



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

HONOR THE PAST BY BEING PRESENT

See you in Seattle

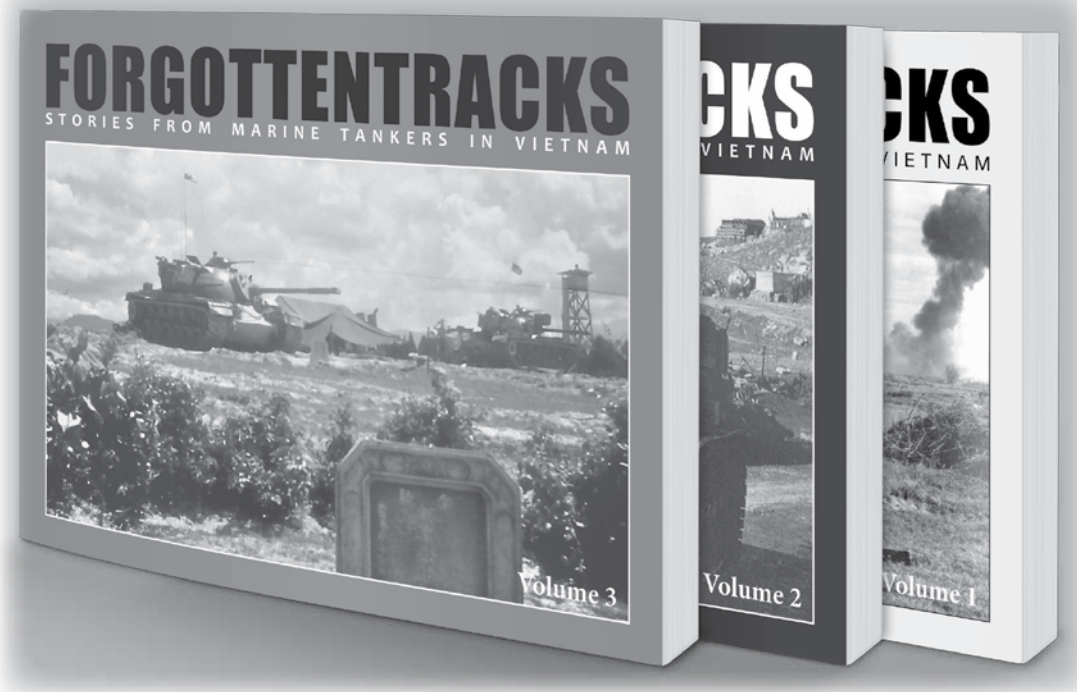
October 31 – November 4, 2019



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It's Brand New! It's Now Available!



FORGOTTEN TRACKS – VOLUME 3

Forgotten Tracks Volume 3, contains over 70 stories of our experiences during the Vietnam War and a photo gallery of images supplied by Marines who served in-country.

It can be yours for the price of \$30 (delivered).

If you need more information, please contact Pete Ritch
at Phone: 850-734-0014 or via email: goldendog@mchsi.com

You can also purchase any volume of the Forgotten Tracks series on-line
at our website PX at <http://www.USMCVTA.org>

Letter from the President

Happy New Year!!! It seems as if the years have morphed into what months used to be!!!

FT. BENNING MINI-REUNION: As I write this, it is the day after I returned from our first ever non-reunion year gathering. Of all of the incredibly wonderful events that took place during our few days in Columbus, Georgia, the most significant (to me) was when the US Marine Lt. Colonel who is the CO of the USMC Detachment that includes the USMC Tank School said, "When you gentlemen sit down for noon chow, please leave an empty seat between each of you so that our Tank School students can sit between you and pick your brains."

I did not know what to expect because, in the past, when I have been asked to speak (as a Vietnam veteran) at a local high school, the students typically just sat in the audience like "bumps on a log," never asking salient questions or participating in any fashion. To be honest, I felt like I had to be the students' entertainment for the hour-long session. But to my immense surprise, the young Marine student tank crewmen were deeply interested, very engaged and actively participated in the discussions. I loved the way that their eyes seemed to get as big as saucers when one of us told a "sea story" about our time in combat with our tanks. And when I asked them how they got to be so engaged with asking us meaningful questions, one of them replied, "The instructors told us to pick the brains of our tank commanders because each and every one of them has been in combat." What great advice!!!

ANNUAL MEMBERSHIP DUES: Just like always, your 2019 membership dues are payable as of January 1st of each year. There is a reply envelope provided in this issue. Please very carefully print your current contact information; enclose your dues payment, and affix a postage stamp before mailing it to us. We thank you in advance. And of course, tax deductible donations are greatly appreciated.

DONATIONS: This issue of our magazine has our annual feature called "Over & Above" where we thank those members who have gone above and beyond the call of duty and have contributed extra money to help our organization thrive. Please note that there are a number of Life members who realize that their most generous initial investment has been "used up" by now and that they have decided to begin contributing to the cost of mailing the Sponson Box magazine to them by making a tax deductible donation to the VTA. We would be eternally grateful if all of the Life members saw their way clear to help by donating on an annual basis.

SEATTLE REUNION: It would be terrific if all the members who are attending our 2019 get together ensure that they (a) Bring your old Vietnam photos put up in an album for the rest of the attendees to enjoy; (b) Bring many items to donate for the fund raising Auction and (c) Bring your guests who may want to attend. We have seen some amazing bonding going on between VTA members and their wives, sons and daughters who attend together. The old man may not talk about his time in Vietnam, but his buddies will fill Junior's ear!!! And speaking of our next reunion, in this issue of our magazine we have included a list of "Things to Do in Seattle." We provided that list for anyone who wants to participate in additional activities while they attend our gathering. I recommend that you make your plans in advance and do not wait until you arrive in Seattle.

LEGACY DONATION PROGRAM: A few years ago we embarked on a special program whereby you can leave a tax-deductible donation to the USMC VTA in your estate plans for after you pass on to The Great Tank Park in the Sky. You can leave a dollar amount or a percentage of your total estate. You could also leave a collection of valuables like weapons or vehicles. To date, only one of our members has seen fit to do this. What can we do to have more of you consider this charitable donation program? Please contact Rick Lewis for more information or to direct your questions.

John

"Demonstrate to the world there is 'No Better Friend, No Worse Enemy' than a U.S. Marine."

– U.S. Marine Gen. James "Mad Dog" Mattis –



view, based on individual experiences not solely based on opinions. You made me proud. The organization owes you a huge debt of gratitude for enhancing the image of the USMC tankers, not bringing it down with your ego and possible misplaced pride; it could have easily crept into your psyche and totally derailed the whole response letter. I am very proud of you. The USMC VTA is very well represented!!

Correction



John Wear writes: On Page 29 of the most recent issue of our magazine there was a photo of a Marine Lt. Col. reservist pointing to the muzzle of a tank. The caption read something like, “The commander of the 4th Tank BN discusses the power of Marine tank flash suppressor.” Little did the photographer know that tank gun that they were examining was that of an M-67A2 flame tank that did not have a “blast deflector,” and that it was not considered a flash suppressor.

Operation Pegasus



Bruce Van Apeldoorn writes: When I got the most recent

issue of the magazine, I saw the above photo on Page 28. I showed it to my wife, Nancy, and told her that this is exactly how our terrain looked when our tanks went out on Operation Allenbrook.

John Wear replies: Yeah, that is Vietnam National Highway 9 that runs from the South China Sea to Khe Sanh and on west to Laos. It had been untraveled for over six months...since the start of the so-called “Siege of Khe Sanh” when the NVA cut the road to keep the base from being resupplied.

The “Operation Pegasus” that those Marines in the photo were conducting was to clear the highway and allow the convoys back on the road. The funniest part of the operation was that the USMC cleared the road of mines and NVA, rebuilt the blown-up bridges and culverts...and then the US Army was sent in to “free the Marines that were held up on the base.” And that is what the US Army “official” version is. Little does anyone know or understand the base had been abandoned weeks before so there were no Jarheads to “rescue.”

Unconventional Weapons



Rick Walters sent us this photo to share...

