, I can't think of much of any news. I sure hope Dad's back gets better. You know I think you and dad are going to have to stop farming. You just can't keep up that hard work forever, and when one of you gets down it's just too much for one person. Well that (is) about all I have to say. Mom, you and Dad take care of yourselves. Don't worry about me cause I'm alright. I'll write when I can.

BONUS: This is a letter that Dennis Tannahill wrote to Ron Davidson after they both rotated back to the "World."

Hi Snoopy (Ron's nickname),

Well, got your letter today. Sure was good to hear from you again. As for what Fuzz (LT Rod Henderson) told you, it's true. Third really got tore up. Cleve got hit on my tank four days after we left. The 35 took four penetrations in the turret. 140 mm rockets. Cleve almost lost his sight and Chambers almost lost his leg. Flanagan got killed. Blew his head off. Barney got peppered in the back. I got a letter from Chris a

few weeks later and he told me that Bradley got killed. I got my brand new '67 Chevy Impala SS 327 cu. in. 4 speed. Red. And I mean RED! Sure hope that you got that new sports car you wanted. I'm trying to get into the Forestry Division. Well, I guess I'd better close and say, Write Soon.

P.S. Ed and Cleve are going to be alright in about a year and a half. ■

Photo from Vietnam



On the banks of the Ben Hai River

Looking For

RON KRAUS—KIA AUG 1965

It is probably a lot to ask but does anyone up and down the line have an address for the next of kin of Ron Kraus, S-1, H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn? Fifty-two years have passed and I would like to tell his children about my service with him at Camp Lejeune during 62-64 when he was with the Adjutant Section of Force Troops. Fine person!

Gary McDaniel
Wetumpka, AL

MORE PHOTO ID NEEDED



Dan Anderson wrote to Greg Martin: "The photo I sent to you is of the men in front of the Sherman tank at Tank School at Camp Del Mar on Pendleton. I think it may be possible JT Donlan, JC Carrol and TG Roberts, who are three members of the VTA."

Editor's Note: This e-mail exchange happened in early 2015, and right after that Greg Martin then contacted Tom Roberts who reported that he is having health issues and is not doing well.

UPDATE: Tom passed away several months later.

QUESTION: Does anyone recognize these Marine officers? If you do, please give Greg a call at (360) 480-1206.

FRANCIS RAY GINTER

His son, Max, wrote: I know it is a long shot, but here goes: I am looking for anyone that might have served with my dad. He drove an Ontos in Plt 241, Company C, 4th Antitank Battalion, USMCR. His name was Francis Ray Ginter. He passed two years ago from pancreatic cancer. I am just trying to find out more about his service in the Marine Corps. This was his Facebook page—<https://www.facebook.com/ray.ginter.96/photos...> I am looking for pictures and stories of his service.

MICHAEL ROPAK

I saw your info about the USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. reunion in Leatherneck. I am not a tanker, but have been trying to locate or get info about a friend who was a tanker during Vietnam. His name is Sgt. or S/Sgt. Michael Ropak, and would have been in country during 1968. Mike and I had been stationed together at Marine Barracks, Bermuda, during 1965-1967. I was never able to link up with him in Vietnam and have never been able to find him since. Would it be possible to poll your membership and see if there's anybody out there who knew Mike. I would like to thank you in advance for any assistance you might be able to provide.

James (Jim) Truman; MSgt, USMC (Ret.)

PO Box 235

Holly Ridge, NC 28445

Phone: 910-329-1655 (home)

Phone: 303-918-6112 (cell)

Email: jtruman1@earthlink.net

If you send me an email, EarthLink will send you back a reply message that the email has been held. I'll still get it and can respond once I accept the individual. ■

JOKE



A Poem

TAKE A MAN AND PUT HIM ALONE,
PUT HIM TWELVE THOUSAND MILES FROM HOME.
EMPTY HIS HEART OF ALL BUT HIS BLOOD,
MAKE HIM LIVE IN SWEAT AND MUD.
THIS IS THE LIFE I CHOSE TO LIVE,
THIS IS THE SOUL TO THE DEVIL I GIVE.
YOU HAVE YOUR PARTIES AND DRINK YOUR BEER,
WHILE YOUNG MEN DIE OVER HERE.
PROTEST THE WAR AND HAVE YOUR FUN,
AND STILL REFUSE TO CARRY A GUN.
THERE IS NOTHING ELSE FOR YOU TO DO,
YET I'M SUPPOSED TO DIE FOR YOU.
THERE IS ONE THING THAT YOU SHOULD KNOW,
AND THAT IS WHERE I THINK YOU SHOULD GO.
I AM ALREADY HERE SO IT'S TOO LATE,
I HAVE TRADED ALL MY LOVE JUST FOR HATE.
"I WILL HATE THIS PLACE 'TIL THE DAY I DIE",
I WILL ALWAYS HEAR MY BUDDY CRY.
I SAW HIS HEAD AND THE BLOOD HE SHED,
JUST BEFORE A CORPSMAN SAID,
"LOOKS LIKE ANOTHER DEAD."
IT WAS THE HIGHEST PRICE A MARINE COULD PAY,
SO WE CAN LIVE THE AMERICAN WAY.
HE HAD THE GUTS TO FIGHT AND DIE,
TO KEEP THE FREEDOM THAT YOU LIVE BY.
BY HIS DYING, YOUR LIFE HE BUYS,
BUT WHO GIVES A DAMN IF A MARINE DIES?

FOUND
IN THE POCKET OF A DEAD MARINE
QUANG TRI PROVINCE, VIETNAM
7 JUNE 1969

WHAT THE WAR IN VIETNAM TAUGHT US ABOUT AMERICA THE HOMECOMING FOR VIETNAM VETERANS

November 26, 2013

Here we are, almost forty years after the end of the Vietnam War, reminiscing on Facebook and other social websites about those experiences we endured in a war so long ago. As we age, many of those memories have faded away, others, were purposely buried, destined to remain that way. However, some of these traumatic experiences continue creeping up to the surface, the details, clear as day and as if the incident occurred just yesterday. What if I told you that my reoccurring nightmare isn't about encounters with enemy soldiers on foreign soil, but of a single incident that took place right here in the United States with my own countrymen? That's right, it's about my homecoming after serving honorably for a year in the Vietnam War.

The goal of every serviceman in Vietnam was to survive the brutality of war and return to the safety of "The World". I was happy, proud and thankful I survived – finally on my way home. Our Pan Am jet landed at McCord AFB in Washington State and, after disembarking, we had to walk across the tarmac to a large hanger almost a quarter of a mile away. Unlike other wars, Vietnam Veterans did not come home as a unit, instead, they came home as individuals with 250 other strangers on a jet plane; a long single file line of veterans snaked toward their destination. Large posters greeted us, announcing "Welcome Home", "Thank you for your service" and "Our Country is Proud of you" among others. Once inside, we were served steak dinners, completed a short physical examination, and

then issued new dress uniforms; all are shocked and comment at their new measurements as this is something none of us paid attention to while overseas. Every one of us lost an average of six inches around the waist. There is a feeling of excitement in the air! All are anxious to complete this process and leave for Tacoma International Airport to coordinate the final leg of their journey home.

Dressed in my new uniform; all ribbons, badges and sergeant stripes in place, I was ready to be welcomed home by the local populace, who had gathered in a large group outside the airbase; every one of us were looking forward to sharing the love.

Instead of finding love, we were bombarded with hate! People stood on the side of the road holding signs condemning the war and us returning veterans. They chanted slogans as a group and yelled insults to us as we passed. Once the bus began pulling away, tomatoes and eggs fell from the sky, splattering against the windows. All of us on the bus sat quietly, shocked, jaws agape, unable to believe what had just happened. Welcome to the new "World!"

We were treated like outcasts, blamed for a war we didn't start, accused of killing innocent women and children, called dope heads, spit at and ridiculed by citizens most of the way to Michigan. Don't get me wrong, I did meet some very generous and friendly people on the way, but they were solely the minority and far and few in between. Some uniformed soldiers with missing limbs were jeered

at and told that they deserved their fate.

These actions, similar to the Westboro Baptist Church group that demonstrates at soldier's funerals today, were not well accepted. Unfortunately, we didn't have a Patriot Guard to run interference for us and had to face the demons head on.

When arriving home, I was dumbfounded, ashamed, and depressed about our treatment – so this is the thanks for putting our lives on the line and for sacrificing what we did during the past year! I began questioning myself – was I right in going to fight in Vietnam or did I make the wrong decision? I soon discovered that it was better to not advertise and just keep quiet!

The news media had continued to flame the public opposition to the Vietnam War by broadcasting distorted and biased accounts from the battlefield. Reporting that the use of drugs in Vietnam was escalating, increased incidents of soldiers refusing direct orders to go out on patrols, and the military inflating body counts and misleading the public on the war – so the warriors were blamed for losing the war!

Clearly, it was unpopular for someone to be a Vietnam Veteran or even a member of the military. In the 1970's, Vietnam Veterans were discriminated against for jobs, publishing books of their war experiences, and were referred to as the social delinquents in our society – even the VFW refused to allow us membership. It seems like every movie about Vietnam to that point portrayed the veteran as a killing machine with mental problems, bad marriages, hooked on drugs or alcoholics.

They were considered an unstable and dangerous lot – a group that citizens should be wary of and avoid. Vets clamped up, refrained from wearing military uniforms in public, grew beards and long hair to fit in with their peers, keeping primarily to themselves. The truth was that our country just wanted to forget about Vietnam and didn't want any reminders circulating. In my opinion, November, 1982, was the start of a new era for Vietnam Veterans – the wall in Washington DC was dedicated and the healing began.

Then, after Vietnam Veterans of America is founded in the

mid-eighties, former combat veterans came out of their closets in droves, growing the organization by establishing local chapters throughout the country. Finally, there is an outlet for veterans to talk about their tours and others who understood and listened intently. The camaraderie is unsurpassed to this day! The time had finally arrived for them to be recognized and appreciated. Not long afterwards, Chicago and New York City both hosted "Welcome Home Vietnam Veterans" parades in attempts to recognize veterans and change public opinion. I personally marched in that parade and have nothing but the greatest admiration for the Chicago residents – they went out of their way to sincerely make us feel wanted.

How many of you are aware that in 1998, sociologist Jerry Lembecke published a book *The Spitting Image: Myth, Memory and the legacy of Vietnam*, which completely discredits the claims that American soldiers were spit on when they returned home and that it was a common urban myth, constructed to ruin anti-war protesters. It stated that, "spitting on returning soldiers started somewhere around 1980 when Stallone mentioned it in 'First Blood.' Anyone who thinks that a number of U.S. soldiers were spit on and did not retaliate by whipping someone's ass is admitting that they think U.S. Soldiers are wussies. There is no way that you could spit on more than a select few soldiers and not get into a fist fight requiring someone to write a report about the incident." Since no reports or evidence was available, it never happened. The truth is that these returning soldiers were still numb from the war and confused when confronted by the protesters. They were unable to react or chose not to retaliate to further fuel the fires enveloping them.

Looking further into this, I found that, shortly after the book came out, a Chicago columnist, Bob Greene, came up with an idea for a newspaper column that eventually resulted in a published book. The idea was prompted by rumors heard over the years. In a column that is syndicated in 200 newspapers nationwide, he asked the following question: "If you are a reader of this column, and you are a Vietnam Veteran, were you ever spat upon when you returned to the U.S.?" The response was overwhelming and more than >>



The 1982 Dedication of The Wall in D.C.



1000 soldiers wrote in. The many letters confirmed the rumors and make a poignant, genuine statement on their own. Taking excerpts from these letters, editing and verifying, Green put them together in a book called "Homecoming."

Here are some excerpts from his book:

"In the Seattle airport, as I was arriving home after serving in Vietnam in 1968-1969, a gang of 10 to 20 total strangers clustered in the terminal and shouted insults at me as I passed by in my uniform. It never occurred to me that people could attack individual young soldiers who walked through the airport alone in their sacred hour of homecoming."

When J. Leonard Caldeira returned from Vietnam, he was walking with his fiancée in San Francisco. A rather nondescript man, "not a hippie," he writes, spat at his uniform. "Nothing was said but the incident saddened and confused me. I took off my uniform later that day and never put it on during the rest of my stay in San Francisco. The only mental scar that remains with me today of Vietnam was the unwelcome display of that man in San Francisco."

Frederick H. Giese of Arlington Heights, IL., was evacuated from Vietnam to a hospital in Japan. While there he met a Japanese woman, married her and adopted her son. When he returned to the United States in 1970, he was in uniform, wearing all his medals — including the Purple Heart and Bronze Star. "My family and I were standing in line, when, out of the blue, this middle-aged lady walked up to me with a bowl of potato salad in her hand. She threw the salad smack in the middle of my chest and spat what salad she had in her mouth in my face. Then she proceeded to call me a 'baby

killer,' a 'warmonger,' and a lot of other vile names. That was how I was welcomed home. That is how my family was first introduced to America.

"It is dumbfounding to read letter after letter of such utter, personal viciousness Americans directed at Americans. These disquieting testimonies plumb depths of meaning on the war that volumes of analysis cannot," said Greene. "I have no doubt that many returning veterans truly were spat upon," Greene writes in his preface. "There were too many letters, going into too fine a detail to deny the fact. I was profoundly moved by how, all these years later, so many men remembered exactly where and when they were spat upon, and how the pain has stayed with them."



glaze over, and I, for one, will carry mine until I die. What about you?"

Bob Boughton, of Fredericktown, Ohio, recovering from injuries received in Vietnam, was waiting for a bus home. "An elderly woman came up to me, looked me square in the face and called me a hired killer. But then, a young lady dressed in bell-bottoms, love beads and a peace symbol came up to me as the elderly woman walked away. She looked me in the face and told me she was sorry for the way the returning vets were being treated. I could never forget her face and those few kind words."

Greene writes, "I did indeed include the invitation for anyone who had spat upon a returning soldier to write in and explain his or her motives, and to reflect on how he or she feels about it now. There were no responses."

Many others, while not spat on, were called baby killers and war criminals by strangers, and occasionally by people they knew and friends from the neighborhood. A number were welcomed back and thanked for the sacrifices they had made by citizens in public. However, the vast majority of well wishes were from immediate family members.


Most of the spitting and jeering incidents in the book happened in San Francisco, where a large number of returning veterans stopped on the way home. Nevertheless, they also happened in the southwest and mid-west. The veterans felt that the American people had turned against them. From the soldiers, I have known the common theme was they experienced this in some other areas of the country, but it was virtually unheard of in the south. This is only word of mouth and nothing is documented.

Many Vietnam vets remain embittered by the treatment they experienced following the war. The social alienation of Vietnam veterans, ostracized by the community instead of being welcomed home, has contributed to the problems of PTSD. Today, the American psyche is ingrained with greater respect for the military, in large part, because people recognize that past treatment of Vietnam vets was a mistake.