Ten Most Destructive Americans in the Past 8 Decades

John Wear wrote: I was reading an article about the above subject. Here are the three that most of us can relate to:

Walter Cronkite – Cronkite was a much beloved network anchor who began the politicization of America’s news media with his infamous broadcast from Vietnam that described the Tet Offensive as a major victory for the Communists and significantly turned the gullible American public against the Vietnam War. In fact, the Tet offensive was a military disaster for the NVA and Viet Cong, later admitted by North Vietnamese military leaders. Decades later Cronkite admitted he got the story wrong. But it was too late. The damage was done.

Lyndon Johnson – Johnson turned the Vietnam conflict into a major war for America. It could have ended early if he had listened to the generals instead of automaker Robert McNamara. The ultimate result was: 1) 58,000 American military deaths and collaterally tens of thousands of American lives

damaged; and 2) a war that badly divided America and created left- wing groups that evaded the draft and eventually gained control of our education system. Even worse, his so-called “War on Poverty” led to the destruction of American black families with a significant escalation of welfare and policies designed to keep poor families dependent on the government (and voting Democrat) for their well-being. He deliberately created a racial holocaust that is still burning today. A strong case could be made for putting him at the top of this list.

John Kerry – Some readers will likely say Kerry does not deserve to be number one on this list. We have him here because we regard him as the most despicable American who ever lived. After his three (faked) Purple Hearts during his cowardly service in Vietnam, he was able to leave the US Navy early. As a reserve naval officer and in clear violation of the Uniform Code of Military Justice, he traveled to Paris and met privately with the NVA and the Viet Cong. He returned to the United States parroting the Soviet party line about the war and testified before Congress comparing American soldiers to the hordes of Genghis Khan and baby killers. It was a clear case of treason, giving aid and comfort to the enemy in a time of war. We got a second bite of the bitter Kerry apple when he was Secretary of State...but that is recent politics and we try to steer away from them now.

From the UK

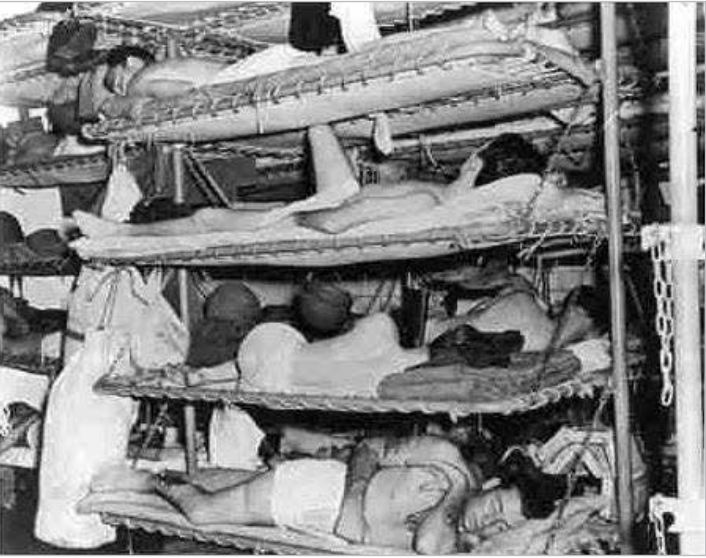


Vietnam Trivia

July 28, 1965: President Johnson announces more troops to RVN. During a noontime press conference, President Johnson announces he will send 44 combat battalions to Vietnam, increasing the U.S. military presence to 125,000 men ... (including Yours Truly). Monthly draft calls are doubled to 35,000. “I have asked the commanding general, General Westmoreland, what more he needs to meet this mounting aggression. He has told me. And we will meet his needs. We cannot be defeated by force of arms. We will stand in Vietnam.”

Submitted by John Lange

A US Navy Luxury Cruise?



Iwo Jima Marine

John Wear was in Longmont, CO, visiting relatives a month ago and while walking to lunch, he bumped into Jack Thurman, an Iwo Jima Marine who landed on Iwo Jima in an amtrac on the first wave with the 27th Marines, 5th Mar. Div.

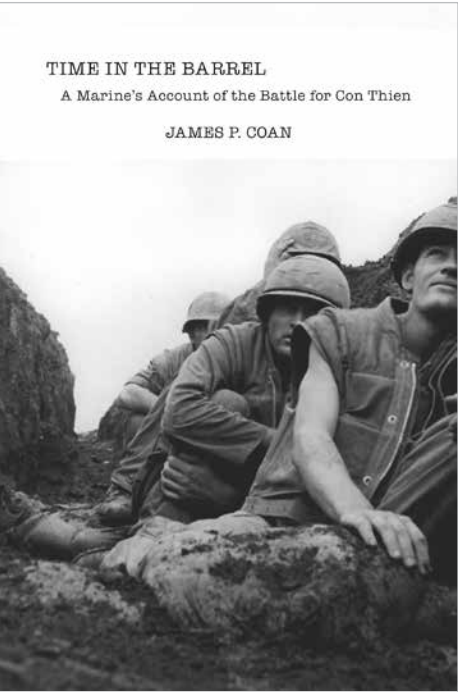


Gunny R. Lee ErmeY Honored



Rick Lewis writes: This last weekend, the 31st Drill Instructor Association reunion took place here in San Diego. I met with two other guys who were in our MCRD San Diego Fox Company that “pushed” recruits with me. The stories by all present made some of the current Drill Instructor on Active Duty eyes pop out. But good laughs were had by all. This year we honored GySgt. Lee ErmeY. He had attended many of our reunions and I had been able to meet him several times. He sat at our table two years ago and kept us all in stitches. This time he was missed. We had his whole family come and join us. Lee was one of five boys. His brother Jack talked about

Lee and how much he loved (Continued on page 27)



About the book

A Marine’s highly personal memoir reliving the hellish days of a pivotal conflict of the Vietnam War

Con Thien, located only two miles from the demilitarized zone dividing North and South Vietnam, was a United States Marine Corps firebase that was the scene of fierce combat for months on end during 1967. Staving off attacks and ambushes while suffering from ineffectual leadership from Washington as well as media onslaughts, courageous American Marines protected this crucial piece of land at all costs. They would hold Con Thien, but many paid the ultimate price. By the end of the war, more than 1,400 Marines had died and more than 9,000 sustained injuries defending the “Hill of Angels.”

For eight months, James P. Coan’s five-tank platoon was assigned to Con Thien while attached to various Marine infantry battalions. A novice second lieutenant at the time, the author kept a diary recording the thoughts, fears,

and frustrations that accompanied his life on “The Hill.” *Time in the Barrel: A Marine’s Account of the Battle for Con Thien* offers an authentic firsthand account of the daily nightmare that was Con Thien. An enticing and fascinating read featuring authentic depictions of combat, it allows readers to fully grasp the enormity of the fierce struggle for Con Thien.

The defenders of Con Thien were bombarded with hundreds of rounds of incoming rockets, mortars, and artillery that pounded the beleaguered outpost daily. Monsoon downpours turned the red laterite clay soil into a morass of oozing mud, flooded bunkers and trenches, and made Con Thien a living hell. Being at Con Thien came to be ruefully referred to by the Marines stationed there as “time in the barrel” because they were targets as easy as fish in a barrel.

More than a retelling of military movements, Coan’s engrossing narratives focus on the sheer sacrifice and misery of one Marine’s experience in Vietnam. Through his eyes, we experience the abysmal conditions the Marines endured, from monsoon rainstorms to the constant threat of impending attack. Climatic moments in history are captured through the rare, personal perspective of one particularly astute and observant participant.

Authors / Editor

James P. Coan is a former Marine Corps captain who was awarded a Pur-

ple Heart for his injuries at Con Thien. He is the author of the historical memoir *Con Thien: The Hill of Angels*. He resides in Sierra Vista, Arizona, with his wife and family.

Reviews

“A vivid, compulsively page-turning and often gut-wrenching narrative.” —*Arizona Daily Star*

“Con Thien certainly has been re-created here. I have read few personal narratives from the Marine war in Vietnam that get as close to the sheer sacrifice and misery that I have always suspected to be their lot.”

—Philip D. Beidler, US Army Vietnam War veteran and author of *Beautiful War: Studies in a Dreadful Fascination*, *The Victory Album: Reflections on the Good Life after the Good War*, and *American Wars, American Peace: Notes from a Son of the Empire*

“*Time in the Barrel* brings to life a significant and often overlooked event in America’s war in Vietnam: the siege of the Marine firebase at Con Thien during the critical months of September–October 1967. James P. Coan has delivered a gritty and impassioned book, one that will enlighten general military history readers as well as Vietnam War and Marine Corps specialists.”

—Gregg Jones, author of *Last Stand at Khe Sanh: The U.S. Marines’ Finest Hour in Vietnam*, winner of the 2015 General Wallace M. Greene Jr. Award for distinguished nonfiction from the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation. ■

Gunnery Sergeant Robert H. Mccard

UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS



MEDAL OF HONOR CITATION

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to

GUNNERY SERGEANT ROBERT H. MCCARD
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

for service as set forth in the following CITATION: *For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as Platoon Sergeant of Company A, Fourth Tank Battalion, Fourth Marine Division, during the battle for enemy Japanese-held Saipan, Mariana Islands, on June 16, 1944. Cut off from the other units of his platoon when his tank was put out of action by a battery of enemy 77-mm. guns, Gunnery Sergeant Mccard carried on resolutely, bringing all the tank’s weapons to bear on the enemy, until the severity of hostile fire caused him to order his crew out the escape hatch while he courageously exposed himself to enemy guns by hurling hand grenades, in order to cover the evacuation of his men. Seriously wounded during this action and with his supply of grenades exhausted, Gunnery Sergeant Mccard dismantled one of the Tank’s machine guns and faced the Japanese for the second time to deliver*

vigorous fire into positions, destroying sixteen of the enemy but sacrificing himself to ensure the safety of his crew. His valiant fighting spirit and supreme loyalty in the face of almost certain death reflect the highest credit upon Gunnery Sergeant Mccard and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country. /S/ FRANKLIN D. ROOSEVELT

Biography

Robert Howard Mccard, born at Syracuse, New York, November 25, 1918, enlisted in the Marine Corps December 18, 1939. He was subsequently assigned to Parris Island, South Carolina; Norfolk Navy Yard; USS Tuscaloosa (CA-37), New York Navy Yard; U.S. Naval Torpedo Station, Newport, R.I.; and Central Recruiting Division, Chicago, Illinois. Shortly after the United States declared war against Japan in 1941, he was assigned to the Naval Training Station, Great Lakes, Illinois; then the Training Center, Quantico, Virginia; Camp Lejeune, North Carolina; and Camp Pendleton, California. He served in the field with 4th Tank Battalion from January 31, 1944 until he was killed in action at Saipan on June 16, 1944. ■

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“The brave may not live forever, but the cautious do not live at all.”

FORESTS OF STONE

BY LARRY DUNN

Scattered throughout this great country and in many foreign lands are countless “Forests of Stone.” Some are perfectly aligned, delicately manicured and carefully guarded. Visited at times as a courtesy or for official inspections; at other times by somber faced friends and relatives of the precious remains lying beneath the sod of these hallowed forests. Others stand alone in private cemeteries, forgotten, covered with weeds, unkempt and unvisited.

Walking through these “Forests of Stone,” where each white granite marker stands in mute testimony to a life sacrificed or served to ensure our liberty and freedom, is sobering. Each stone stands at the head of a patriot, blind to race, color or creed, reminding each visitor of the cost of freedom and the sacrifice that each citizen must be willing and prepared to face in order to perpetuate this freedom.

Solitude and peace surrounds these sons and daughters of America who now lie still in death. Many had lives cut short in an ultimate display of honor to secure our heritage for those that follow. Fallen on the field of battle in long forgotten wars in unfamiliar foreign places. Fathers and mothers of children who will never be born and will never enjoy those rights for

which they died. Others served faithfully but by chance and the Grace of God, were spared the fate of their fallen brothers and sisters. Sometimes taken for granted in life, they must now be respected in death.

These “Forests of Stone” have stood as silent sentinels over our military dead since the first markers were carved by hand so many years ago, weathering gracefully the ravages of wind

and rain. Permanent reminders to those who enjoy the milk and honey of America that there will come a time when the call will be sounded to follow their lead; when the greedy and power-hungry of this world will cause the thunder of war to rattle across this great nation. Patiently, these “Forests of Stone” wait, to eventually receive the honored remains of patriots yet unborn.

Pay homage to those

who lie here and in private cemeteries across the nation, seldom visited, seldom thanked, seldom remembered. Remember also those 125,000 sons and daughters lying at peace in twenty-four “Forests of Stone” on foreign soil; and those who lie in unmarked graves on battlefields and jungle floors throughout the world, for they bravely answered the call and paid the price of freedom. They ask nothing of us. To them we owe everything.



Donald James McMillan, Jr.



August 17, 1949–October 9, 2018

Donald James McMillan, Jr., 69, of Azle, Texas passed away after an extended illness, October 9, 2018 in Fort Worth. Visitation: Sunday Morning, October 14, 2018, Biggers Funeral Home. Service: 2:00 PM, Sunday, October 14, 2018, Biggers Funeral Home Chapel. Interment: 11:00 AM, Monday, October 15, 2018, Dallas Fort Worth National

Cemetery with Marine Corps Honors. The family requests memorials, if desired, to the USMC Vietnam Veterans Tankers Association.

Donald was born August 17, 1949 in Fort Worth to Donald James McMillan, Sr. and Ethelda Mae Robertson McMillan. Donald graduated from Irvin High School in El Paso, and then joined the Marine Corps at 17 years old. He later worked toward and received his Bachelor Science in Criminal Justice from the University of North Texas. He loved the Marine Corps, where he earned the rank of SGT and served as a Tank Commander. Donald was awarded the Purple Heart having been combat wounded in Vietnam during the 1967/68 Tet Offensive. Donald met and married Elizabeth Frances Karam in

1969 and they had three sons. Donald loved to study the Civil War, US Constitution History, Law and Politics. He was an independent “Do it yourselfer” who loved fishing, camping, reading and traveling. Donald was a great father having coached his boy’s baseball teams, attended drama plays and was a Boy Scout Leader.

John Wear wrote: Don’s widow, Liz, told me that they were married 49-1/2 years. She said that Don just could not make it 50 years.

GEORGE B. SEARCH

George B. Search passed away Sept. 11, 2018 at the Tucson VA Medical Center from pulmonary complications due to Agent Orange. He was born in Jersey City, N.J. on March 27, 1936 and graduated from high school in Laurel, Maryland. He enlisted in the Marine Corps and proudly served 20 years and retired as a Captain. His service in Vietnam included an Ontos platoon leader. He leaves behind his wife of 64 years Shelby Search, daughter Debbie and son Randy, and four grandchildren, five great-grandchildren, and a brother.

LtCol Gene Berbaum

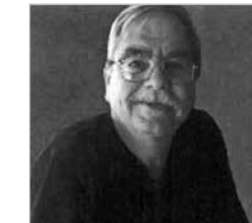
Rick Lewis writes: Yesterday Guy Everest, Roger Unland and I attended memorial services for LtCol Gene Berbaum. He passed away on June 18, 2018, but due to the back log for services at Rosecrans National Cemetery, it took this long to have it. It was very well done as the Patriot Guard was there with 50 gentleman on bikes with American flags. The Marine Corps did the 21-gun salute and they presented his wife with the flag. Col. Buster Diggs said a few words.

I know that Gene was also a thorn in the side of the VTA as he was one who did not think we should be an organization. However once I became the VTA VP, I went to the MCTA BoD as John and I had talked about and relations between the two organizations did change. The MCTA did, in fact, change their By-laws and Gene and many of the other MCTA members did change their opinions. After I attended two of their reunions the welcome mat was out for us.

The other plus was old John Bartusevics was there on his Harley. “Bart” was our tank section leader when Auclair and I were privates in 1966. We were his “shit birds” and he must have smacked us daily when we were around him. If you don’t know Bart, he is high degree karate black belt so being smacked by him met you were going to picking yourself off the deck. I saw a few other old tankers at the funeral and we all got a round and shook hands but ... Man! All you get is 30 minutes at the funeral site and you get chased out since there is another funeral service that is

starting. There were three more funerals waiting on the west side and two on the north side. One of the cemetery guys told us and he had done five burials that morning and he added that it was a slow day.