So, does this mean we should forgive and forget? Some scars are too deep to

Reprinted from the blog website "Cherries":

<https://cherrieswriter.wordpress.com/2013/11/26/the-homecoming-for-vietnam-veterans/> ■



VA HEALTH CARE
Defining EXCELLENCE in the 21st Century

V. A. News & Updates
For more VA information please go to our website
www.USMCVTA.org

Non-VA Emergency Care Fact Sheet

At some time in your life, you may need emergency care. This document explains what VA might be able to do for you. When it is not possible for you to go to a VA Medical Center, you should go to the nearest hospital that has an emergency room. If you are in an ambulance, the paramedics will usually take you to the closest emergency room.

What is an emergency?
A medical emergency is an injury or illness that is so severe that without immediate treatment, it threatens your life or health.

How do I know my situation is an emergency?
Your situation is an emergency if you believe your life or health is in danger.

If I believe my life or health is in danger, do I need to call the VA before I call for an ambulance or go to an emergency room?
No. Call 911 or go to the nearest emergency room right away.

When should I contact the VA regarding an emergency room visit?
You, your family, friends or hospital staff should contact the nearest VA medical center as soon as possible, preferably within 72 hours of your emergency, so you are better aware of what services VA may or may not cover. Provide VA with information about your emergency and what services are being provided to you. Ask VA for guidance on what emergency charges may or may not be covered, so you can plan accordingly.

If the doctor then wants to admit me to the hospital, must I obtain advance approval from the VA?

- If the admission is an emergency—NO, although prompt notification of the VA is necessary.
- If the admission is not an emergency—YES

If a VA bed is available and I can be safely transferred, do I have to move to the VA hospital?
YES, if you want VA to continue to pay for your care. If you refuse to be transferred, VA will not pay for any further care.

If I am admitted to the hospital as a result of an emergency, how much will VA pay?
This depends on your VA eligibility. VA may pay all, some, or none of the charges. Some highlights are listed in the next column.

For service-connected conditions, here are some of the criteria that must be met:

1. Care or services were provided in a medical emergency, and
2. VA or another federal facility were not feasibly available, and
3. VA was notified within 72 hours of the admission.
4. Ask your local VA Medical Center's Non-VA (Fee) Care Office for further eligibility guidance.

For non-service-connected conditions, here are some of the criteria that must be met:

1. Veteran is enrolled in the VA Health Care System, and
2. Veteran has received health care services from VA within the previous 24 months, and
3. Veteran has no other health insurance coverage.
4. Ask your local VA Medical Center's Non-VA (Fee) Care Office for further eligibility guidance.

How do I know if I have a service-connected condition?
A service-connected condition refers to an illness or injury that was incurred in or aggravated by military service and has a rating assigned by the Veterans Benefits Administration.

How long do I have to file a claim for reimbursement for emergency medical care?
File your claim with the nearest VA Medical Center quickly because time limits usually apply. For non-service-connected care, the time limit is 90 days. Again, consult your local VA Medical Center for more information.

Will VA pay for emergency care received outside the United States?
VA will only pay for emergency care outside the U.S. if your emergency is related to a service-connected condition. For more information about care provided outside the U.S., contact the Foreign Medical Program (FMP) at (877) 345-8179, or go to the FMP website at: <http://www.va.gov/hac/forbeneficiaries/fmp>

Short Stories

Should I Have Stayed In?

BY JIM COAN

In response to John Wear's request for us to share the personal decisions we made regarding either leaving or staying in the Marine Corps, I'll share mine:

Back in 1960, I planned to attend the University of Arizona after high school. My childhood home in Tucson was only three blocks from the UA campus. Seeing male ROTC students walking by my house to and from school was a turn-off. I hated the idea of having to wear a uniform on campus. To avoid having to take mandatory ROTC my first two years of college, I joined the Arizona Army National Guard in Tucson, went on 5-months active duty, then became a full-time college student while serving with the Guard.

After being expelled from college for a semester in 1964 over some misguided alcohol/testosterone-related high jinx, I decided it was time to get serious about my future. My grade average improved markedly, enabling me to finally graduate. Then, one night in 1966, I saw a Marine officer being interviewed on TV about a battle his unit had just been in. I was impressed with his self-confident, no-nonsense demeanor. I thought, Maybe I could be one, too. But, there was the little matter of my prior bar fight misdemeanor arrest that had gotten me kicked out of school. Turns out I was in good company when the Officer Selection Officer met with me and five recent college grad applicants. Three of us had to obtain waivers due to having a misdemeanor arrest record (all alcohol related). A war was going on and the Marine Corps was not looking for choir boys to sign up.

I had already completed six years of service through the Army Nation-

al Guard and made sergeant. But, I wanted more of a challenge than I thought a commission in the Army could provide. I joined the Marine Corps with the intention of making it a career. Everything seemed to be moving along in that direction until I was transferred to 2nd Tanks at Camp Lejeune after Nam.

I loved being the CO of Charlie Company. I had an outstanding first sergeant and the company gunny, Gunny Keith, was great to work with. What ultimately began turning me off on making the Corps a career was Operation Ever Ready. Every Friday evening, one battalion in the 2nd Division would be chosen to mount out and travel to the rail head as if the balloon had gone up somewhere and we had to go to war. What this meant was that none of my tankers could go on liberty per usual at 1600, because they would all be needed if we were the unlucky battalion chosen to mount out. The word would be passed long after evening chow which unlucky unit was chosen to mount out, and that pretty much sabotaged any liberty for my Marines that evening and every Friday evening for many months.

Then there was the Navy Relief Fund fiasco. One Friday afternoon, long past 1600, our entire tank battalion was standing in formation, in the rain, until enough men stepped forward to agree to have money taken out of their meager paychecks for this fund. I had a few married corporals in my company who lived off base in run-down trailers, and were barely able to put clothes on their kid's backs. I was fuming mad over this. I told the company reenlistment NCO to go ahead and take some time off because no one would be knocking at his door to re-up for

a long while. I decided right then that I couldn't make a career out of an organization that treated its enlisted Marines that way in order for some high-ups to get eagles or stars on their collar.

When the word got around that I was leaving active duty, several senior Marines, both officer and enlisted, tried to convince me to stay in. My 1st Sergeant invited me to his home for a bar-be-que. The Bn. CO took me to lunch at the Officer's Club and offered to recommend me for a regular commission if I would stay in. That was hard to turn down, but my mind was made up. I'd already applied for and been accepted for graduate school, and was committed to following that fork in the road of life.

Did I ever have any regrets? Yes. In fact, after I'd completed grad school and obtained a position with the City of Tucson in 1972, I learned I'd been promoted to Captain, USMCR. I looked into joining the Marine reserve unit in Tucson. However, I could not get past those Marine reservists having sideburns and rather sloppy military demeanor. It was a bulk fuel company, which might explain the lack of esprit. So, I decided to pass on that course of action and wrote the Headquarters Marine Corps inquiring about coming back on active duty. I was still on inactive reserve status. Their response was that the Marine Corps was downsizing and would only consider my request if I had joined a Marine reserve unit after initially leaving active duty. That was the end of any plans I might have had of making the Marine Corps a career.

But, I've had a good life, married a wonderful woman, and raised three children. Sandra and I celebrated our 40th Wedding Anniversary last

year. I had a really rewarding career working in the field of juvenile corrections and obtained a great retirement package through the State of California. Life is good.

The Coin Flip

STORIES FROM JIM COWMAN

On June 8, 1967. Orders took me from 1st Tank BN to the 5th Marines at An Hoa. Another officer and I made the flight together, and as I recall neither of us was overly pleased with this assignment.

We arrived at An Hoa, were issued flak jackets, helmets and other combat gear. We were told to "stand by" to catch the next resupply chopper to our assigned unit. One of us was to join the 5th Marines and the other to join the 7th Marines (I think). Both units were deeply involved in Operation Union at the time.

We decided to flip a coin to see who went were! We flipped! I can't recall who called the toss or who won, but I ended up going to Hotel Co, 2/5. The Lt. went to the other unit.

The story of that initial flight from An Hoa to Hotel Company will be told later, as it was an exciting venture. The story of the other officer ends here. He was killed that day.

The Night The Coal Mines were Hit

On Monday, July 3, 1967, Hotel Company 2/5 departed the An Hoa combat base and humped out to Hill 42 in Antenna Valley. By the time we got to Hill 42, Hotel Company had suffered one Marine KIA, had medevaced one Marine who had lost a leg, and had eleven Marines qualify for Purple Hearts.

Hotel Co set up its position on Hill 42 and, as was the procedure, monitored battalion and other company radio traffic.

Golf Co. of 2/5 was in position at the "coal mine" complex south of An Hoa. As it turned out the coal mine was not the place to be at night.

Radio traffic increased and it was evident that the An Hoa base and the coal mine were under attack! Hotel Co. was on Hill 42 and we were very concerned. It was just a matter of time before they hit us. We got as ready as we could, but no attack came.

Golf Co. had 13 Marines KIA that evening and some 43 Marines wounded. This attack on the "coal mines" has been documented in several official USMC reference books.

On the afternoon of the 4th of July, 1967, Hotel Co. was ordered to hump back to An Hoa. We had steak that evening, but the VC had done their work and we did not have much to cheer about.

Aunt Gertrude

Some 15 years or so after the Vietnam mess was over with, my association with the USMC had terminated, I was in Michigan on vacation. One afternoon my mother and I were chatting about lots of things and Vietnam was usually one of the subjects discussed. We both agreed that my father would really have enjoyed my stories, but he never heard any of them.

My mother mentioned that my Aunt Gert had said several times how the Vietnam situation "had made me hard." I've never been quite sure what Aunt Gert meant, and she died before I could ask her. But I guess Vietnam affected all of us in some way.

The Cluster F*ck

BY FRED GOGER

I was a 2531 "push to talk" man with h&s on hill 34 from late nov. '65 Till sept '67. Besides standing radio watches, me being an e-1, i was tasked with night patrols and shared this duty with joe staskiewicz. We split this up doing 30 nights apiece for about 6 months. With that kind of duty, we also took part in field operations when available. Most of our nighttime treks were directed east to-

ward rt.1 And a schoolhouse 3rd tks was entrusted with.

On august 9th, we took a bunch of mortars from yen bac to the west. Everyone knew yen bac belonged to charlie. Toward the end of august, s-1 came up with a plan to sweep thru yen bac by way of the song cau do river to the south. We put three squads into three amtracs which were also from hill 34. The leader of this operation was s-4's s/sgt. Longo, who as far as i can remember never left the wire. He had less than 30 days to do. Why he chose to take this mission i could never figure out.

We went by truck to board the tracs and slowly made our way westward toward yen bac. While we were on the river, we also had a squad walking back and forth in the rice paddies between the ville and hill 34. This all began at 2300 hrs.

About midnight, the lead trac got stuck on a sand bar about 200 meters from where were to "jumpoff" and surprise charlie in the ville. I was on the 2nd trac as longo's radioman. The number 3 trac came forward, threw the lead trac a cable and spent about 20 minutes trying to pull him off the sand bar. When he pulled him free, he then got stuck. Now the number 2 trac where i was had to go forward and pull that one off the sandbar. While this was going on, sgt. O'hare, who was on my trac, was carrying an m-79 thump gun which he accidentally fired over the ville in the direction of the guys in the paddies who were trying to draw fire from the ville. Of course, they thought they were being fired upon. I had to convince those guys by radio that it was only an accidental discharge. The river's edge at yen bac was a straight wall and we had to run off the top of the lvt's sides. Of course, one guy missed and fell in the river-his trac backs off to leave and i had to call him back to pick this guy up. With all this engine reving and m-79 shot, all surprise was lost and s/sgt. Longo had >>

our three squads form a semi-circle with our backs to the river. It is now about 0300 and Longo said to me, "gog, i think we're surrounded." So, we stayed put until sunrise. The only "action" we saw was the guy falling in the river and O'Hare's shot at the squad on the other side of the ville. At sunrise, we moved thru the village and hooked up with the guys in the paddies for the walk back to the hill. A cluster f*ck to remember.

Jungle Rot

BY TOM FENERTY

Over the years I've read many books about Viet Nam: military, political, fiction and fact.

Maybe I missed the few that dealt with the grunt's fight with a different enemy—infection. The infection I am talking about was, at the time, given a general moniker known as "Jungle Rot." I have no idea who had it, how many had it, or, how prevalent it actually was among the troops. I only knew that I had it, and I didn't like it. All these years later I thought to investigate jungle rot and its causes.

I started by checking out the definition on-line and was puzzled to find more information about a mid-west rock band by the same name. Now, there's a bad mental image. Wikipedia terms jungle rot as a "tropical ulcer" that normally occurs below the knee. Someone must have not noticed that hands and arms were not below the knee. My layman diagnosis is that it is simply a bacterial infection which occurs in tropical weather with conditions such as poor hygiene, diet, and, the lack of an adequate antibiotic, such as penicillin.

Often initiated by minor trauma, such as a cut or scrape that, when exposed to the elements and conditions present, becomes infected and soon fills with odorous goo commonly known as pus. I'm not sure when it first manifested on my legs and then hands, probably January or February of 1968. Walking patrol through

thick vegetation and elephant grass combined with the leeches in the wet and humid jungle areas were the cause of my "minor trauma."

Problem was that proper hygiene would require a bath or shower. We were, at times going some 30 days without bathing because of operational issues (we were in the boonies). At best, if not a helmet washing, a quick wash-up took place in a stream or bomb crater. With enemy nearby this was not done with leisure.

The available food for the majority of the 12 months and 20 days came in a can. Some said that these cans of C-rations were left over from the Korean Conflict. I never tried to verify the age of a meal; just knew that most of the 12 variations of "food" were not very appetizing. Were there hot meals prepared in a mess hall? Yes, available in the rear areas. On rare occasions, hot chow was choppered to our field positions for consumption. Hot chow came in large insulated metal containers. Scrumptious, even without the table cloth. Did eating out of a can the majority of the time contribute to poor diet?

Once the infected area would pus up, the slightest pressure or bump would cause pain and a breakage in the skin with this caramel colored goo oozing forth. The infected area would then scab up and the cycle would start over, growing a bit larger with each passing day.

Soon, both legs from below the knee were quite tender and sported a series of scabs and pus.

Surely, one would think that this situation could easily be rectified by going to medical personnel and saying, "Hey, Doc, can you give me something for this.....?"

I did this on numerous occasions, and the miracle treatment, penicillin, was not available.

I'll bet the Army had plenty. Penicillin was used as a cure for many maladies in Viet Nam, the foremost being the treatment of "clap," a venereal disease. I just figured that

was the reason there was none left. It wasn't until I rotated home that, without any medication at all, this vile infection began to disappear. The scars on both legs are my only reminder and souvenir.

Ahhh the memories.....

Did we serve together?

BY GREG KELLEY

It's been so long that my memories are old and some of them deeply buried. I was an 18-year-old PFC, and was the gunner on Alpha-24, Third Tanks, for most of '67. We were assigned to be in many operations that year. I remember several Operation Hickories...but all the operations seemed to string together. We'd come off one and we'd be on our way back to the tank park at Dong Ha, but when we arrived we'd get attached to another operation...and so it went for a couple of long, hot months. I spent time at The Washout, Con Thien, Gio Linh, Cam Lo, and places in between.