Harold Ringgold



Harold Lee Ringgold, 68, of Little Rock, passed away Friday July 3, 2015. He was a retired salesman for the food industry and a Vietnam veteran serving in the United States Marines.

He is survived by his daughter and son-in-law, Stacy and Cliff Lindsey of Sheridan; son and daughter-in-law, Shane and Amy Ringgold of Cabot; brother, Derral Ringgold of Sherwood; sister, Bertha Sims of North Little Rock; seven grandchildren, Austin, Rebecca, Riley, Hannah, Delaney, Kellar and Aiden.

My name is Stacy Ringgold Lindsey and I’m Harold Ringgold’s daughter. This was the only contact in Dad’s list of contacts that I thought might be Bobby Joe Blythe. I sent you a private message on Facebook but I thought since we weren’t friends that it might have went to your “others” folder. I decided to log on to Dad’s email to message you.

I hate to send bad news this way but Dad passed away on Friday, July 3th. He was found unresponsive in the parking lot at his apartment. They rushed him by ambulance to Baptist Hospital and worked on him to try to revive him. The doctor told us that it was a “cardiac event”, most likely a heart attack, and that he went quickly.

My brother and I went to the funeral home to make arrangements this morning but we don’t have an exact date yet as they have to obtain a death certificate before they can cremate him. It will most likely be early next week. Dad wanted to be cremated and Shane (my brother) and I decided he deserved a military honors service and we are going to place his ashes in one of the walls at the Arkansas State Veteran’s Cemetery with his name, date of birth, date of death and military branch engraved in the granite.

Dad didn’t talk much about his days as a marine. He actually avoided it until much later in life. He did, however, talk very fondly of you so I wanted to make sure you knew of his passing.

If you have any questions or anything, my email is slindsey71@yahoo.com.

- Stacy Ringgold Lindsey. ■

What Members Are Doing

FORE!!!



Bruce Van Apeldoorn writes: VTA member Tom Reish (left) & I played in the Leatherneck Open in Rochester, NY. The purpose of the tournament is to raise funds for the local Marine Corps Coordinating Council. The MCCC supports Marines and their families. Examples would be during deployment of local USMC Reserve Marines to assist wives and families left behind. Also the Council helps Marines making the transaction to civilian life. The Council enjoys an awesome relationship with local business, so is well supported. When I was getting my gear out of my truck I announced, "If there are any vehicles without a USMC sticker in this parking lot, tow it!"

OOO-RAH!!!



Gunny Wes "Tiny" Kilgore sent in several photos of his model tank collection with a backdrop of an amazing hand-painted wall depicting various scenes of USMC glory.

Tiny adds: Years ago when I was in 2nd Tanks, we had an artist who did a painting called "The Evolution of Armor." I took some pictures of the painting and then Leslie (my son's girlfriend) expanded on what I knew from reading of WW1 and WW2 and she used some other pictures that I found. After she finished the painting, I bought a bunch of

tank models to show all of the tanks that participated from 1917 (WW1) until Afghanistan. I enjoy looking at it every now and then.



NASA 1st Lunar Moon Landing Reunion



Doc Gene Hackemack writes: Nancy and I recently attended our "Apollo 11, First Lunar Landing (manned) Reunion." We also visited my old workplace, the NASA NBL (Neutral Buoyancy Lab) in Houston.

Mini-reunion in Oregon



(L to R) Ned Schultz, Bob Willoughby, Stan Williams, Ellis Van Diver, John Hunter, Mark Van Wagoner

John Hunter writes: Here is the story of our mini reunion. This is the second time the 3rd Platoon, B Company, 1st

Tank Battalion has gotten together for the Pendleton Round Up in Pendleton, Oregon. We attended the Round Up on September 13th, which was designated as Breast Cancer Day, that is the reason some of us have pink shirts. The photo is taken in the Let Her Buck Room, which is located under the grand stands. The beverage served is Pendleton Whisky, you can see we all have a cup of the same. As noted it shows Ned Schultz, Bob Willoughby, Stan Williams, Ellis Van Diver, John Hunter, and Mark Van Wagoner. I am sorry for the misspelling on Mark's name, I gave Doc the wrong info.

As you know, three of us are members of the VTA, and the only one that would qualify for membership is Bob; he was in Vietnam with us in Chu Lai, and in Da Nang, and we have tried to recruit him in the past. As for Ellis, he was a 1st Tanks member prior to Vietnam, he and Ned were together at Camp Pendleton, and on Okinawa. It is my understanding he was on an RLT heading for Vietnam, but it got called back. Ellis is older than the rest of us, I think he was discharged in 1965. For any Texan's, Ellis owns and runs the Red Wing Winery, in Hamilton, TX. If you get by his place, be sure to stop by and sample his wine.

Mark Van Wagoner is Stan's brother in law, a youngster, only 60 years old. He lives in Pendleton and was our host and guide after the Round Up. We could not have had a better host. His wife Kathleen took us to the rodeo and picked us up at the Packard Bar in Pendleton after we had a few beers. Mark knows all the history of the City of Pendleton and the 3 bars we visited. Kathleen picked us up, and took us to their house and fed us dinner and breakfast the next morning. Pretty great! She also thanked us for "our service." As you know, there is nothing like hanging around with your Marine Corps Brothers.

Because American Airlines changed Ellis's flight out of Boise, ID, we had to get up at zero dark thirty to make it over there by 0640; it is 170 miles from La Grande, OR where Stan lives. I was the designated driver. I had forgotten about the hour difference in the time, so it was just luck I woke up at 0130.

Other tankers—I met a young guy at the gym; he was active duty in the 80's at Camp Lejeune with 2nd Tanks. I learned about the TOW units that are attached to tanks. I guess they have taken the place of our friends in Ontos. As I said, he is young compared to most of us; he was doing some weight lifting with two 100 pound dumb bells.

This past Saturday I got to meet the commanding officer of the 3rd Battalion 11th Marines out of Camp Pendleton, Lt. Colonel Charles Von Bergen. He has quite a resume as you might expect, but he was also a tanker. He was the Fire Support Coordinator for 1st Tank Battalion at 29 Palms. He also rides motorcycles and that is how I met him. After being introduced, he took off his helmet and I noticed the high and close hair cut, so I asked him if he was active duty, and that was affirmative.

The above photo is of us at the Round Up. The painting on the wall is our favorite Army General George Custer!

TBS Class Unites for 50th Anniversary Reunion



In the photo: (Left to right) Watts, Terry Arndt, Robert Skeels and Tibbs.

Frequent Leatherneck magazine contributor and Marine veteran Kyle Watts had the privilege of joining the Marines of "Hotel" Company, The Basic School Class 8-68, for their 50-year reunion in Washington, D.C., June 8. One of the Marines, Chris Tibbs, invited Watts to attend following their conversations and work together on Watts' article "Gallantry and Intrepidity: The Marines of 3/26 in Operation Meade River," which appeared in the August 2017 issue of Leatherneck.

Eleven Marines from Hotel 8-68 were killed in action in Vietnam, and a large portion of the reunion served to honor their memory. The group traveled to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial and placed a placard displaying the name and photograph of each of their fallen brothers under each panel containing one of the 11 names. Besides their classmates, all the veterans present had their own list of names on the wall to seek out. They then proceeded to tour the U.S. Capitol and attended the Evening Parade at Marine Barracks, Washington, D.C. Pictured with a musician from "The Commandant's Own," the U.S. Marine Drum & Bugle Corps, are (left to right) Watts, Terry Arndt, Robert Skeels and Tibbs.

"I found it amusing and refreshing that, despite the extended period of time since they have worn the uniform, these gentlemen embodied the sentiment of 'Once a Marine, always a Marine,' " said Watts. "Hearing their talk, their mannerisms and interactions, even seeing the way they all lined up at the bar before taking their seats at dinner, all took me back to my own time on active duty and made me remember just how much I love being around Marines."

This article was featured in the October 2018 Leatherneck magazine. ■

Looking For

MICHAEL “MAU” TRUJILLO

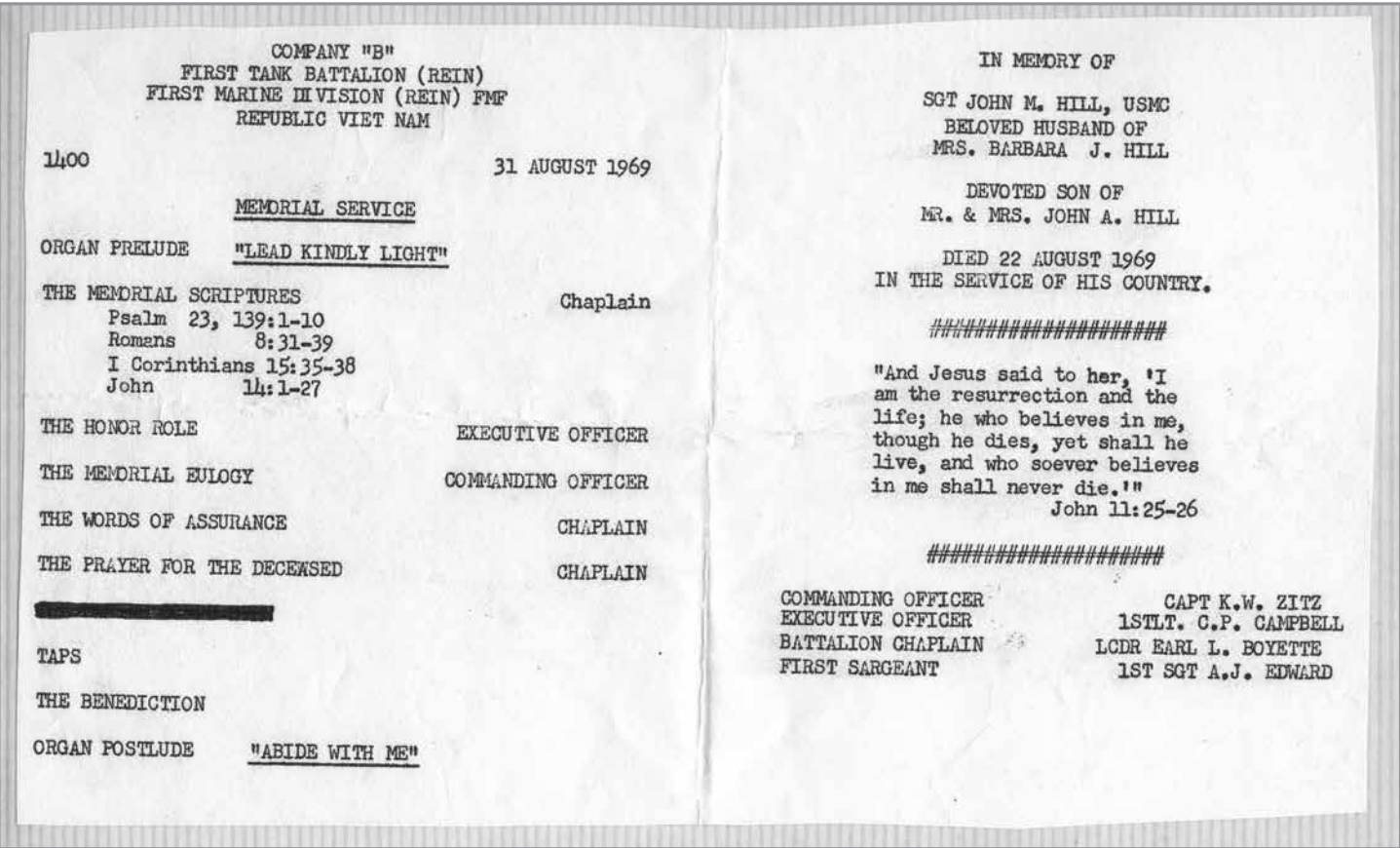


Pete Ritch writes: I am looking for anyone who served with Michael Trujillo (nick-named “Mau”), in Vietnam. Mike was a Marine tanker and was in-country 1969-1970.

Mike went to The Big Tank Park in the sky about two years ago due to complications from Agent Orange. I met his widow, Ellie, at a local fund raising event for the American Cancer Society. I was wearing my USMC cap and she asked where I served and who I was with in Vietnam. Mike did not talk about his experiences and she is very interested in hearing from those who served with him.

Please call me at 850-734-0014 or e-mail me at goldendog@mchsi.com, if you have any information on Mike

SGT JOHN HILL

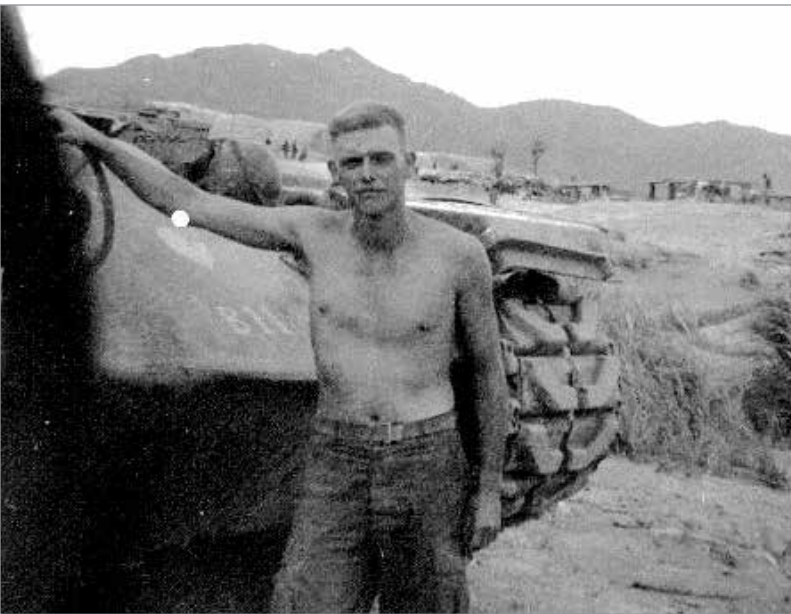


Lee Dill wrote: Someone was “Looking For” info on Sgt. Hill, KIA August 69. I attended the memorial service for him at 1st Tanks ... but I did not know the man any more than to only to say hello to him on occasion. I was in the area at Hill 55 when the service occurred and I was asked to attend ■.

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who this hard charging young Marine is?

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 unnamed mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

As of the publishing date of this edition No One correctly identified the “Guess Who?” photo that was in the July 2018 issue as A T-95 tank in the year 1955 with a smooth bore 105 mm main gun.

Several members incorrectly guessed that this was an M-103 - 120 mm “Elephant” tank. Note this tank’s far different “Christie” suspension system.



Above & Beyond

Recognizing those members that have made financial contributions above and beyond their normal membership dues to help our organization grow. This list includes Life Members who have taken it upon themselves to see past their initial investment and have donated to help carry their weight.

Anderson Mark
Arena John
Baccarie John
Balleweg Joseph
Barnhouse Robert
Barry Thomas
Bartashus Vincent
Baxley Robert
Beirne IV Richard
Belmessieri Michael
Bennett Donald
Bisbee William
Blythe Bobby
Bohonos Paul
Bolick Reed
Box Frank
Brazeau Max
Brummitt Dennis
Buning Richard
Bunning Richard
Byrne John
Byrnes Raymond
Canulette Patrick
Cardiel Frank
Carmer Richard
Carr Frank
Cassidy Thomas
Cercone Edward
Cerde Rene
Ceres Midland
Chassereau Joseph
Christopher Kenneth
Christy Albert
Clavan Robert
Clock Darrell
Clock Jeni
Clock Richard
Cohen Allen
Cohen Burton
Coulter Richard
Cowman James
Cramer Monty
Crossman Sr Thomas
Crowe Norman
Dahl Kenneth
Damschen Mark
Davis William
Davis John
Davis William
Defazio Robert
Deroma III Florindo
Dill Lee
Dixon Ernest
Dodd Robert
Doty Don
Dudek Ronald
Edwards Shane
Eksterowicz Kenneth
Ellis Richard
English Richard
Evans Steven
Everest Guy
Falk Stephen
Farrell Danny
Fentery Thomas
Ferguson Sid