I remember "Kim" from the village of Cam Lo. She was a North Vietnamese refugee who was my age. She was the only Vietnamese person I ever really got to know. Whenever we went back to Cam Lo, I searched for her.

We ran a major sweep out of Cam Lo with a bunch of "new guy" grunts. We took heavy casualties; a lot of them were heat stroke. We ran in to the Demilitarized Military Zone (DMZ) just shy of North Vietnam several times on quick strikes. I forget exactly which operation it was but it was a big one and we ended up almost entirely surrounded while deep into the DMZ. We took very heavy casualties. We also got hit very badly at The Washout one night. There were hundreds of mortar rounds, artillery and gas. We were overrun a couple of times. I remember so many details. "Puff" finally showed up after more than three hours of heavy fighting. During a lull, I had to get out of the tank to take a piss.

I remember emptying my .45 into an NVA at about 20 feet just as I was buttoning up. A flare had just popped overhead, and as it swayed from the chute ... (Do you remember how eerie the light was from those flares as they floated down?) ... I saw him just as he saw me. I remember the split second it took for my mind to process the facts. He was only an outline in the weird lighting but he had camouflage brush all over. I remember how quickly I realized he was not one of us. We had no LPs or OPs or any patrols out that night. He was the enemy and I emptied my clip into him just as he was starting to swing his AK at me. To this day, I credit my Marine training for saving my ass at that point. I was a split second faster and lived.

My tank commander at the time was a gunny but can't remember his name. I think that he had been pulled out of stateside recruiting duty. It damn well could have been (RB) English. Whoever it was, I remember one night that he got hit badly in the eye with shrapnel and he was medevaced out the next day. He was so cool, even after getting wounded badly. As he sat on the mule he yelled out (and I quote verbatim) "Bring me my pipe and my Playboy and no smoke signals".

Ben Cole was on the north side of the washout for some of the time I was there. I went through five or six tank commanders while I was In-country and I'm embarrassed that I can't remember many names very well. "Nicodemus" strikes a bell while we were at Gio Linh. We were overrun by the NVA at Con Thien too. I spent 43 days on "The Hill of Angels" jumping from trench to trench while the hundreds of incoming arty landed all around. We got really good at knowing which ones were close and which ones you didn't have to jump for. I remember a red-headed tank commander from one of the other tanks. One day a lieutenant came up for a few minutes

to talk with us and explain that they were going to try to get us back to the rear one at a time for a hot shower and a cold beer. I remember that the red headed TC looked the Lieutenant in the eye and said, "You want us to shower to take off this mud? Christ!! It's taken us weeks to get this dirty!" That was about the funniest line I heard while on that hill. Johnny Seiler was our driver. Johnny passed on to the Great Tank Park in the Sky a while back.

Many years ago, I read the Sponson Box magazine account of "My Two Days at Con Thien" by John Wear, and chills ran up my spine as I remembered an incident incredibly similar that happened on a road sweep out of Con Thien while I was on Alpha 24. It involved two tanks and a handful of grunts, just like that account. We got hit badly. As I recall, we were "suckered" into it by small arms. The tanks were committed deeply into the tree line a hundred yards or so off the road, and one got pretty much knocked out. It was such a blur and it's been so long that I only recall a few details. I was the gunner on Alpha 24. We were firing .30 cal. and canister rounds like crazy and one of the canister rounds broke open into the breach of the 90 when we were rocketed. The accident disabled the main gun when the slugs jammed the breach. I remember the same airstrike as the story. It was so close that it sucked the loader's hatch open. I recall jumping out with my loader (it could have been Lance Corporal Calderon??) to attach the cable and hooks to the other tank to pull it out while we were getting showered with small arms and machine gun fire. I recall one or more crewmen from the other tank who were wounded and one was hit in the thigh pretty badly. I recall thinking, "He got the million dollar wound." I remember having to leave one of the grunts in the trees screaming. We swept the area a couple of days later with a couple of squads and a few tanks. We found the

grunt who had been screaming. The NVA had tortured him badly before he died. Was this the same incident? Too much the same not to be, I think.

If anyone remembers any of this, I would appreciate an e-mail back and we can catch up. I'll be at the reunion next month, and a handshake and a nod will go both ways if you remember me. I'm sure I will remember you too. Although these memories are jammed into the back of my skull, I really want to dislodge them after all these years.

CAVES

This is a write up of an email conversation that several 1st Tanks comm. guys were having a few years ago:

Mark Suthers (Ontario, Canada) writes: Guys—I was wondering if any of you remember when we were on the beach in Chu Lai and bored shitless? Someone got the bright idea that we should dig a tunnel underneath the comm. tent. So, we pulled up some floorboards and started digging. I can't remember where we planned to go with the tunnel or where we got the reinforcing materials, but we were quite a way along when Lt. Lemon came into the comm. tent one day and caught us in the act. Lou Cavelli was down in the hole digging out sand while the rest of us were going out for a piss and dropping the sand along the way. Lt. Lemon said something like: "What the fuck are you guys doing?"

Someone ... probably you (Tom Snyder) ... as you were the senior guy, said. "We are digging a tunnel!" You may have added that it was something to do ... I guess or whatever...

Lt. Lemon just stood there and said something like: "I didn't see a fucking thing!!!" He then just turned around and left us to our little game. I think we moved inland shortly after that, so I am not sure what happened to the tunnel and we never tried that again, since we got a lot of visits from Capt. Bertrand after that. >>

Tom (Snyder): Please check with Carl Lemon to see if he remembers this—and do you have Lou Cavelli's email address? Good times!!!

P.S. I haven't thought of this episode for probably 50 years...

Jim Renforth replies: I remember Cavelli quite well. I once asked him what his first name was and he replied, "Corporal."

Tom Snyder chimes in: I don't remember "the tunnel," Mark ... but then again, the troops were told to NOT use the comm. shack as a hang-out. I will forward this to Capt. Lemon. I'm sure he will find it funny, if he remembers it. And with regard to Cpl. Lou Cavelli, (our supply NCO) ... I located him in Indiana. He was located right at the Illinois state line. He was a fire chief at the time that I spoke to him and he was getting ready to retire. He never showed any interest in joining the VTA, which is a shame. He still has a great sense of humor, just as we knew him then. You have a good memory, Mark. I am glad you remembered it and I'm sure you had no trouble blending the sand from the tunnel around the piss tubes.

John Wear writes: Mark, I will also

forward this to Carl Lemon ... hopefully he will respond. I also see that Robert Fierros is on your CC list. Robert recently joined our organization.

Mark Suthers replies: Robert Fierros was the GySgt. for 2nd Plt., B Co., 1st Tanks (reporting to Lt. John Warner). I was attached to 2nd Plt. when we landed in May or June 1965 at Qui Nhon. We spent the next six months there and points inland. Just before 10 Nov 65, we got on a LST and moved up to Chu Lai to rejoin B Co. The Navy cooks did a superb job of feeding us on the USMC BD—we had been on B & C Rats for so long, we all forgot what real food tasted like. We were all a bunch of testosterone fueled Jarheads and it seemed the only guy with any discipline was Gunny Fierros. Of course, we did our jobs, but it just didn't seem anything like the John Wayne movies, so we were always doing stupid stuff. I kind of feel a bit of guilt at the way we all treated Gunny Fierros; he really was the one who held it all together. I really did like my time with 2nd Plt. more than getting back to HQS—got to do real Marine stuff like night patrols, etc.—not just fixing radios.

Mark adds: Paul Zloba was a radio-relay tech with 7th Marines in Chu Lai. I went through electronics school with him and we always seemed to get stationed nearby to each other for the rest of our enlistments. As to the replay you received, it is really from Donna (Paul's wife of 48 years). She is a bit of a Drill Instructor in temperament—she could probably make Lee Ermey cringe.

And Ted Lunacek was another tech I met in Force Service Regiment in LeJeune when we rotated back to the World. He was with 3rd Amtracs in Vietnam (around Da Nang) and I think landed with the 1st wave in March 1965. He saw some shit as well as some of the tracs got shot up pretty bad during some of their Ops.

So, I don't think Paul or Ted would have much direct interest in the VTA as their time was spent in other units. Paul did spend a lot of free time in our comm. tent and he also knows Doyle, as they are both from the Cincinnati area.

I will work on Doyle Harp.
Editor's Note: We are still waiting for Carl Lemon and Doyle Harp. ■

My First Taste of Combat

BY: BRYANT R. MCDONALD

John, you're right about nobody will know our task and deeds unless we tell them, so here is my story of my first taste of combat.

I checked in at 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd MarDiv in March 1966 after getting off of a troop ship in Da Nang Harbor. The next morning, I was sent to Hill 22, about 20 miles SW of Da Nang, where two of 1st Platoon, Alpha Co. tanks were assigned. My tank had Sgt. Banner as the TC, Cpl. Spell the gunner, LCpl. Williams was the driver and PFC B.R. McDonald (me) was the new loader. The two tanks ran road sweeps every morning and had perimeter guard duty at night. At this time, we were hill hopping to get the VC farther away from Da Nang. We later moved to Little 22, and then to Hill 55.

Around the 1st of June, 1966, a 2nd Lt. came out to the hill. He said that he was our new platoon leader and that we were going on a sweep operation. Both of our tanks had full crews, so the Lt. rode on our tank, sitting on the loader's hatch. We left Hill 22 and went south with about a company of grunts. The area consisted mostly of rice paddies, tree lines, small waterways, and a hut every now and then. About 7 or 8 miles out, we came upon a large creek with high banks, so we had to turn right and follow the creek.

Our sister tank was about 50 meters behind us and our tank was in the lead of the grunt column. We traveled a little farther and came up to a grass hut. Sgt. Banner told Williams to drive over the hut. My head was sticking out of the loader's hatch between the Lt.'s legs, when all of a sudden there was a large flash and one hell of a large explosion. L/Cpl. Williams, our driver, had buttoned up before hitting the hut and that move saved his life. I heard Sgt. Banner yelling and felt something pushing on my helmet. I looked up at him, with my ears still ringing and a little confused. I noted that it was him

pushing my head down and yelling at me, "Get down! Get down!"

For some reason, my head would not go down, then he pointed to the gypsy rack behind me and there I saw the Lt. bleeding from everywhere and appeared to be unconscious. I dropped like a rock to the tank floor because I was thinking booby trap the whole time. I heard Sgt. Banner yelling, "Medic! Medic!" at the grunts. He told Williams to drive on through the hut. He also asked Spell if he saw anything. Spell told me to get another HE round ready to load into the gun and told Sgt. Banner that he hadn't seen anything. I grabbed another HE and listened to Spell say, "I got 'em!"

Sgt. Banner said, "Fire!"
"On the way!"—BOOM!
All in less than a second. I loaded the next round and Spell said, "On the way!"—BOOM!

I loaded another round of HE. Then I heard Sgt. Banner say, "Good Job!"

Sgt. Banner never left his position and showed more courage than I had ever seen before. He was cool, calm and collected. Spell had taken out an RPG team that was preparing to shoot at us again. Banner then told Williams to turn left and move toward the creek. I popped my head back out the hatch and saw that the Lt. was gone, but there was blood everywhere. I then heard Banner say, "I see some on the other side. Spell, do you see them?" I looked across the creek about 30 meters and saw about 20 gooks in black pajamas and straw hats carrying AK-47s. Spell said, "Yes, I see them."

Banner said, "Hit them with the .30," and Spell opened up. Sgt. Banner raised up his .50 and opened up. I dropped back down and checked the .30 to make sure everything was

working good and heard Banner yell, "Ammo!" I then went back up and grabbed a box of .50 cal. and gave it to him. I watched as Spell was knocking them down left and right with the .30 cal. You could see limbs falling off of the trees and hear bullets flying over our heads. My heart was racing and my hands were shaking. I had never felt more alive! But I damn sure did not want to die, either, so I dropped back down.

Banner yelled, "Ammo!" and I got him another box of .50 cal. and dumped the brass for the .30 cal. When I dumped the brass out of the tank, I saw our sister tank had fire balls coming off of it. I looked across the creek and saw an RPG crew firing at them. I grabbed Banner's arm to get his attention and pointed to the other tank, then to the RPG crew. At about that same time, the other tank commander came on the air and shouted, "We need some help!"

Sgt. Banner had already told Spell to come left for the RPG crew, and the turret was already turning. I dropped back down inside, ready to load, when Spell said, "Target!"

Banner said, "Fire!"
"On the way!"—BOOM!
I loaded another HE as Spell said, "Got 'em!"

I went back up and looked across the creek and the RPG crew was still there, preparing to fire again. Banner was already looking in that direction. I pointed again, and about that time, the gooks fired the RPG. Banner saw them and told Spell, "Another RPG to the left!" Spell brought the gun around to the left and said, "Target!"

Sgt. Banner said, "Fire!"
"On the way!"—BOOM!
I loaded another HE and >>

Photo from Vietnam



John Bartusevics wrote: Heavy Section with one tank in front and two tanks in rear providing security for a company of grunts from 1/1 heading to rally point in order to kick off Operation. There was a section of P-5 amtracs in the middle. I took this Photo with my 35 mm Petri with a 1.8 Lens in Vietnam, 1966-67.

Spell said, "On the way!" – BOOM! I loaded another HE as Spell said, "Got 'em!" Banner came back with "Good job, men!"

I felt dumb, because I should have known that there was more than one RPG team shooting at us. Then, mortar rounds began hitting in the creek and slowly walking on to our side. I saw two rounds hit in the creek and I dropped down, then I heard more hitting around the tank.

Banner told Spell that the mortar crew was in the tree line about 100 meters from the creek. He used the TCs override and lined up the main gun on the enemy. A couple of seconds later, Spell yelled, "Target!"

Sgt Banner yelled, "Fire!"

"On the way!" – BOOM!

I loaded another HE and Spell said, "On the way!" – BOOM! I loaded another round but the mortar stopped firing and Spell said, "I think I got them."

Banner said, "I think you did, too."

By now the gooks had thinned out and were in hiding places, except directly in front of us. Two or three at a time would jump out of bushes and run down to the bank of the creek. Every time they did, Spell and Sgt Banner would open up on them. It appeared that they never knew we were right across from them and, every time they'd move, they'd hit the dust. Finally, the gooks disappeared into the tree line behind them. It seemed like a lifetime, but the firefight lasted about ten minutes.

Banner checked with everybody, including the other tank and everybody was fine. He told our crew that we had done a great job. I was standing on my loader's seat and made a boot statement directly to him. "That was fun!"

He looked at me and said, "Help the grunts load the dead Marines (on to our tank)."

I jumped down on the ground and helped load sixteen dead Marines on the back of our tank. I didn't make any more stupid statements after that. We learned later that we had run upon the rear guard of the VC unit. They had hit us with an RPG round on the left side of the gun shield. There were numerous bullet holes in our water cans and some ammo boxes. Our other tank had lots of exterior damage and took about fifteen hits from RPGs.

The gooks had a tunnel dug under the creek and they were moving to the other side when we drove up on them. A grunt tunnel rat went into the tunnels in order to blow them up and found that the exit point was directly in front of our tanks, right where we had been seeing those gooks grouped up and running down the creek bank. The Lt. was the only tanker casualty that day. The grunts told us later that the Lt. was being medevaced with the other wounded on the choppers that were now coming in. I never heard any more about the Lt., so I hope that he made it okay.