Fierros Robert
Fischer Michael
Flaviani George
Frankenberger Warren
Fuentes Mario
Fuentes Jr Ramon
Gaither
Gates Robert
Gehl Donald
Goger Fred
Goodine Paul
Green Dave
Griffith Jeffrey
Grooms John
Gulledge James
Hackett Timothy
Hamby Alvin
Hancock Jr. John
Harper John
Harrigan Joseph
Harter Kenton
Hayes Thomas
Hays Max
Heffernan John
Helfrich David
Henderson Rod
Hernandez Gilbert
Highshoe Douglas
Hildabrand Theodore
Hiltz Jr. Charles
Hoch Clyde
Hogue Larry
Hokanson Carl
Holden John
Hollister Gordon
Holter Harold
Hoopman Glenn
Hoover Robert
Hughes Merritt
Hughes John
Hunter Dana
Hunter Terrance
Hutchins Glen
Hydinger Steven
Jefferies Brian
Jefferson Jeff
Jewell James
Johnson Lewis
Jorday Jr. George
Juarez John
Jugenheimer Ricard
Kalanick Ronald
Keely Joeseeph
Keely Sr. Joseph
Kellogg Fred
Kelly Thomas
Kennedy Sr. Raymond
Kilgore William
Kilgore Westley
Kirik Jr. Michael
Knack John
Knee James
Knight Ronald
Knox Clyde
Kopf Francis
Kropke Roger

Kues Edwin
Landaker Joseph
Langley Richard
Langlitz Harlan
Leddy Orville
Ledford James
Lewis Richard
Lorance Richard
Maddox Gerald
Manson James
Martin Carolyn
Mashburn Thomas
Mastrangelo Joseph
McCabe Avery
McCauley Sr. John
McCleery Geary
McDaniel Gary
McGuire John
McKeown Pearce
McMath Phillip
McMillan Jr. Donald
Medley Fred
Mefford Gary
Melton Jr. Virgil
Miller Jay
Miller Harold
Monaghan Danial
Moreno Armando
Morrison Jon
Nagle Richard
Najfus Louis
Needam Richard
Newberry Craig
Nichols Timothy
Nichols Timothy
Norman Jr Olin
Nuanez Jerry
Olenjack Stanley
Ouellette Reynald
Owen David
Owens Gary
Pawlak Daniel
Peksens Richard
Perillo John
Peters Dow
Peterson Gary
Phillips Todd
Pipkin Michael
Pjura William
Plank Jr. Milo
Ponder Michael
Pozder Kenneth
Ralston David
Ralston David
Rasner Steve
Reish Thomas
Remkiewicz Francis
Riehl Charles
Riensch Harold
Ritch Peter
Roalson Larry
Rogers Lawrence
Rose Sr. George
Ruby Jr. Chester
Rudy Janet
Russell Dickie

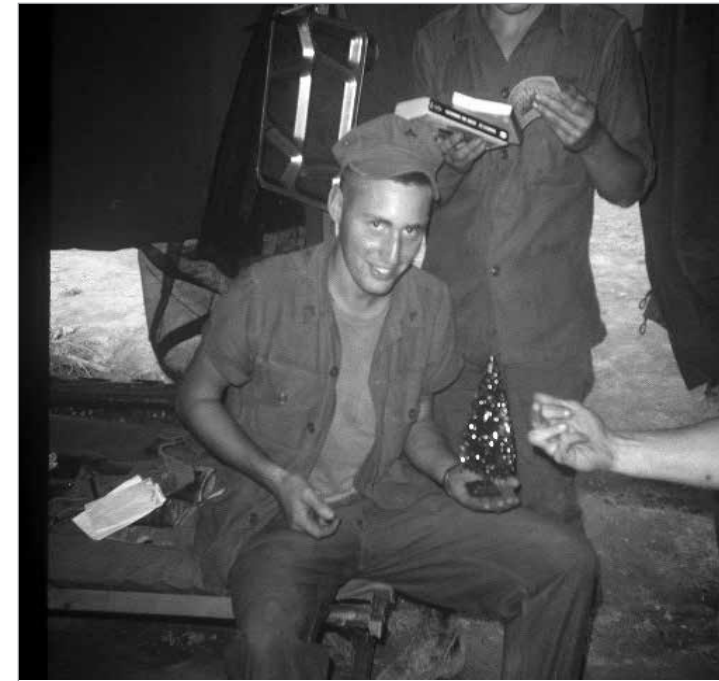
Sanders Joe
Santana Joshua
Santos Ladis
Sausoman James
Sayers Patrick
Scanlon David
Scheurich Ray
Schlieben George
Schwartz Ralph
Schwartz Ralph
Serrano Ralph
Sharetts Ronald
Shaw Michael
Schrivner Jr. Douglas
Shollenbarger David
Shuppy Ronald
Sims Charles
Skeels Robert
Skinner Steve
Sparks Earl
Stayton James
Stokes Robert
Thacker Shirley
Thomas Wayne
Thompson Ky
Thompson David
Thompson Robert
Thompson David
Tiscia Jr. Joseph
Torres Joseph
Traynor Jr Andrew
Trice Carol
Trower John
Tubbs Charles
Tuck Robert
Tunget Everett
Turner David
Tyson Joseph
Tyson Jr. Joseph
Ullmer Leland
Unland Roger
Valdez Steve
Van Apeldoorn Bruce
Van Dusen Dyrck
Vaxter Robert
Wahl Jerry
Walters David
Warham Richard
Waters Michael
Wear John
Wells Walter
West Charles
White Jerry
Whitehead Kenneth
Williams John
Williams Stanley
Wimmer Sandra
Wokaty Dan
Wolfenbarger Guy
Woodward Stanley
Zayat Richard
Zebal Kenneth
Zitz Kenneth
Zlotek Jr. Adam
Zobie William

YOU'LL SHOOT YOUR EYE OUT, KID

BY: RIC LANGLEY

We arrived back in Dong Ha in the middle of December, 1966. We had switched tanks with a platoon from Alpha Company and had been flown back from Con Thien to Dong Ha aboard a Jolly Green Giant chopper; what a ride. We squared away our gear and set out to check out the tanks we had traded for. What a disappointment. The tanks were filthy and very poorly maintained. The next few days were spent trying to get our new junk piles into something that resembled combat vehicles. We were standing our usual perimeter and bunker guard, plus working all day on the tanks. The daily rains continued leaving everything wet and covered in mud. Just to walk from the tank park to our tent would leave you soaked to the bone, with mud up to your knees. Standing watch at night was a miserable experience, to say the least. The whole first part of December had been a real bummer.

Christmas was approaching quickly and most of the platoon was really down in the dumps, with no Christmas spirit to speak of, with one exception; Miles Jansen was a Christmas nut. He had started getting excited about the holiday around the first of the month and had grown more and more excited as Christmas day grew closer. The guy just loved Christmas. The rest of us just grumped around and felt sorry for ourselves. The week before Christmas, Jansen received a huge package from home and we all knew this was going to be good. Jansen's family always sent great packages. We all gathered around, like a bunch of vultures, as Miles took his time unwrapping the gift. We were not disappointed. The package contained all kinds of great goodies. As always, everything was shared with the whole platoon. The last thing to come out of the box was a small Christmas tree. I thought Miles was going to burst into tears. One of his big concerns leading up to Christmas was the fact that we had no tree. From the grin on his face you would have thought that Santa himself had paid Miles a visit. The feeling was so jubilant that it lifted everyone's spirits. During the next week everyone was receiving packages from home, so, by the time Christmas day actually rolled around, we were all truly in the Christmas spirit. Christmas day was bitter sweet. We had been lifted by a guy with a six-inch Christmas tree and a love for the Christmas



holiday. We sang Christmas songs, had drinks and shared all that we had. But also, we were very sad to be so far from home and loved ones on this special day.

With Christmas just another memory, we settled back into our mundane life of work and watch. We were able to procure rain gear for everyone and bought rubber boots from the local vendors so we were dealing with the rain and mud a little better. During the Christmas season, there had been several days of sunshine, making it possible for the Alpha Company platoon to return to

Dong Ha with our tanks. Even in the short time that they had them, they had really made a mess of our tanks. Somehow, the crew that had been assigned to our tank had even been able to lose the escape hatch, located under the driver's seat. We would spend a few more days working to get our tanks back in order. With everything cleaned and shipshape, I still needed an escape hatch and I knew just where to get one. I told Siva I was going to the Alpha Company tank that we had been on and procure the hatch we needed. He said I should wait for night, they probably wouldn't even know it was gone. I declined the idea, saying that they lost the hatch so they owed us one. With Siva, Sellers and Hamby behind me, I marched over to the crew that had lost the hatch and told them I was taking the one out of their tank. They looked kind of stunned as I climbed into the driver's compartment, pulled the lever and dropped the hatch to the ground. Still nothing was said as I reached under and pulled the hatch out from under the tank. With the hatch in hand, I thanked the crew as we made our way back to our tank.