Sgt. Banner told me that, if the RPGs had been a 57mm recoilless, we would have been in a lot of trouble. After everything was cleared up at the scene, we headed back to Hill 22 like it was just another day at the office.

I want to say that our tanks were A-14 and A-15, but I am not sure. Later, I had a fire that burned up most of my Vietnam stuff. Sgt. Banner and the other TC were old school Marines and none of the tanks had names painted on their gun barrels. When Sgt. Banner rotated back to the World, my new TC named our tank "None," because the other tank was named "None Better." Later on, I became TC and I changed the tank's name to "The Believer." And that's another story which was in the Sponson Box as A-14.

My Vietnam bio is:

1st Plt., A Co., 3rd Tanks – Mar 66 to June 67

3rd Plt., B Co., 3rd Tanks – June 68 to Nov 68

Operation: Liberty, Macon, Prairie, Deckhouse VI, De Soto, Beacon Hill, Prairie III, Prairie IV, Lam Son 250, Lancaster II, Scotland II and several other unnamed Ops.

McDonald, Bryant R.
400 Bright Star Road
Horton, AL 35980
Phone: 205-466-7668
No Email

Connecting the Dots...

BY PETE RITCH

USMCVTA Member

Company B, 3rd Tanks; Vietnam 1968/1969

Talking with John Wear after the VTA Reunion last year, I told him that I was amazed at how many of our VTA members could recall specific times, dates, names and locations, etc. from their tours in Vietnam. They could rattle off crew member's names, tank numbers, units they supported, operation names, etc. I told John that I couldn't tell you any of the operations I participated in or the names of the units my platoon supported. While I could recall some of my platoon members, there were more that I couldn't recall than there were ones that I could recall. I don't think it is old age, I think I developed a very selective Vietnam data base in my brain housing group.

John told me about the National Personnel Records Center in St. Louis Missouri that retains all military records. In addition, upon written request, they will send you a copy of your file. I sent the Center a letter requesting my Separation Documents, Personnel Records and Medical Records. Approximately three (3) months later, I received a seventy-five-page packet from the Records Center that contained my enlistment documents, orders to duty stations and schools (OCS, TBS, Tracked Vehicle School), combat assignments, citations/awards, fitness reports, discharge papers and my re-enlistment request (this is a story for another time). What had been a hazy recollection of memories now became an exact chronology of my USMC career.

On my Record of Duty Assignments form, I found that I enlisted in the Marine Corps on August 29, 1967 and was on inactive duty until November 20, 1967, when I received orders to report to OCS in Quantico, Virginia. I completed OCS, was commissioned as a 2nd Lt., and then completed TBS in Quantico on July 12, 1968. I completed Tracked Vehicle School at Camp Pendleton, California on September 27, 1968, and arrived in Vietnam on October 14, 1968. I remembered most of

this information, but not the actual dates.

My real fuzzy memory area was Vietnam, primarily because of the shock of being assigned as an infantry platoon commander upon arriving in-country. Didn't the pagues in Da Nang know I had an 1801 MOS? It was then explained to me that the 3rd Marine Division had a policy that required all new 2nd Lieutenant's arriving in-country to be assigned to infantry platoons for 90 days, regardless of MOS. It was now clear to me why I blanked out this period of my enlistment.

My Duty Assignments Record listed that I was an infantry platoon commander in Co. M, 3rd Bn, 9th Mar, 3rd Mar Div. effective October 22, 1968. On January 4, 1969, I was transferred to Co. B, 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Marine Div. My stint in the infantry was shorter than the "90 days a Grunt" rule, but I chose not to point that out to anyone. On October 10, 1969, I left Vietnam with orders to MCSC, Albany, Georgia. And last, but not least, I was discharged from active duty on November 15, 1970.

To this day, I could not tell you which operations or units I supported with the five tanks of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co. I believe that this was because we were always in support of Marine, Army or ARVN infantry units in our AO.

My Combat History- Expeditions-Awards form listed the following dates and operations that I participated in. All of the operations in 1968 were as an infantry platoon commander:

- 14 Oct. 1968-Operations against Viet Cong in the vicinity of Dong Ha
- 27 Oct. 1968 Operation Scotland II Mountain
- 19 Nov 1968 Operation Scotland II AF-TON
- 22 Dec 1968 Operation Dawson River
- 10 Jan 1969 Operation Scotland II and Operation Kentucky
- 27 May 1969 Operation Lam Son 277-1,

Caddo Creek and Virginia Ridge
• 24 July 1969 Operation Herkimer Mountain and Georgia Tar

I do not remember writing any after-action reports. Again, since we were in support of other units, I figured that they would do all of the reporting and documentation. Twice during my tour, I was called out of the bush and back to Bravo Company Headquarters at Vien Dai (the Rock Crusher) and awarded a medal. I did not know who provided input for these awards, and I was not asked to provide any documentation. Both citations were very detailed and accurately describe the incidents. I never did know who supplied the details until I read the Award Recommendation forms that were included in my file from the Records Center.

Included with the award forms, were documents signed by Lt. Oliver North, 2nd Platoon Commander, and L/Cpl. James Lehnert (2nd platoon radio operator), Kilo Co., 3rd Bn, 3rd Marines, 3rd MarDiv, describing an ambush on 22 February 1969.

The Bravo Company Tank Retriever ambush on 24 March 1969 award form included information supplied by Captain Jay Miller, B Co. Commander, and Lt. Dave Ralston, B Co. XO.

Again, I had no idea who wrote up or recommended these actions.

There were eleven (11) fitness reports in my file starting with the completion of The Basic School in July 1968 to my discharge in November 1970. The comments ranged from "not observed" to three (3) pages of comments regarding my performance. The majority of the fitness reports during my 13-month tour in Vietnam were "not observed". I guess that makes sense.

Obtaining and reviewing my military records has clarified my recollections of my tour in Vietnam. I encourage everyone to request your file, so that you, too, can "connect the dots."

If you would like to receive a copy of your military records, send a letter requesting your complete military records file to: National Personnel Records Center, 1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138. ■

Photo from Vietnam



1967 – Kilo, 3/9,
during Operation Buffalo

A Uniquely Special Marine Tank Officer

BY KENNETH EUGENE (GENE) WHITEHEAD
MSgt, USMC Retired
1811/8511/8531

My first encounter with 2nd Lt. Wayne Michael Hayes was when he arrived late Oct. 1966 on the "Rockpile" just south of the DMZ in Quang Tri Province, South Vietnam with his platoon of Ontos (called affectionately "Pigs"). Wayne was very excited to find tanks on the perimeter and made a b-line to come over and introduce himself to our tank crew. It was important to him to let us know that he was an 1802 tank platoon leader by MOS.



the fire control system and fire the mission. He was like a little kid at Christmas each time.

Some days would find us with an air of boredom, so some of us would get together for a game of Acey Ducey; this is where you try to hit the space between the Ace and 2 card in the

The "Rockpile" was called that because it just seemed to jut out of the earth and was a very dangerous place to be, especially since it was directly on the path of one of the NVA's infiltration and supply routes. It was highly contested and fought over many times during the mid-to-late 60's.

Lt. Hayes' interest in tanks was very keen and obvious because he would ask permission on many occasions to be checked out on our tank, and he would accomplish this with a volley of questions each time. It was also obvious that Lt. Hayes was knowledgeable and did have the skills required to command not only the TC position on a tank crew, but Wayne had the command presence, quiet confidence and leadership to command a tank platoon.

However, the special uniqueness that Lt. Hayes possessed was something that came from his upbringing in a Christian home, and it was instilled in him from birth. Wayne's soul was so special that I never forgot him and his unique nature since we first met 50 years ago on the Rockpile.

He finally settled on a vacant fighting hole to make his home on the hill just to the right of our tank. This made it easy for him to have access to our tank crew and tank which he found time to visit daily. We usually performed daily maintenance on our tank and Wayne would volunteer to help with just about every effort, and of course we did not get in his way. When we would fire H&I missions, Wayne would be there loading the main gun and, at times, we let him set up

deck to win the pot. Well, one day Wayne had a good hand and went for the pot but lost, and I can remember him saying, "Well, I guess I have to sign my check over to you guys." We found it impossible to take his check, but I think we did agree to let him grease the tanks suspension in exchange for the money he lost.

I found myself drawn to this exceptional man because of his big brother character and rock-hard confidence he had in getting through his tour of duty and in the process keeping his Marines as safe as possible so they could go home safe as well. He truly cared for the Marines, not only in his platoon, but also every Marine that had the honor of meeting Lt. Hayes.

Lt. Hayes had a zeal for fighting the enemy, and wanted to be in the thick of the action when ever possible. He believed that we Marines were totally better than what we faced on the battle field, and he would vocalize this to his men all the time. However, he did respect the NVA and he did not take them for granted.

Wayne was not stiff-necked and full of himself, on the contrary he was very approachable, friendly and truly caring, but at the same time commanded the respect of all Marines. They wanted to please him through their work, and I know they would follow him no matter what the situation.

Wayne spoke lovingly many times of his family back in Wisconsin and his girlfriend Ginny that he planned to marry; he was going to ask her hand in marriage once he got home. He had it all planned, his future was bright, and he anticipated his return to family and Ginny.

At the end of Nov 1966, I was pulled off the Rockpile and attached to a tank platoon with BLT 1 / 4 rotating to Okinawa for refitting and I left Lt. Wayne M Hayes on the Rockpile to never see him again. Nevertheless, he left a deep, positive impression on me as a young 20-year-old L/Cpl. that has lingered for over 50 years. After about 30 days in Okinawa, I returned to RVN, then rotated back to CONUS on 23 April 1967. I found out some time later that 1st Lt. Wayne Michael Hayes had died in country 6 July 1967, doing what he really loved, commanding a platoon of tanks while leading from the front. Sgt. Olin "Spanky" Norman was Lt. Hayes's tank driver (C-31) in 3rd Tanks at the time of his death; and, even though Spanky knew Lt. Hayes for a brief time, he also speaks of how special Lt. Hayes was.

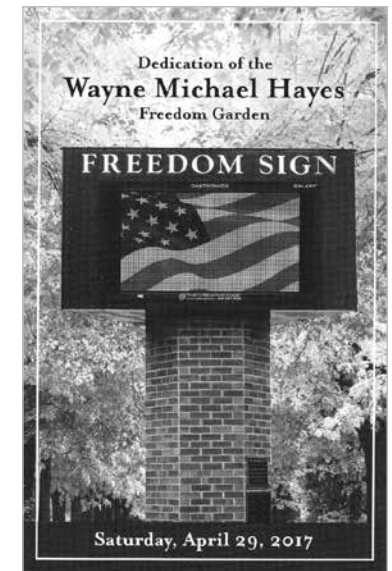
I didn't truly understand what made Wayne so exceptionally special until I had the extreme honor and privilege of meeting his family the weekend of 29 April 2017 for a Memorial Park dedication event in Lt. Wayne Hayes' honor. The location was at Olivet Nazarene University, Kankakee, IL. Even though this event was to honor Wayne and it did, his family made me feel that, along with Wayne, I and all other veterans were also being honored at this occasion. Wayne's brother, Rev. Chuck Hayes, elegantly spoke of his loving brother to the gathered crowd there and, at one point, asked me to stand and be recognized. I could not help but feel so overwhelmingly humble when the entire Hayes family of over thirty in all stood up and gave me a standing ovation. I felt extremely humble and unworthy because of survivor's guilt, and I know Wayne would have made more of his life than I did.

In Wayne's letters home from RVN (which I was allowed by the family to read and copy), he often said that he would not be killed "because only the good die young, and I am too mean to die." Well, Wayne is a prime example for that quote. A uniquely special man that died too young! My regard for him was so high that I named my first son after him, Gary "Wayne" Whitehead. Gary served honorably in the USAF for over nine years before being discharged medically after a motorcycle accident. Gary Wayne brings honor to Lt. Hayes' name, and all three of my children Gary, George and Gena, have become what every father hopes his children we be, and I am so very proud of them.

In my 32 years of total service to the USMC, 23 years active duty/10 years civil service, I have had the pleasure of working for many Marine officers, and most of them were stellar Marines, but I believe subconsciously I gaged them, or sized them up against Lt. Hayes in evaluation. I can name many very good officers and only a few that fell short of the high mark that Lt. Hayes set.

"God bless you, and Semper Fi," 1st Lt. Wayne Michael Hayes, C-31, 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co., 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Marine Div. Your legacy as an outstanding Marine is solid. My brother, you have not been forgotten and never will be, and

you are still alive today because our God is not the God of the dead, but of the living. Amen!



Wayne Michael Hayes	
Wayne Michael Hayes was born August 10, 1945, in Menomonee, Wisconsin, to Harley and Ione Hayes. He had four brothers, Larry, Alvin, Chuck and Cecil, and one sister, Cora (Hayes) Uphurch.	
Wayne achieved the rank of First Lieutenant in the United States Marines. A 1965 graduate of Olivet Nazarene University, he served as a tank platoon commander in the Vietnam War. He gave his life for his country on July 6, 1967, in Quang Tri, Vietnam, and was the first Olivet alumnus to die in that war.	
While at Olivet, Wayne participated in many campus activities. He was chair of the Young Republicans Club and a leader in the Sociology Club. With his high level of interest in government and politics, he met many government leaders on a number of occasions. He personally shook hands with U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower when the President visited Olivet's campus.	
Dr. Larry White, who also served in the Vietnam War and suffered injuries, was Wayne's roommate at Olivet and a close friend. Dr. White is a retired district superintendent for the Church of the Nazarene.	
Wayne was very well known among Olivet students and faculty. His favorite professor was Harvey Humble, a gifted history and political science professor. Wayne enjoyed Professor Humble's classes and the spirited debate pertaining to history and politics.	
Wayne Michael Hayes brought honor to his alma mater, Olivet Nazarene University, and to his country. His legacy will live on with the Freedom Garden named in his honor and memory.	
Wayne Michael Hayes	
Freedom Garden Dedication	
April 29, 2017	
10:30 a.m.	
Welcome and introductions	Bruce Greenlee, Village Trustee
Presentation of Colors	ROTC Color Guard
Invocation	Senior ROTC Cadet
"The Star Spangled Banner"	Amber Olney
Introduction of Speakers	Ret. LTC Stan Tuttle
Village of Bourbonnais	Mayor Paul Schore
State of Illinois	State Rep. Lindsay Parkhurst
Veterans of Kankakee County	Captain John Flynn, Ret.
Olivet Nazarene University	Dr. John C. Bowling, President
Eternal Father, Strong to Save	Freedom Brass Band
Presentation of Plaque	Captain Daniel J. Flynn
Gun Salute	Marine Corps League
Taps	David King
Marine Corps Hymn	Freedom Brass Band
Family Response	Rev. Charles Hayes
Benediction	Captain Alexander Hoffman
Retiring of Colors	ROTC Color Guard

Note: Thanks to USMC Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation for helping me with dates and locations of events. My memory on some things is fading.

A Memory Dedicated To 1st Lt. Wayne M. Hayes Kia 6 July 1967 – Vietnam

BY OLIN "SPANKY" NORMAN

I have felt the strong need and with the deepest respect remember Lt. Hayes with this letter because he was without a doubt one of the finest tank platoon commanders I ever served with during my time in Vietnam.

I was the driver aboard C-31, the command tank part of 3rd Platoon, "C" Co., 3rd Tanks. After our platoon had completed an operation we were sent to the Con Thien firebase. This was around the first week of July, 1967. Shortly after arriving at Con Thien our platoon commander informed us that he was being called back to company headquarters, and they were sending us a new platoon commander to re- >>

place him. A couple hours later I noticed a young Marine 1st Lt. walking towards our tanks. He had a big smile on his face, and said, "My name is 1st Lt. Wayne Hayes," and I'm your new platoon commander." And you could see in his facial expression how proud he was to finally be in command of a tank platoon.

The night before Lt. Hayes was killed, we sat around the tank in the evening and talked about many things while eating C-rats and sharing instant coffee. At one point, Lt. Hayes started talking about his girlfriend back in the world and then pulled a ring out of his pocket and said, "This ring is for her and I am going to ask her to marry me when I get home."

I knew there was something special about Lt. Hayes as soon as I met him, and that something materialized on July 6, 1967.

I found out a few years ago while talking to a very good friend, M/Sgt. Kenneth "Gene" Whitehead, that he was at the Rockpile with 1st Lt. Hayes for several weeks. Gene also told me how much Lt. Hayes loved tanks. He would get in their tank and practice with the fire control system keeping his skills sharp that he learned in officer's tank school. I was also told that when Lt. Hayes was at the Rockpile, he was the Ontos platoon commander.

The first few days we were with Lt. Hayes on Con Thien, I was so impressed by his knowledge of tanks, and his leadership ability. He was the type of officer that talked directly with you, not down at you. On the morning of 6 July 1967, Lt. Hayes told our platoon that there was a large NVA unit operating east of Con Thien and that we were to link up with a Marine rifle company to find the enemy and destroy them.

On that fateful day prior to our tank platoon moving down that red dirt road out of Con Thien to link up with the rifle company, I observed Lt. Hayes talking with a Marine captain who I believe was the grunt company CO. They were discussing the conduct of our mission. Within a few minutes, we were ordered to mount up and move down the road. We advanced down the road approximately three quarters of a mile, when Lt. Hayes said, "Sgt. Norman, give me a hard-left break." I turned left and drove up over a small hill followed by the other tanks. An open field lay in front of us, and this is where we were to begin our sweep for the NVA unit.

At that point, Lt. Hayes said, "I want the heavy section up front followed by the infantry to cross the field first, and if we make it across okay, then the light section can cross." Lt. Hayes then told me to line up C-31 with the center of the field. Once C-31 was lined up, he then said, "I want C-32 on my left flank, and C-33 on my right flank." His next statement was, "When I give the order to move out, I want C-32 and C-33 to drop back forming a wedge." Within a few seconds, he gave the order for all tanks to button up.

Then he said to me, "Sgt. Norman, you ready?"

I replied, "Yes sir."

He then replied, "Move out slowly."

As we were about half way across the field, I begin to hear

heavy machine gun fire coupled with supporting weapons. At that moment, I perceived Lt. Hayes beginning to fire the cupola-mounted .50 caliber machine gun. About the same time, our gunner, Sgt. Moore, was ordered to fire the coax .30 caliber machine gun and to look for targets while spraying the tree line to our front. About that time, I heard some main gun rounds being fired from the other tanks.

I do recall during the fighting how tranquil and collected Lt. Hayes seemed to be, and his voice had a calming effect on us all. Not long after all the firing had commenced things, seemed to quiet down a bit, but that didn't last very long. The NVA were now beginning to become more active to our front and our tanks began hitting them with heavy main gun fired as well as machine gun fire.

During the fighting, I kept C-31 moving slowly forward across the field. While looking ahead I spotted a NVA heavy machine at approximately our 11 o'clock position. As I pushed the intercom switch to give Lt. Hayes this critical information, I heard the infantry capt. say, "Tiger 31, Tiger 31, there is a machine gun at....", and then before he could finish his statement there was a huge explosion that seemed to come from inside the turret, and the crew compartment began to fill with fire and smoke immediately. Then, just seconds later the fire went out. I remember hearing the .50 caliber machine gun rounds cooking-off in the ready boxes, and I could see other material burning in the turret.

After my head cleared, I had an instant concern for my tank crew and I needed to see if they were OK. Our tank was in a very vulnerable position and I had to get C-31 out of the kill zone. I called back to Lt. Hayes and got no answer, so I called back to Sgt. Moore and got no answer. My fears were that the whole crew was incapacitated or killed, so I called to the loader, Cpl. Pigeon, and he did answer me with, "I'm OK!"

He told me that Lt. Hayes and Sgt. Moore were hit bad, and that we needed to move back, but we needed some cover fire. I told Cpl. Pigeon to move Sgt. Moore over enough for him to get the .30 going to cover our withdrawal. I backed up very slowly in order not to run over any grunts that were behind us.

Once we backed up to the point where we had started, I felt it safe enough to stop the tank and to check on our crew. The grunts helped me get Lt. Hayes and Sgt. Moore out of the turret, and it was only a few minutes later that we loaded them on a medevac chopper. A few days later we got word that Lt. Hayes did not make it, and that Sgt. Moore was medevaced to the States.

Lt. Hayes was a very fine Marine tank officer who took action that I believe saved a lot of Marine infantry lives that day by putting C-31 out front and drawing the fire of the NVA ambush which was intended for the whole unit.

The anti-tank round that hit C-31, some say was an RPG round. However, by looking at the turret, it appeared to me to be a HE round from a 57mm recoilless rifle. At any rate,

this was some of the heaviest fighting that I experienced during my tour of duty in Vietnam. No matter what hit our tank that day, it took the life of an awesome person. I was discharged from the Marine Corps in 1972, but my heart was still in the same and I never forgot Lt. Wayne Michael Hayes. I was proud to be counted worthy to have served with Lt. Hayes and some day we will meet again in Heaven with a hand shake, salute and I will say, "Thank you, Sir, for the action you took 6 July 1967!"

"Semper Fi"

Your driver on C-31

Olin "Spanky" Norman, S/Sgt. USMC

Charles T. Riehl sent this message: John- sorry for the delay- I cannot help with any information on Lt. Hayes since I arrived in-country at the end of August 1967.



The park in Wayne Michael Hayes' honor is the Freedom Garden, located south of the electronic Freedom Sign that honors all area veterans. Hayes was killed in action in Vietnam, July 6, 1967.

First Lt. Wayne Michael Hayes Park dedicated to Marine who gave his life to save others

May 2, 2017

In the last hours of his life, Marine 1st Lt. Wayne Michael Hayes made a critical decision that helped save the lives of other Marines. Hayes died in Vietnam 50 years ago in 1967. Saturday, Olivet Nazarene University and the village of Bourbonnais dedicated a new park in his honor. Hayes was the first — and possibly the only — Olivet student to die in Vietnam. Hayes was hit July 6, 1967, while leading the five tanks of Charlie Company, Third Platoon, Third Tank Battalion defending Con Thien, just south of the Demilitarized Zone separating then North and South Vietnam.

Olin "Spanky" Norman, was the driver of Hayes' tank

I don't remember hearing much about the Lt., but Stan Olenjack is right. However, Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks operated out of Camp Evens in the late summer, fall and winter of '67 — then transferred north to the DMZ in January of '68. I think some of our members have given a moving oral history of another Lt. from Charlie Company who was killed in January '68 near Cua Viet — John Paul Marken. All the best.

Jim Coan added: While proofing the S-Box today, I came across the article on 1/Lt. Wayne Hayes. If you have a copy of Keith Nolan's book, Operation Buffalo, look on pages 276-278. Nolan gives a lot of info about how Wayne's tank came to be involved and how he was killed by that 57mm recoilless rifle round that hit the tank head on. If you can't obtain the article, let me know and I'll fax it to you.

that day. Norman, who now lives in Columbus, Ga., said the full story of Hayes' heroism and death has not been told. "It bothered me," Norman said. "After his death, we heard little about him." That might be because Hayes had only been with the unit for two or three days before the battle that ended his life. Norman said Hayes was "a fine Marine officer." You could see, Norman said, that he "lit up" when he was transferred to command the five M-48 Patton tanks. "I was proud to be his driver. I know he saved lives." "He didn't set himself above us," Norman said of Hayes. "He was there with us."

Are you ready?

Norman said he remembers the battle. The tanks went down a road and then turned left into a field. Hayes deployed three of the tanks in a wedge formation at the front, with his personal tank at the tip of the wedge. Two other tanks were in the rear. The interior of this formation was filled with Marine infantry, partially protected by the fire-power of the tanks. Yet, the tanks were a dangerous place for the men inside them. Norman said he remembers them being commonly referred to as "rolling coffins." A phone on the rear of the tank allowed the infantry to communicate with the men inside the tank. Each tank held four men — the commander, the gunner, the loader and the driver.

"Are you ready?" Norman remembers Hayes asking him. When Norman said, "Yes," Hayes responded with, "Let's go."

It was eerily quiet at first. The North Vietnamese opened up with machine gun fire. Hayes and the other lead tanks responded with their own .50 calibers. As the lieutenant, Hayes fired a gun mounted in a small rounded cupola at the top of the tank. A North Vietnamese round, which Norman said was most likely a rocket-propelled grenade or anti-tank shell, hit the hatch on the top of the cupola and burned through. Hayes was wounded, as well as the gunner below him. When Norman came to his senses, he put the tank in park, but could not immediately back it up, for fear of running over the Marines outside. >>

Norman says the NVA most likely deliberately targeted Hayes' tank, which was clearly painted with the 3-1 designation. The enemy knew, he said, that the "I" stood for the command tank.

Hayes was later evacuated by helicopter to a hospital ship, the USS Sanctuary, but died there.

Kenneth Whitehead, a fellow Marine, knew "Spanky" and also served with Hayes at the Rockpile, a hill of mostly stone, just south of the DMZ. Whitehead flew in from Richlands, N.C., for Saturday's ceremony. At the Rockpile, Whitehead said, Hayes was commanding an Ontos unit. The Ontos was an imposing looking vehicle with six recoilless rifles, designed to lay a massive volume of fire on the enemy. "I have served with many officers," Whitehead said. "He [Hayes] was a good one."

A big brother

"There was something about him," he said. "Maybe, it was

the fact he was a Christian and really cared. There was nothing phony about him." He likened Hayes to a "big brother." "When your big brother tells you to do something, you do it."

Charles Hayes, Wayne Hayes' real little brother, spoke for the family at the Saturday ceremony at Olivet. Charles Hayes is the pastor of the First Church of the Nazarene in Greeley, Colo. He said he remembers the day when his big brother, Wayne, took him to buy his first baseball glove. He pored through a bin of gloves at Montgomery Ward to find the one he wanted.

"When I hold and smell the leather on a baseball glove, I am suddenly seven again," he told the audience as he pounded a glove on his hand. "I can almost, but not quite, reach out and touch him," he said of his brother. And one day in heaven, Charles said, he said he hopes to play catch with Wayne again. ■

John Wear writes: Jim Coan mailed me the "official" VTA reunion check-in roster from the very first USMC VTA reunion that took place in Washington, DC over the July 4th weekend in 1999.

The list of those who registered is below. I would love to hear from each guy ... (if he is not "Guarding the Streets of Heaven") ... to get their opinion of that first reunion and an idea of what he's been doing since then. My new home phone number is (719) 495-5998:

Name	Comment or Tank Name	Name	Comment or Tank Name
Jim Arend	F-11 Hue – "Ashley's Animals"	Gene Hackmack	
Thomas Barry		Gary Hall	
Howard Blum	"Cremator"	Ed Hiltz	**Did he actually show up for the reunion?*
Mike Bolenbaugh	**Did he actually show up for the reunion?*	Bob Hopkins	**We have since lost contact with Bob**
Mike Brandi	**Guarding the Streets of Heaven**	Tom Knoble	
Hank Brightwell	"Bush Whacker"	Billy Laurent	
Dick Carey	"Dirty Dozen Minus 8"	Carl Lemon	**We have since lost contact with Carl**
Bill JJ Carroll	"Angel of Death"	Carl Ludecke	
Charles Carson	"Misfit" / "The Protestor" / "Misanthrope"	Robert Nawn	
Robert Chinnis		Larry Parshall	
Jerry Clark	**Guarding the Streets of Heaven**	Robert Peavey	"Better Living Through Canister" / "Pray for Slack"
Charles Corbin		Mike Pingrey	
Harry Christian	"Why Me?"	David Prindle	
Wayne Cornell	**Did he actually show up for the reunion?*	John L Reed	
CV Cummings	"Death Dealers"	Ed Salau	**We have since lost contact with Ed**
Joe Cutchins		Ned Schultz	
Justin Donnelly		Jack Schuyler	
CB Doten	**Guarding the Streets of Heaven** "Miss Goody Two Shoes"	Rich Smith	
Bob Dougherty	**Did he actually show up for the reunion?*	Al Snell	1st Tank Bn CO
Terry Dunphy		Tom Snyder	Motor-T Driver
RB English		Ray Stewart	
Floyd Fletch		Mario Tamez	**We have since lost contact with Mario**
Carl Fleischman	"Devils Disciples"	Don Tidwell	
Pete Frano		Russell Tingle	
Herb Gardner		Frank Vining	**Guarding the Streets of Heaven**
Chuck Garrison	"Death Dealers"	John Wear	"Crispy Critters" / "Devils Disciples"
Carroll George		Bill Wright	**We have since lost contact with Bill**
Jesse Griffin		Lynn Young	"Dirty Dozen minus Eight"
Jim Guffey	**Guarding the Streets of Heaven**	Wally Young	"Road Runner"

WISH I WOULD HAVE STAYED IN THE CORPS? NO F*CKIN' WAY!

BY LEE DILL

Here is why I never considered a career:

Graduating boot camp, yes, I expected to do 30 years, but after my time in Vietnam—no way! Long story short, my first battalion formation after returning to the States was in January 1970, and the formation was to dishonorably discharge a Marine. I had been at Camp LeJeune maybe four days; I hated the place. It was crowded, a race war was in progress, and I hardly knew anyone. Eight men to a tank, no meaningful work, and I was not a Vietnam tanker TC; I was a f*cking nobody!! I could not handle the "Fall from Grace."

Back to the formation, the guy getting tossed out was a black Marine TC, whom I had worked with on a road sweep, An Hoa to Phu Loc 6, not more than four months earlier. No one could tell me what he did, but he was being booted out. I was more than a

little shaken. The following week they assigned me "Corporal of the Guard" and I swear I could not remember my General Orders or much else about what to do as a Stateside Marine. I was fine as a Vietnam Marine, but this Stateside crap was all different, and to my eternal surprise, it was chicken-shit petty stuff that was suddenly very important!