Siva was leaving for thirty days leave in the states, a reward for extending his tour in 'Nam for six months. Sergeant Jim Short took over as our TC. He was an old timer with the platoon, with only about another month to go before he was due to rotate home. I liked Jim, as he had taken me under his wing when I first joined the platoon back in July. Gunnery Sergeant English had come on board as our new platoon sergeant, along with a few other new personnel. With just a few days left until New Year's, the platoon left Dong Ha. Three tanks went to the mouth of the Cua Viet River and the other two tanks, ours included, were sent to guard the Cam Lo Bridge. >>



Cam Lo Bridge Dusters at Cam Lo

The weather was starting to let up slightly, but we were still just sitting and waiting for things to dry out before getting back out in the boonies. The bridge duty was like a vacation. There was no harassment like at Dong Ha and we were not out on sweeps or patrols of any kind. On the warm days, we swam with the kids in the river and lay around and soaked up the sun. We bought peanut whiskey and fresh baked bread from the old man across the river and celebrated the New Year by setting his house on fire with a hand flare. As the sunny days became more frequent, we knew it was only a matter of time before we would be chasing Charley again. After a short time, we moved again to the main outpost at Cam Lo, meeting up with the rest of the platoon. Things had dried up and we were told we would be going back to Con Thien. As on our first trip up there, we would be sweeping the area between the two outposts. This would be our first encounter with the Army twin-forty tracked vehicles called "Dusters." These things looked like a tank with an open turret and two gun tubes. They were actually an anti-aircraft gun with two 40mm guns. They could run circles around us on the highway, but when it came time to hit the bush, we ran off and left them. The operation kicked off like so many in the past, with the grunts sweeping north and, I'm sure in their minds, hoping to make it to Con Thien without seeing even a trace of the NVA.

The day started off quietly with no signs of any enemy activity at all. After we stopped for a short lunch break and had moved only a few hundred yards, all hell broke loose. The lead element in the column had been allowed to pass and the middle of the formation had come under ambush. The objective was to cut the column in half and defeat each half one at a time. It seems that Charley had spent the rainy season learning new tactics and also obtaining new weapons. As soon as the ambush was sprung, the enemy moved in as close as they could to the



Marines, making it almost impossible to call in either artillery or air cover. As the ambush continued, we noticed these puffs of smoke and what looked like a slow-moving dart followed by a thin trail of smoke and a whooshing noise. Charley was introducing us to the RPG 7. RPG stands for rocket propelled grenade and the seven was just the latest in the series. The RPG had anti-tank capabilities and would become our most feared weapon. The NVA, up until this time, had the RPG 2, but not in large numbers. With the NVA acquiring the RPG 7 in sufficient numbers, a short learning curve on the best way to use it and his new tactics; it was a whole new ball game. We tried to rejoin the rest of the column but Charley had put himself between the two halves of the column. Being unable to fire our guns for fear of hitting friendly troops, we could only try to outflank the enemy and pull the column back together. The NVA were way out numbered, but they had us between a rock and a hard place. After quite some time, we were finally able to link the column back together. With the grunts, five tanks, and the twin forties all firing, Charley decided he had done all the damage he could do and faded, as always, into the underbrush. The Marines had taken several casualties, so medevacs had been called and were on their way. Patrols searched the immediate area but turned up little. We moved out with a heightened sense of awareness, thinking maybe we were a little rusty. As the sun was settling below the horizon, we set up our position on the perimeter and spent a restless night.

Before first light, I had been up for about an hour, tending to my duties getting things ready for the day to come. I had my coffee and peanut butter crackers, checked the suspension and fluids, and had crawled into the driver's compartment to get it squared away. As I did every day, I pulled my pistol out of its holster, jacked the slide back to check the chamber, when the pistol slipped out

of my hand. I instinctively grabbed for it, causing it to discharge in a loud blast. I knew instantly that the bullet had struck me in the lower leg. It felt like someone had hit me as hard as they could with a sledge hammer. I looked down and sure enough there was a small hole in my pant leg. I pulled up the pant leg to reveal a nickel sized hole in my calf about three inches below the knee. I looked at the back of the calf, there finding a quarter sized hole six inches above the ankle. I could not believe this had happened to me; I was always very careful with my pistol. I guess in the firefight the day before, I had placed a round in the chamber of the pistol and had neglected to remove it. Dumb, Dumb, Dumb!!! As I lowered myself down the front slope of the tank, a bunch of people came running to see where the shot had come from. As they helped me to the ground, I explained what had taken place. A corpsman was called and was on the scene in no time. He examined my leg saying that I was lucky that the bullet had missed the bone and any large blood vessels or veins, although I would have to be medevaced for treatment. The chopper was called and, as I waited, I kept telling everyone how sorry I was. Sgt. Short told me not to worry, that these things happen, that they would be fine until they could send out a replacement crewman.

The chopper came and, in no time, I was being unloaded at the medical facility in Dong Ha. My stretcher was placed on the saw horses in the large examining room next to two other guys, who didn't seem to be wounded too seriously. The doctors checked my leg, reiterating how lucky I was. That .45 cal. bullet could have done a lot more damage if it had hit the knee or shin bone. Luck was on my side in one way that day; the USS Repose, a hospital ship, was off the coast at that time. I, and the two other Marines, would be flown out there as soon as they could get a chopper lined up. Up until this time, my leg had been surprisingly almost pain free; it just throbbed. I could lay on my back, put my ankle on top of my other knee and see straight through the hole in my calf. This was unbelievable. The corpsman came around and gave me a couple of pain pills, stating that the wound was going to start hurting before long. How right he was. We were loaded into a waiting military ambulance and taken down to the landing strip where there was a CH47 chopper, waiting to fly us out to the ship.

The chopper set down on the, in my opinion, way too small landing pad, as the ship's medical personnel rushed out to off load us. We were again taken into a large examining room and immediately stripped of everything we had brought with us. Laying there naked, the pain had started to catch up with me, so one of the doctors administered a shot of morphine. This stuff was great I thought. I could have walked out of there and gone right back to the platoon. My leg was examined again, the orders written, and away I was whisked in a wheel chair down the hall to a medical ward. I was wheeled up to the nurse's station where a round-eyed female nurse, hadn't seen one of these in a while, took my paperwork from the corpsman. She shuffled through the papers and welcomed me to the ward. I was turned over

to another corpsman, given a small bag with all the personal hygiene products I would need, and pushed to the showers. With the corpsman's help, I showered, shaved, brushed my teeth and was helped into a set of light blue pajamas. This was feeling pretty good. From the showers we made our way to the other end of the ward to the treatment room. The corpsman told me to wait just outside the door until the doctor was finished with the patient he was now treating. The earlier shot was starting to wear off, so I was glad the wait was short. I was taken into the treatment room and placed on the table. The doctor was just finishing washing his hands, at the same time reading my chart. He introduced himself and said "We had a little accident, did we?" I replied, sheepishly, yes. He looked at my leg and made the same comments that I had heard before, about being lucky. He ordered the corpsman, which was assisting him, to give me another shot of morphine so he could get the wound cleaned up. In short order the doctor had the wound cleaned of all damaged tissue and washed out with what looked like a turkey baster. The doctor left the dressing to the corpsman. He packed the now even larger hole with what seemed like miles of gauze packing, then wrapped the wound with gauze and finally finished it off with an ace bandage. I didn't feel a thing. "Ain't drugs a wonderful thing?" With my wound taken care of, it was time to find me a bed. I was placed in a lower bunk in the tightly packed ward and told to call for one of the corpsmen if I needed anything. The only thing I needed was a good night's sleep.

I slept through the night, except when they came around to take my temperature and gave me some pills to take. I was startled awake the next morning by breakfast being served. The meals on board ship were outstanding. I am not just saying that because I had been eating lousy food for so long; they were great! I wolfed down my meal, finishing just in time for the corpsman to wheel me down for my morning dressing change.