I knew I had gotten a hernia in Vietnam when I caught the sprocket when the two tank bars slipped, so I went to the Navy surgeon and he confirmed my malady, scheduled my operation and put me on light duty. Then I was back to the company area with a light duty chit. Low and behold, who do I run into at the final formation of the day? S/Sgt. ____ ©. He remembered me from Vietnam because he took over a flame tank and he didn't know squat about flame tanks. I had to teach him.

So, he spots me in formation. He gives me a raft of shit and then hollers, "Right face...Double time!"

I step out of formation. He comes around totally red in the face and starts screaming about bringing me up on charges. I pull out the light duty chit and, I swear, his head almost exploded. So, he calls me some names, announces to everyone I am a problem, and takes the company for a run.

I got operated on and the recovery took three weeks. I

was still on light duty, awaiting my Early Out date. Each day of my first week back, S/Sgt. ____ © would toss my rack on the deck because it did not meet his standards. After the fourth day, finally I had had enough and, after he tossed it, I just left it there on the floor. The PFC who had the rack under me was freaked out because I was going to get in trouble. He was just looking out for me and reteaching me basic stuff—a good Marine. But, I told him I didn't put my mattress on the deck and I was done picking it up. I really didn't give a flying f*ck who thought what about it! (My time of living dangerously!!!!)

The company First Sgt. (who I worked for in Bravo Co. back in Vietnam and who had just rotated in) came after me and, when I explained everything to him, my rack stayed in place from that point on. The First Sgt. for some reason liked me, promised me; if I shipped over I could go to Computer School and go on Embassy Duty in Australia. But, at that point, I was done having others make decisions for me about what I could do or could not do. YES, FROM MY ASSIGNMENT TO TC AND FOREVER ONWARDS, I HAVE QUESTIONED AUTHORITY!

This would not lead to a career in the Corps, so I declined the Top's offer and I was out of the Corps in two weeks, March 12, 1970.

But, on my two-days-and-a-wake-up day, I nearly got Captain's Mast for sideburns, too long!

I got my six-month Early Out, ran for the Main Gate, and never looked back., which may be a reason for my lack of attendance at the reunions these past 20 years. I used the VA, got my education, did "I.T." work my whole life. I made my own decisions, and there you have it. ■

JOKE



More on Operation Starlite

Editor's Note: A few issues ago, the Sponson Box contained several stories about America's "First Blood" battle, Operation Starlite. Here is a follow up article by some of the Marine tankers who were there.

Milo Plank wrote: This is the tank turret of A-34. A-34 Was knocked out on the morning of August 18th, 1965, by an enemy 75mm recoilless rifle. It penetrated the left side of the turret, hitting Sgt. Ed Sipel in the leg, also wounding Jim Thompson and Cunningham. It was hit again about two hours later in the left rear of the engine compartment, penetrating the fuel cell. The explosion killed my Tank Commander, wounded L/Cpl. Court, and took out my hearing. It burned all night and was blown in place by engineers the next morning.

Jim Thompson replied: Thanks, Milo. Great to hear from you! I didn't realize that the second hit had hurt any but our crew. Who was your TC at that time? And, where were you in relation to A-34 at that second hit?

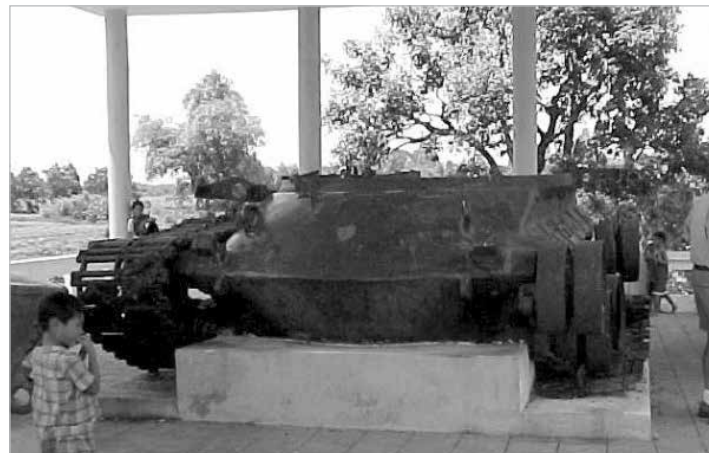
One correction: Cunningham was 34's driver and was uninjured; the other wounded man was Yoder, 34's loader. Sgt. Ed Sipel and Yoder were evacuated shortly thereafter—exactly when, I can't say. Sgt. Sipel lived 12 more years and had offspring. I've lost track of Yoder and Cunningham. That second blast deafened me, as well. I was evacuated later that afternoon.

Milo responded: My TC was Cpl. Bill Laidlaw. If anybody got a bad photo, I can copy it again and send it by snail mail. Please send me your mailing address and I will get it to you.

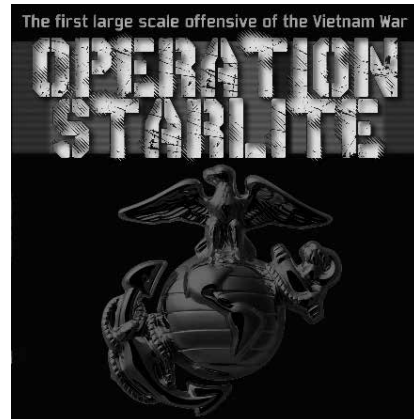
Jim Thompson wrote back: Thanks, Milo. Here's a couple more recent photos. A-34 isn't green anymore.



The cupola of the tank destroyed during Operation Starlite. The Vietnamese have constructed a war memorial around it. Author



There is still an RPG hole in the side of the turret



Jim Thompson continued: It looks like Charlie built some kind of memorial or something with a roof over. Bet they sweated bullets getting that steel up onto the floor of that display! The photos show various stages of completion.

I don't remember A-32 arriving, nor remember it leaving. I saw Bill (Laidlaw) being pulled from the turret but, at that point, I'd left A-34 and was tagged by the corpsman and told to

follow the other walking wounded; that was a long, scraggly line.

I'd heard that A-32 had taken a hit in the sponson box—fog of war? It sure was a confusing day, as you well know. I regret leaving my K-bar in the turret; wish I had it today! After that second hit, I had other things on my mind. Anyone know who grabbed my ankle and pulled me off the back armor? ■

TANKS TO THE RESCUE!

Shortly after dark it began to rain and it cooled everything off. Everyone stayed in the bunkers except the men on patrol or perimeter foxhole duty. An extra poncho was used at the bunker's doorway to block the light from about twenty flickering candles as men sat and laid around on spread ponchos and shelter halves, reading, writing letters, playing cards and bullshitting. The extra humidity with the smoke from scores of smoked and smoking cigarettes made the inside of the bunker almost intolerable. I went outside several times throughout the night to breathe some clean air.

Right at chow time the next morning, the rain slacked off to a misty drizzle. I heard a shot out towards the

northwest as a patrol was fired on by a sniper. Visibility wasn't very good. I could just barely make out the outline of a small pagoda about 400 yards from the outpost. Evidently, the sniper was inside the pagoda. An Ontos was sent out and headed towards the position where the patrol was taking cover and stopped about 200 yards away from the pagoda. I heard the .50 caliber spotting rifle fire only once. Then...

VROOOOM—KAPOW!!!

The 106mm recoilless rifle round blew the pagoda into a scattered heap of rubble.

"The locals are going to be pissed now," I said. "They coulda zinged that sniper or used a grenade. Blowin' that pagoda all to hell will really piss 'em

off." Brooks and Page agreed.

It drizzled all day long. I didn't like the idea of spending the night in a foxhole in the rain. I figured that I'd have to rig up some kind of a roof or extend the overhang so I could keep reasonably dry. My poncho had a couple of holes in it.

The drizzle gradually turned into a downpour as it got dark. My new foxhole partner was a two-striper, Cpl. Reneau. He was transferred in from the 2nd Battalion the day before. On his helmet cover it said, "As I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for I am the meanest mother fucker in the valley!" I chuckled when I first saw it, because Wheeler put the same thing on >>

his helmet cover at Kentucky Hill... and I thought "Uh-oh". Reneau wasn't like Wheeler; he was the passive type.

"Normally, we begin two-hour watches starting at 10:00 PM, but on account of the weather, what do ya say we start right now?" I suggested.

"Fine with me," replied Reneau. "I'll take the first two hours, unless you'd rather have it...it don't matter to me. I think that it's goin' to rain all fukkin' night."

"Sure! Go ahead. I'm going to crap out."

We exchanged watches. At midnight, it was still raining but slacked off a little. At 2:00 a.m., I woke Reneau for his next two-hour watch and crapped out again, still wearing my poncho.

Reneau tapped me on the foot. I looked at my watch and saw that it was 3:00 a.m.

"You'd better get out here, Churchill!"

There was a tone of urgency in Reneau's voice and I wasted no time joining him at the front of the foxhole. He was staring out into the rainy darkness.

"What's the matter...trouble?" I asked.

"Could be. They just passed the word that one of our patrols spotted some enemy troops out north of here. What do you say we take a look with your Starlight scope?"

"Sure. Be right back." I went back inside the shelter and popped the rubber end cap off the scope. I got the seven-inch long aluminum tube out and pressed it firmly over the end of the scope to keep the rain off the lens. I then went back outside and got up on the shelter's sandbagged roof and flipped the small toggle switch to the "on" position.

I began scanning the entire area. With the weather and heavy darkness and all, the image was pretty dark, so I gave the illumination adjustment dial a slow turn that began boosting the light-gathering capability from 30,000 to 50,000 times until it looked like "High Noon" through the scope. The

guys in the next foxhole to my right saw me standing up there in the rain, aiming the Starlight scope.

"See anything out there, Churchill?"

"No...just sand and trees."

"Any sign of the patrol?" asked Reneau.

"No, they must still be way beyond the other side of the tree line. I'll keep looking."

Twenty minutes passed. I got down in a steady sitting position, keeping a constant watch on the tree line. I still hadn't seen anything. Then, a runner from the CO's bunker came hustling by. "Our patrol radioed that they're on the way in. They say there's a whole fukkin' mob of Vietcong headed this way!" Then he went on to the next foxholes. I'd left my pack inside of the shelter with 26 M-16 magazines in it and only had 10 magazines on me.

"Reneau...would you get my pack out of the shelter and hand it up here?"

Reneau ducked inside of the shelter and soon came out and set my pack beside me. "What do you think?" he asked.

"I think that we might have to move to the north side if we get attacked," I said. "If they come from the north, we won't be able to see 'em from here."

I continued looking through the scope, worrying about what was going to happen. Then there was shooting from the far side of the northern tree line. I pointed the Starlight in the direction of the shots and held it steady, straining to see the slightest movement. Then I saw them...our six-man patrol came running out of the sparse tree line, 450 yards away.

"Here comes the patrol!" I shouted. They were running like their asses were on fire! Reneau got up beside me as I kept looking through the scope.

"Do you think we're going to be attacked, Churchill?" asked Reneau. "Surely they'd be fukkin' nuts to in this fukkin' rain."

"I don't know...I never thought so till now. With this fukkin' weather and all, we might not be getting'

any air support. I'd bet the fukkin' Reds know that too...but if we do get attacked, you can bet your ass that there'll be a hell of a lot of them!"

Now our patrol was almost back to our perimeter. I was almost certain I saw movement beyond the tree line. It was a little difficult to hold the rifle as steady as I wanted.

"I'm moving, Reneau. I think they're coming!" I said.

I grabbed my pack and headed for the north side. Reneau followed me. Just as I found a position on top of a sandbagged foxhole shelter, an illumination flare popped, brilliantly illuminating the far side of the tree line and the wide field of sand, clearly exposing several hundred Viet Cong troops! They scrambled for cover like cockroaches. Instantly, all hell broke loose!!

A tremendous fusillade of M-60 machinegun and M-16 rifle fire was directed at them. Then, our two tanks and the Ontos started firing away at them! Bullets were flying all over. I grabbed several sandbags and set them up in front of me. I wedged the M-16 hand guard assembly deeply between two sandbags and began shooting. I had a perfect shooting position, solid, steady and well-protected as a continuous hail of bullets poured into our outpost, ricocheting all over the place.

I soon had the range and began making nearly every shot count. Many of the Viet Cong attackers had bolt action rifles, so I tried to just go for the ones with automatic weapons. The Starlight scope and M-16 were a very deadly combination. I could easily hit them, even when they would only expose their heads and shoulders. None wore helmets. Most had those funny, flat, bouncy cone-shaped straw hats on. They were dressed in a variety of different ways, most wearing black.

The VC were spreading out along the tree line now for over 200 yards as more and more of them appeared from the rear. The tank and Ontos rounds were cutting them to pieces; explosions erupted all along the tree line.

Half of the men from our eastern,

southern and southwestern perimeter defense were called over to the north side. Many of them were being cut down by the continuing hail of enemy bullets. As I changed a magazine, I saw a man on my left die as a bullet hit him in the face.

Now, we began receiving artillery support. Most of the tank, Ontos and artillery rounds were bursting along the center and right side of the enemy position. I saw a tree fall and five Viet Cong moved up and began firing from behind it. I nailed them all – one at a time – just like shooting gallery targets. The piercing, reverberating thunder of full-tilt battle was deafening as 200 M-16s, 15 M-60 machineguns, 4 fifty caliber machineguns, two M-48 tanks, and one M-50 Ontos and a distant artillery battery sent a tremendous volume of firepower at the huge force of Vietcong attackers. There must have been over 300 dead VC scattered along the tree line within the first twenty minutes, but there seemed to be three times that many of them still out there and still shooting at us.

Now there were only eight M-60 machineguns sending tracers into the tree line. Apparently, the enemy's fire was concentrated in the direction of the source of red tracers. There was an M-60 position just 15 yards from me and the two-man crew lay motionless...and dead.

The tanks stopped shooting at the same time and began backing towards an ammo bunker near the center of the outpost to reload. The Ontos was already at the rear to reload its six barrels and get more ammo.

Because of the conspicuous reduction of firepower, the attackers must have sensed victory, because they began attacking – running towards our perimeter in a widely-scattered mass. The rest of our defenses were called over. I switched the M-16 selector switch to full automatic and began firing short bursts into the 200-yard wide field of attackers. They were so widely scattered, they were hard to hit, but they were dropping all over. There

must have been over 700 – maybe a thousand, running and shooting at us! Our situation was critical!

Suddenly, the tanks' engines roared and they moved up again and began blasting into the charging attackers who were now within 150 yards of the perimeter. The tanks were now shooting "beehive" rounds!!! With each blast thousands of merciless, lightning-quick, inch-long metal missiles ripped into the fanatical attackers – mowing down ten or twenty or more at a time.

Instantly the attackers turned – some retreating to the tree line to the north where they'd come from – others running towards the eastern tree line where just beyond was a steeply banked sand dune that paralleled the entire shoreline. At least three hundred of them lay dead and wounded out in the open as the survivors made it to cover.

The tanks switched to HE (high explosive) rounds and the VC huddled behind the trees and the sand bank to the east. No doubt they were pretty ruffled by the beehives and were seriously thinking of retreating from the area...I hoped!

The artillery coordinates were switched and soon the howitzer rounds began bursting along the eastern tree line and sandbank.

After fifteen minutes, the enemy to the north began moving around to the east and the ones along the east side began to gradually moving closer towards the entrance road to our outpost, which was our weakest point, because it had fewer barriers.

The tanks, Ontos, and artillery continued to inflict heavy casualties on the enemy as it grew closer to dawn. The rain was letting up considerably and, no doubt, we had air support preparing to come to help us out...I hoped!

Then what I feared would happen – happened! Both tanks ran out of ammo at the same time again and began backing up to reload. Although the artillery continued and every man who could, kept shooting – it wasn't

enough. Over 500 VC began emerging from the far end of the eastern tree line, charging our north side.

Suddenly, one of the tanks came charging back towards the north side and began unleashing a tumultuous, deadly barrage of beehive rounds into the horde of attackers!

Instantly, they turned, running back towards the tree line. I felt a great rush – more thrilling and sensational than an orgasm as I watched the beehive missiles mow them down like a gigantic invisible sickle! I was consumed with the intense fervor—heavy tears running down my cheeks as I held the thundering machinegun on the retreating, previously threatening mob and watched my bullets topple scores of them as the misting rain steamed off my barrel.

The other tank charged back into action. Suddenly it halted, throwing a spray of sand, its turret turning towards the entrance gate. Then I saw them! Scores of Viet Cong were pouring into the outpost.

BOOOOOOMMM!!!

Where a second before there were 50 attackers running at the entrance gate, now there were as many scattered, torn and riddled bodies – annihilated by a single devastating beehive blast.

Editor's note: That last blast was probably a canister round.

The story goes on where four tanks from a beachhead position come charging into the firefight with their guns blazing and relieved the beleaguered outpost. At that point, the enemy broke contact and ran north with the charging tanks in hot pursuit. The author's final words about the attack: The fighting was finally over for us. Reneau and I remained at the top of the bunker, while four corpsmen scurried about among the wounded and the dead. It was then that I realized that I'd crapped myself during the fighting!

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Remember Lt. Jim Spallsbury

A conversation between Mike Ledford and John Wear

Mike Ledford: I saw the movie “Fury”. It seemed to be very realistic. I had a Sunday School teacher, Frank Fisher, who was in North Africa as a tanker. His tank was shot out from under him. I think it was an M3, as it had a 75mm gun. I do remember him telling me that. He said it would only blister the paint on a Panzer, while their 88mm would go through his tank like a hot knife through butter. I believe he was captured by the Germans and later released. When I was on recruiting duty in my home town, he stopped me and congratulated me on my duties at Alpha Company. The local paper had a small article on me that the Marines had published while we were in the ‘Nam.

John Wear: Wow! If you have the article, it would be great to publish it in the Sponson Box and share it with the membership

Mike Ledford: I don’t have the article. Lt. (Gunner) Jim Spallsbury and Lt. Col. Fontenot put me up for a Bronze Star, but I did not feel I deserved it. I could not see how what I did compared to what you guys did every day. In return, they gave me a Combat Meritorious Promotion to sergeant. The write-up for the award was still sent by HQMC to my home town paper, and that is where Frank Fisher saw it. I didn’t know about it until he told me about it. I was stupid for not accepting the award.

John Wear: I don’t know if you and I had this conversation about Jim Spallsbury, but he was my “rabbi” while I was under his command or around him. I wish to hell he had not killed himself. In my book, he was one hell of a great Marine. If your local newspaper company is still in business, they may have the article in their archives. It sure would

look good in the Sponson Box. We look back and think about how young and stupid we were. I turned down a Purple Heart ... same reasoning.

Mike Ledford: I turned down a Purple Heart, too I got hit in the left buttock and another Marine lost his eyes. I had no idea, until about 1997, in the Little Rock VA, that I have shrapnel behind my eyes, next to my optic nerve. That is what knocked me out of flight school. White-outs in high G turns. Also, in 1981, a piece of non-ferrous metal (bullet fragment) worked its way out of my bald spot on my head. I now have a little hole there. They said, “Nam would get us one way or the other.”

Mike Added: I forgot to tell you about what happened to me, because of that promotion. After rotating back to Camp LeJeune, I was being tested, along with other sergeants, in a “troop and stomp” on the drill field. The new CG of Camp Lejeune watched me march a herd of a mix of FNG’s and old salts, who were waiting to be discharged, into a pine tree. These assholes were doing a Keystone Cops imitation, just to mess with the new sergeant (me!). After the new CG, Maj. Gen. Rathvon Mc-Tompkins, yelled at us to halt, walked over and centered on me—face to face. He exclaimed to me, “Who made you a sergeant?”

My answer was, “You did, sir, . . . Combat Meritorious.” His signature was on my warrant. His last words to me were to learn how to drill the troops.

Later on, an Army Battalion Commander, Col. Moses Erkins, who had heard about how Marines can drill troops, had me march the whole battalion from the mess hall to our quarters, about a third of a mile. I sang out the Marine cadence and, with several for-

mer Marines in the battalion, the boots were clicking out their own musical cadence—just like Parris Island. I did great and the Colonel had not seen that done before. I just wished that General Mc-Tompkins could have seen me perform.

John Wear: My own story about Jim is that, for 30 years, I kept my ass low and never had much interest in doing much to relive or review my brief USMC “career.” Like most of us, when an unwashed and ignorant civilian found out that I was a Marine Vietnam veteran, the first thing out of their mouths was, “Did you kill anyone?” Are you fucking kidding me!!!!

So, in late 1998, when I finally got my first personal computer, I went on line and typed in “USMC Vietnam Tanks.” Up popped a post written by Dick Carey asking for people interested in coming to a reunion of USMC Vietnam Tankers in Washington, DC. I responded almost immediately ... and the rest is history. When I got to DC, I asked several guys about Lt. Spallsbury. No one knew him, but one guy suggested that I check with R.B. English. R.B. was a retired Sgt. Major who had been a gunny with 3rd Tanks, so he might have known Jim. I found R.B. outside of the hospitality room and asked him. He took a deep breath and then, in his native Texas drawl, said, “I believe that Jim took his own life back in the 1970’s.” The shock on my face must have told him to explain in more detail. So, R.B. went on ... (I think that this is what he told me) ...

that Jim was stationed at Camp LeJeune. He had recently separated from his wife; he was drinking heavily and he had just been diagnosed with cancer. He took a .45 and shot himself. RB added, “What a waste.”

I honestly cannot remember exactly when it happened but, I am pretty sure that during my tour in-country, a 3rd Tank Bn. shit-fister, or maybe one of the pogues who worked in the 3rd Tank Bn. Maintenance Office at Dong Ha, came up to me and asked, “What did you do to make Lt. Spallsbury like you so much?” Of course, that comment was totally out of the blue and took me by surprise. My reply was, “Huh?”

Evidently, back in the summer, I had brought my flame tank in for a repair. The hydraulics that elevated the gun tube were out of whack and the gun bounced when we hit a bump. I believe that air somehow got into the system causing the gun tube to bounce around and that either a new pump was needed or the air in the system needed to be bled—or both. Unbeknownst to me, a gunny who was the maintenance chief went to his CO, Lt. Spallsbury, and demanded that the Lt. put me up for charges of “destruction of government property.” In front of whoever was telling me the story, Lt. Spallsbury said, “Gunny, when you have had as much time in combat as Corporal Wear, you can bring him up on charges for whatever you want...but, until then, get your lazy ass out to the tank ramp and fix his fucking tank!!!”

The pogue asked me again what I had done to make the good LT feel that way about me. My reply was, “I don’t know. But thanks for the story.”

Fast forward about six months and a few weeks before I rotated back home. We were running all night “rat patrols” on Route 1, between Dong Ha and Quang Tri, in order to keep the road open and mine-free. Early one morning, we were sitting on the side of the road just outside of the Dong Ha gate, when an ARVN 6x6 truck loaded with soldiers came barreling up the road toward us. The truck came over a hill and, obviously, the driver did not expect to see two tanks pointing their guns toward him, so he hit his brakes and swerved the steering wheel. The truck went one way and then the driver oversteered, making it go the other

way. As his careening truck slammed into the left fender and ran along the fender of my tank, ARVN soldiers fell out of the truck and onto the road. The 6x6 blew a tire and bent the wheel. The truck wobbled on down the road with ARVN running to get back on. Both tank crews laughed like mad men. Then, I inspected the damage. The left fender and frame were bent under the track and, even with a tank bar, we could not bend it back into shape. I figured correctly that, if we pulled out with the fender and frame bent, the track would probably get torn to shreds in a few hundred feet. So, I got on the radios and called Bn. Maintenance. After trying to explain the situation to the pogue, Lt. Spallsbury got on and said, “Wear, what did you fuck up now?” I explained what happened and suggested that he dispatch a wrecker with a cutting torch to cut the fender off. I also added that since I was “so short” that I may miss my rotation date if they could not come soon.

The LT said, “Wait one.” And, a few minutes later, he said that they’d be there in ten or fifteen minutes. I remember as if it was yesterday that the wrecker truck got there with the LT in the shotgun seat. He jumped out and walked over to me saying, “I can’t let you go home without me saying good-bye.”

God bless Jim Spallsbury.

Mike Adds: The first time I remembered Jim was when I had been medevaced from A-3 and stumbled back to the Alpha Company area, clothed in bloody utilities, covered with mud, and with a heavy beard. He saw me as he was speaking to a new lieutenant who was reporting in. He asked the lieutenant how old he thought I was.

The lieutenant said, “35?”

Jim laughed and said, “21, that’s what the Nam will do for you.” Then, he saw I was injured and he had the men take me to my tent. After the corpsman checked me over, as I lay on my cot, he came in and said, “Cpl. Ledford, you’re going to have to ship over 6 times to pay for that truck you blew up. It cost

\$25,000!” Of course, I shit! And then he told me to get well.

I also did a stupid thing at Gio Linh, which could have got me, Gunner Jim, and the others with me killed—but, at the time, I felt that I had no choice. Jim was riding shotgun with me, as we had 2 or 3 trucks loaded with ammo and supplies for our men at Gio Linh. Outside the gate, blocking the road into Gio Linh, was a convoy of several ARVN trucks.

Of course, Gio Linh had its share of incoming, and that day was no exception. We were stuck behind the ARVN trucks with nowhere to go but into Gio Linh, and we were surrounded with the remnants of another convoy of trucks that had been blown up where we were sitting. To me, that meant that the NVA had this road zeroed in for their artillery. Jim went up to talk to the ARVN lieutenant in the first ARVN truck to get them to go on into Gio Linh, so they could disperse and free up the entrance for us. Their lieutenant would not budge. I asked Jim if I could try. I walked up on the hill, past and above the ARVN trucks, with my M-14 cradled in my left arm, pointed my right arm at their lieutenant, and gave the universal sign to start their engines (arm upward and rotating in a close circle). He shook his head, “No!”. I chambered a round into my rifle, aimed in at his head, using my right arm, and repeated the signal with my left arm and hand. He got the message and the trucks started up and went on into Gio Linh, getting out of our way. When I got back to my truck, Jim asked how I did it? He couldn’t see anything, because the ARVN trucks blocked his line of sight. I told him I had to get their attention, so they would listen to me. As far as I know, nobody, including him, ever knew what I had done.

At the Battle of Dong Ha Bridge, we had three tanks being repaired that were manned by tankers and maintenance Marines, while I had two trucks of ammo to take to the fight. We were told that we were expendable, and that we had to hold the fort until the >>

grunts got back. When we got there, there were two Army quad-50's, one at the base of the bridge, and one on the top, and they were hard at it, shooting at NVA. Our three tanks were on the river bank, in front of an old French bunker, doing the same. I unloaded the trucks and our HQS platoon, and spare tankers were breaking out the ammo as we were loading the tanks as fast as possible. I remember yelling at our HQS guys who were "eye fucking" the enemy to start breaking out the ammo or we would be up to our ears in gooks. They got to it and did a great job. After daylight came, Jim came over to the truck and told me to have our guys maintain a 360 so the gooks wouldn't sneak in the back door. He really liked how we handled the reloading.

The last thing I remember involves him and GySgt Woodard. We had been relieved by the Army at some of our forward positions, so Alpha Company could raid a large NVA camp north of the Ben Hai River. We were told we would probably sustain high casualties, so several chaplains were brought in to the Alpha Company area to have services for the guys. I was in my tent and almost everyone else was with the chaplains. Jim and Gunny Woodard came by and asked me if I wanted to see a chaplain. I told them I didn't need to as I figured if I wasn't ready to die, it was too late to change. They laughed and took me to Jim's tent where they gave me a beer. We talked and waited for everyone to get back. During that operation, I helped to man a forward CP at Con Thien. Our guys did great and, I think, the worst injuries were bleeding eardrums from incoming hitting their tanks.

That is what I remember of Jim. The last time I saw him was at his house trailer in North Carolina in the late '70s when I looked him up while I was in the area on recruiting duty. He was a wonderful person and a great Marine.

Mike's final comment: You have got me remembering things I had forgotten about Jim. To begin with, I always addressed him as Lt. Spallsbury,

never "Jim", except for one time. I had been at Alpha Company for nine months and, because I had been so busy before that, with no help, I never got to go on R&R. A couple of months before that, I got Huey Ward as my assistant, and he could do everything well. One other Marine had just returned from the first R&R's for Australia and Jim gave me the second one. After what the other Marine said about being scooped up by three gorgeous blonde Aussie girls, taken to their apartment, and enjoying being "rode hard and put up wet" for a solid week, I was raring to go!

I was in my tent, the day before I was to leave, packing my SEA BAG. Not my "ditty bag", not a suitcase or nothing small to use for a week. Jim came by and saw what I was doing. He said, "Mike, why are you packing everything you've got in that sea bag?" I said nothing. Then he said, "Mike, you're not coming back, are you?" I said nothing. Finally, he said, "Mike, you've never told me a lie. What is going on with you?" I said (the only time I ever addressed him by his first name), "Jim, if I can ever get out of this country, I'm never coming back, because I feel that I'm going to die here." Jim said that he couldn't let me go to Australia. He gave me a four-day R&R to China Beach where I stayed drunk and watched Australian USO girls. I came back to Alpha Company and finished my tour. Even if it meant the world to me, literally, I could not lie to Jim. Later, I found an earlier correspondence between Lt. Col. Bruce MacLaren and myself:

Lt. Col. Bruce MacLaren, USMC (ret): Jim Spallsbury is likewise deceased. Well, after returning from Vietnam and being assigned as a maintenance officer in the 1972 - 1975 time frame at 2nd Tank Battalion at Camp LeJeune, I was CO of BLT 2/6 at the time and saw a lot of him in the field and at Happy Hour. He and I went way back to the 50's, along with Jim "Deuce" Donlan, who was Spallsbury's best friend. Deuce Donlan, who was also a mustang, was S-4 Task Force

Robbie in Vietnam. Deuce would have details on Spallsbury's death, but I believe it was suicide. He died at home in Richland, NC in the late 70's. Sad! Jim (A Co.) and Donlan (B Co.) both saw a lot of combat as tank platoon leaders in Vietnam before being moved to Tank Battalion HQS type assignments.

John Wear: Jim Spallsbury was my Platoon Leader in 1st Platoon, Charlie Co, 5th Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton in 1967. In fact, the first tank that I was assigned to as the gunner was Charlie 11 (Jim's tank). I "earned" my E-4 stripes shooting at the tank gunnery range while Jim was the TC. He was one hell of a good man.

The next time I laid eyes on him was when I climbed out of our RPG-dinged tank after finishing the fighting in Hue (Tet '68) and showing up at the Alpha Co/H&S Co. tank park at Dong Ha. Jim was a Platoon Leader in Alpha Co. who had seen his share of combat. When he saw me, he got this big shit-eating grin on his face, shook my hand and said, "Wear, let's go have a beer."

At the time, I was still a new guy (to Vietnam) "snuffy." and here was this Marine mustang officer asking me to join him for a few cold beers. Hell, I was 19 years old and did not have a lot to talk about with him. I was pretty embarrassed, and I am sure that Jim might have felt the same way as well. To this day, I am mortified about that incident. I have a zillion things to talk about now!!! Oh well.

At the first USMC VN Tankers reunion (July 4, 1999) in Washington, D.C., I asked Sgt. Major Bill "JJ" Carroll if he knew where Jim might be. He referred me to Sgt. Major R.B. English (who was also at the reunion). RB looked at me and got real pensive. He said basically the same thing that you did. Jim had committed suicide in the 70's. He said that Jim had a "passel (I think that is the term the RB used) of personal troubles." Then, he added the one statement that sums it all up: "What a waste."

RECOLLECTIONS OF "A SOLDIER OF THE SEA"

BY EV TUNGET, LT. COL. USMC (RET.)
WOODLAND, CA

While serving in the 1st Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton in 1957, I received orders to attend Embarkation School at the Naval Amphibious Base, Coronado, CA, as a career pattern assignment. Upon completion of the school in November, I was to report to the Commanding Officer, USS Tulare (AKA-112), home-ported in San Diego, CA, for duty as the Combat Cargo Officer (CCO). This billet made me a part of "ship's company" but, contrary to "Sea Duty" as part of a ship's detachment, I was the only Marine on board.

The USS Tulare was commissioned in January of 1956 and was the Navy's largest, newest and fastest attack cargo ship. During my two-year tour, I served under two different captains and executive officers. For these officers, serving on the Tulare satisfied their "deep-draft" ship requirements for command and promotion consideration. Most of the career enlisted personnel on the Tulare had served on other Amphibious Squadron ships for multiple tours of sea duty with a rare shore duty assignment sandwiched in between. This was tough duty for those with families, and I developed a deep respect for these men for their dedication and professionalism. To put an exclamation point on the last, on the port and starboard sides of the bridge, the Tulare displayed a white "E" for overall battle efficiency. It also displayed a red "E" for engineering efficiency, with hash mark and the Assault Boat Efficiency Award with hash mark denoting consecutive yearly awards, the first PHIPAC ship to have achieved this record.

My official duties as the CCO en-

tailed maintaining the ship's detailed hold loading diagrams to support the systematic loading of personnel and equipment for either an administrative movement or an amphibious landing. At sea, when we were involved with amphibious landings, I was also the Assistant Debarkation Officer. The ship's Executive Officer was the Debarkation Officer, but he would essentially turn these duties over to me.

On "D-Day" (Debarkation Day) the first operation for the ship was to clear all the hatches of the LCM & LCVP landing craft nested atop them. This started with the command "Boats to the rail." When the ship's massive cranes had the first of the boats at the port and starboard rails of each hold area, the boat crews would board and start the engines of their craft. When the "Hatch Captains" reported their boats were manned and ready, the command "away all boats" was given. Each hatch was then cleared of remaining boats as rapidly as possible, hatches were opened in preparation for debarkation and the first serial of personnel and equipment was called to their debarkation station to commence the amphibious landing. The debarkation process was directed from the signal bridge, where we could signal to our landing craft by hoisting signal flags to proceed to a certain hold unloading station in support of the landing plan.

The loading of the ship varied considerably from each type of operation. When possible, I went on TAD to the headquarters of the unit to be embarked to assist the unit Embarkation Officer in developing a comprehensive embarkation plan showing diagrams of the

ship's hold spaces with templates of the type and location of vehicles and cargo to be loaded, particularly to support an amphibious landing. The Embarkation Officer of the unit was normally a junior officer, who had the job as an additional duty and who had received minimal training for the job. As a result, I often had to do much more than merely "assist" in the development of a plan which I knew would be acceptable to my ship's C.O.

I had a number of additional duties myself during my tour aboard ship. In port, I stood Officer of the Deck quarterdeck watches and Combat Information Center (CIC) watches at sea. I was also the ship's recreation officer and landing party officer.

For off-duty recreation while at sea, I created a half-court basketball court in one of our larger holds and had teams from the various ship's divisions competing against one another. With help from a Boatswain's Mate First Class who had been an All-Navy heavy-weight boxer, we also arranged boxing "smokers".

The ship's landing party was loosely organized as a reinforced squad with the three fire teams

and a supporting machine gun section. There was little chance for field training but, while at sea, we did hold classes on fire and maneuver along with weapons familiarization firing. The Tulare had a helicopter platform on her stern where I set up stations for the various weapons we had available. The landing party had a corpsman assigned who wanted to take part in the weapons firing. He wanted to fire the BAR in particular. I had one on the deck with >>

a bi-pod but, since he was wearing his whites, I let him fire one from the hip. There were a number of people standing on the aft section of the bridge observing our firing exercise. I told the corpsman to try to fire two to three-round bursts but he reared back on the trigger and was unleashing a twenty-round burst with the BAR walking toward the bridge! Fortunately, I was on his right side and was able to grab the weapon to stop the swing. Next time I looked up toward the bridge, it was rather empty of observers.

I'll attempt to relate a few other experiences, humorous and otherwise, from the craggy recesses of my mind regarding this rewarding tour of duty.

One of the XO's I served under was a Naval Academy graduate who wore Naval Aviator wings. I learned that his first sea duty assignment was in destroyers where he became violently seasick. He then applied for flight school and became a Lighter-Than-Air (Blimp) pilot. His service records specified that he only be assigned to deep-draft ships for sea duty to lessen his seasickness problem. Even at that, the story goes that when the last line was thrown off, prior to getting underway, and the command to "shift colors" was given where the National Ensign was lowered on the stern and raised on the masthead, he would get queasy before the ship moved an inch.

When ships are tied up to a buoy in the harbor, it is customary to "render honors" to passing captain's "gigs" and admiral's "barges." This entails having the boatswain's mate of the watch "pipe attention" and sound "Attention to Port or Starboard" over the ship's loudspeaker. The OOD then salutes the passing officers. For reasons I can't recall, apparently some ships were not exercising this honor correctly, and a complaint was sent up the line to all ships. The same XO, as above, called a meeting of all watch officers and proceeded to lay out how "passing honors" were to be executed. One of our young officers, who was a rather stuffy Naval Academy graduate, saw fit to correct the XO

and referred to Naval Regulations. The XO took a couple of puffs on his corn cob pipe and said, "Well, Mister, those Navy Regs are a good reference, but we ain't gonna use 'em!" End of discussion!

On our way for our West Pac six-month cruise in 1958, we hit the perimeter of a typhoon close to Midway Island. It was still strong enough for waves hitting the bow of the ship to strip some of the painted hull numbers off. All Deck Department personnel were called out to make sure all deck equipment and landing craft were securely battened down. The captain authorized the ship's doctor to break out the medicinal brandy (2 oz. bottles) and issue one to each man who had been on deck. The chiefs and leading petty officers brought their people to sick bay for their brandy. A few of the younger sailors who either didn't drink or didn't think they needed the "fix" were told by their supervisors, in no uncertain terms, that they WOULD take their ration and let their supervisors "dispose" of it! When word got out of the brandy issue, there were sailors, not involved in the deck operation, who jumped into the shower with their clothes on and showed up at sick bay for their brandy.

Once, while heading for West Pac, the entire Amphibious Squadron conducted maneuvering exercises. The flagship would hoist signal flags, indicating turns to be made by the squadron and, upon bringing the flags down, all ships were to execute the order. I heard this story from a friend on the USS Pickaway, an APA in our squadron. The Pickaway's skipper was Captain Wesson, a Naval Academy man who not only drew pay from the Navy but was also well-compensated from his ties to the Smith and Wesson Arms Company. He was also a man who did not suffer fools gladly. During the maneuver exercise, the captain of one ship did not read the signal correctly and was steaming across the Pickaway's bow a few hundred yards away. Instead of getting on the radio, that captain signaled to the Pickaway, "Sir, what are your intentions?" Captain Wesson got on the

radio and said, "My intentions are to ram you if you don't change course!" After looking around, the captain of the other ship realized he was the one out of step. Just another day at the office on the high seas.

When the Squadron reached Japan, we enjoyed a few days liberty in Yokosuka. After that, each ship operated independently throughout the remainder of the cruise in support of various Marine Corps and Navy commands. We visited such tropical paradises as Sasebo, Japan; Okinawa; Guam; Subic Bay, Philippines; Hong Kong; Taiwan Straits and some of them, twice.

One of our tasks was to transport support elements of 12th Marines in Okinawa to Subic Bay, Philippines, for live firing exercises with Philippine Army units. Our load consisted of various vehicles, ammunition, and bulk powder charges to support the operation. As the loading process was going on, a young ensign of the Deck Department tasked with loading the ammunition in our forward hold came running up to the ship's First Lieutenant, the officer-in-charge of the Deck Department, and frantically reported that the Marines were trying to load black powder in the ammunition hold. He breathlessly stated that the ship would be a floating "time bomb." I was standing on deck with the First Lieutenant and I asked the ensign what the hell he was talking about. When he said that there were boxes clearly labeled "BP," I told him that stood for bulk powder, which was perfectly harmless, unless you were on the receiving end of the projectile it was used to launch and suggested he get back to work!

At the tail end of our cruise, we received orders to proceed to Pearl Harbor, Hawaii, to load up elements of the 1st Marine Brigade, MCAS, Kaneohe for transport to the States for extensive field training at Camp Pendleton. I was ordered to fly ahead of the ship to assist in the preparation of the loading plan. Before leaving Clark Field in the Philippines, I was assigned duty as a "courier officer" and had a locked brief

case handcuffed to my wrist, of which I would be relieved upon arrival in Hawaii. The plane was an old four-engine "Constellation". I was seated in the tail end of the plane in the customary backward-facing seats. Before reaching Hawaii, it was necessary to refuel at Kwajalein Atoll in the Marshall Islands. As we were making our approach, I looked out of my window and noticed the blue water gradually turning to green with coral formations and no land in sight. (Remember, I was flying backwards!) I admit that I was a bit edgy when, suddenly, we slammed onto the runway and the pilot immediately reversed the props while standing on the brakes. At the end of the rollout, the plane turned to taxi to the terminal and the tail section, where I was, was once again hanging out over the water. That runway was 5,000 feet long and we had used every inch of it!

After arriving in Hawaii, I worked with the units to be loaded on the Tulare and was well-prepared when the ship arrived in Pearl Harbor. On the day of the ship's arrival, a Marine helicopter pilot with whom I had been working at the Air Station said he would fly me to Pearl to meet the ship. When we reached the harbor, he came over the

headphones and asked if I had ever seen the Arizona from the air. When I said I hadn't, he told me he was hovering directly over it. This was long before the monument was erected over it and, as I looked down to see the complete outline of the hull, I had tears in my eyes. To this day, whenever I describe what I was seeing, I still choke up.

I'll wind up my recollections with a final story which, I believe, will qualify as a once-in-a-lifetime experience. Shortly before I transferred off the ship, we were assigned as a "submarine target vessel" for dummy firing exercises with subs from the submarine base in San Diego. The submarines were loaded with dummy warhead torpedoes, which were to have their depth set at 40 feet, so as to pass under the ship in a firing attack. Our ship had lookouts on each wing of the bridge who were to report torpedo wakes in the water. When the subs fired, they released a green flare to let submarine observers on the ship know they had fired, so that the effectiveness of the shot could be judged. I was in CIC when I heard the starboard lookout call out, "Torpedo to starboard", and then, "... Son of a bitch, it's going to hit us!" The depth gauge on this torpedo malfunctioned and it

was coming at us just below the surface. It hit the ship in the engine room area with a loud thud and created a vibration which was felt throughout the ship. Had this been a live torpedo, we would not have stayed afloat very long. Obviously, that concluded the firing exercises for that day!

Before I left the Tulare a few months later, the ship went into dry dock in Long Beach for routine maintenance purposes. I was able to go down into the dry dock and see the damage the torpedo had done. There was a dent in the hull plate at least foot in diameter and several inches deep, under the water line. I have always claimed that I was on the only ship to be torpedoed in peacetime and lived to tell the tale.

I started this story as a tanker sent off on what turned out to be a most rewarding and educational tour of duty, where I also gained a tremendous amount of respect for "Gator Navy" sailors! I returned to "tracks" when I was transferred to the 1st Marine Brigade, MCAS Kaneohe. I became the XO of Bravo Company, 1st AMTRAC Bn., and learned that, contrary to a tank, these tracked vehicles could float! ■

Photo from Vietnam



Bob Haller
using sun block

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess what these gadgets were? Where were they located in our tanks?

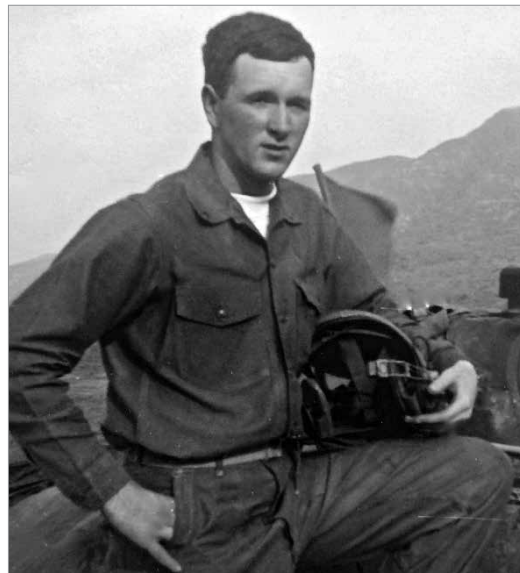
The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 with the right three answers will have their name entered for a prize drawing to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

On Friday, April 14, 2017 at 9:50 AM, I got a telephone call from Guy Everest correctly identifying the Marine in the photo of the last issue as Bob Peavey.

To add a little to the story of this photo, it was taken at the firing range during Tank School in early 1967.



NOTHING WILL EVER BE THE SAME AFTER YOU FIRE YOUR FIRST MAIN GUN ROUND.



I'd rather look back at my life and say **"I can't believe I did that"** instead of saying, **"I wish I did that."**



Don't be afraid of death;

be afraid of an un-lived life.

You don't have to live forever, you just have to live.

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association
16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106

Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRE" on your address label is "16" then your 2017 membership dues are now payable.

Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30* and mail to:

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*Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.