Dressings were changed twice a day, once in the morning and again late in the afternoon. I thought I would go in, they would administer a pain shot, change the dressing, and I would be on my way. Think again. That's not how it would go. I was taken into the treatment room and without any pain medication, the wound was undressed. The ace bandages and gauze wraps were removed without a problem. That left the miles of packing to be pulled out of the gaping holes. It felt like someone was running a red-hot poker through my calf. I don't know how in hell they got that much packing in that one wound? With the packing out, I thought the worst must be over. The corpsman pulled out the turkey baster and started shooting some kind of solution through the wound. The calf muscle cramped up like someone had it in a vise. If there had been a way, I would have jumped overboard and been doing the back stroke in no time. They finished the dressing and sent me on my way. >>

This would go on for the next ten days, until the wound was healed enough, so the doctors could stitch it closed.

I returned back to my bunk to find that I had visitors. Two officers from battalion headquarters were waiting to ask me a few questions. Their concerns were that maybe I had shot myself on purpose. I explained what had happened and that no way would I have done this on purpose. They asked several more questions and then seemed satisfied that it was truly an accident. Until my wound was closed up, I was confined to a wheel chair and the ward. Finally, the torture was over. The day came that the doctor said the leg was healing nicely and was ready for sutures. Thank God! The doctor gave me some kind of local pain killer and sewed the holes closed with a pair of pliers and some stainless steel wire. The sutures would be left in for about ten more days. The next day I was given a pair of crutches and told I was on my own, just take it easy for the first few days. I was able to go down stairs to the mess hall for my meals and up on deck to get some sun in the afternoon. Every night there was a movie under the stars. I made friends with a couple of other wounded Marines and three or four sailors who worked in the mess hall.

A few days before the sutures were due to be taken out of my leg, the word was passed that we were heading for Subic Bay Naval base in the Philippines. The ship would be there for a few days to resupply. The patients that were able to get around, with nothing more than a cane, would be allowed to go ashore on liberty. Everyone who was still on crutches immediately threw them away and was stumbling around trying to walk with just a cane, myself included.

The morning we pulled into port, I still had the sutures in my leg and would not be allowed ashore until they were removed. At morning rounds, I almost begged the doctor to take them out. He studied the wounds and said he thought they should stay in at least until we left port. He then got a huge grin on his face and said he was just messing with me. He said he would pull them out as soon as he finished seeing the rest of his patients. We were issued a uniform of plain khakis and black shoes. The only insignia was a small globe and anchor on the piss cutter (funny looking cap). We would wear no indication of rank or ribbons, but everyone would know who we were and what ship we came from.

I talked to the two guys I had been hanging around with and we decided we would stick together on our adventure into Olongapo City, the small town just outside the main gate of the base. As with all small towns on the outskirts of a military base, it probably wasn't a good idea for someone to strike out alone. Late in the afternoon, we picked up our liberty cards, were instructed to stay out of trouble and to be back on the ship by six o'clock in the morning. As we were filing down the gang plank,

we ran into the sailors from the mess hall. They too were on their way for a night on the town. They insisted that they escort us and show us the ins and outs of this action packed little burg. We were more than welcome to have their guidance. Our first stop would be the base enlisted men's club. Here we could prime the pump and develop a plan for the night to come. There were very few ships in port so the club was almost deserted. There was about eight or nine of us, so we pulled two tables together as one of the sailors ordered a round of San Miguel beer, a beer brewed in the Philippines. I liked this beer and would drink it anytime I had the opportunity. None of us Marines had much money but when the waitress came we all dug in our pockets to pay for our beer. The sailors told us to put away our money; that we were their guests for the night and they didn't want to hear any argument. We stuffed our money back in our pockets and settled in for a great night. The club was so quiet that we only had the one beer and then headed for town.

We made our way out the main gate and across the bridge. Below the bridge, floating in what smelled like an open sewer, were several young ladies dressed in all white, in canoes, wanting you to throw them money. Olongapo City surprised me, to say the least. The streets were narrow and crowded with what they called Jeepneys. After WWII, the Philippine people had taken the left-over Army Jeeps and turned them into taxies. They had painted them in the brightest colors they could find, and had added chrome, lights, fringed tops and horns. These taxies were everywhere, with horns blaring and tires screeching, it was quite a show.

With us three Marines hobbling along with our canes, the sailors decided we would be better off getting a Jeepney for the short trip to our first stop. Someone stuck up his hand and immediately one of the cabs came sliding up to the curb, with another one right behind. We piled into the vehicles, someone shouted out the name of a bar and away we went. It was only a couple of blocks to our destination, but it was a trip to remember. For the short two blocks, the taxi driver swerved in and out of traffic, honked, cussed and made obscene hand gestures to anyone he thought might get in his way. We arrived at our destination, someone flipped the driver a quarter, you could get just about anywhere in the city for under a dollar, and we piled out onto the sidewalk.

In front of us was a very large, open-air bar; in fact, it took up a whole city block. We moved inside and found a table large enough for all of us. The place was about half full with sailors and a few Marines. I did notice three other Marines from the hospital ship; they stuck out like a sore thumb with their plain khaki uniforms, as did we. Beers were ordered and again there was no way that we were going to be allowed to pay. We drank beer and listened to a great band that could play all the latest

hits from the U.S. They sounded exactly like the original artist. Once the word got around that we were from the hospital ship, sailors would come around and shake our hands and want to buy us beer. They asked lots of questions about what it was like in Vietnam and if we had any Viet Cong souvenirs that they could buy.

After an hour or so of this chaos, the group decided it was time to find a little quieter spot to finish the night. One of the guys said he knew the perfect place and out on to the street we headed. With a wave of the hand we were back in a pair of Jeepneys hurtling along the main street. It was quite a distance to our next stop, but this was no site-seeing trip. All I could do was sit down, shut up, and hang on. As before, the taxi was in and out of traffic, passing on the right, then on the left, horn going non-stop. After a sudden U-Turn in front of what seemed like the entire Olongapo city Jeepney fleet, we pulled up in front of the President's Club.

The club was at the top of a long, wide staircase. With the help of our hosts for the night, we hobbled up the stairs to what turned out to be a surprisingly large bar with a stage and dance area. The place was decorated nicely; you could tell the owners took pride in their establishment. One of our group had been here several times before; he even knew the bar tenders and waitresses by name. In no time we were downing more beer and talking with other patrons. Just as I finished my beer, the waitress showed up with three drinks on her tray. She said they were compliments of the Chief, pointing to the table in the corner. She set a drink in front of each of us khaki-clad Marines. We raised our glasses and toasted our benefactor. The drink was really good, so I asked the waitress what it was. She replied it was a Black Russian; it was the only drink that the Chief drank. In fact, I liked the drink so much, I still drink Black Russians to this day.

As I finished my drink, I noticed that the sailors that had been sitting with the Chief had gotten up and left, leaving the Chief by himself. I decided to go over and thank him in person for the drink. I introduced myself and thanked him for the drink. He said that from then on, I would not be allowed to buy a drink in the President's Club. To say the least, I was taken aback. He flashed a big grin and explained. His girlfriend's family owned the bar and they had a policy that the wounded from the hospital ships that visited Subic Bay drank for free in their club. We talked about where we were from, our families, and the usual small talk. The Chief was stationed on the base and in less than a year would be retiring from the Navy. He planned to stay in Olongapo, marry his girlfriend, and spend his time running the bar. The band started up, so I said I would probably see him again, and headed back to rejoin my friends. Again, the band was amazing in the way they could mimic any type of music.

By this time I had quite a buzz and was feeling a need to get something to eat. I conferred with the rest of the group and everybody agreed it was time to call it a night. We stopped by the Chief's table to thank him again. We told him we were going to get a snack and head for the ship. He said that two blocks up on the right was a great place to grab a bite. We thanked him for the information, to which he replied, that's ok; it was his future sister-in-law's restaurant, but it was still good. We wobbled down the stairs and headed up the street finding the eatery right where the Chief had said it would be. We stuffed ourselves with God knows what, hailed a Jeepney, putting our lives in the hands of an unknown driver yet again, and made our way back to the Repose.

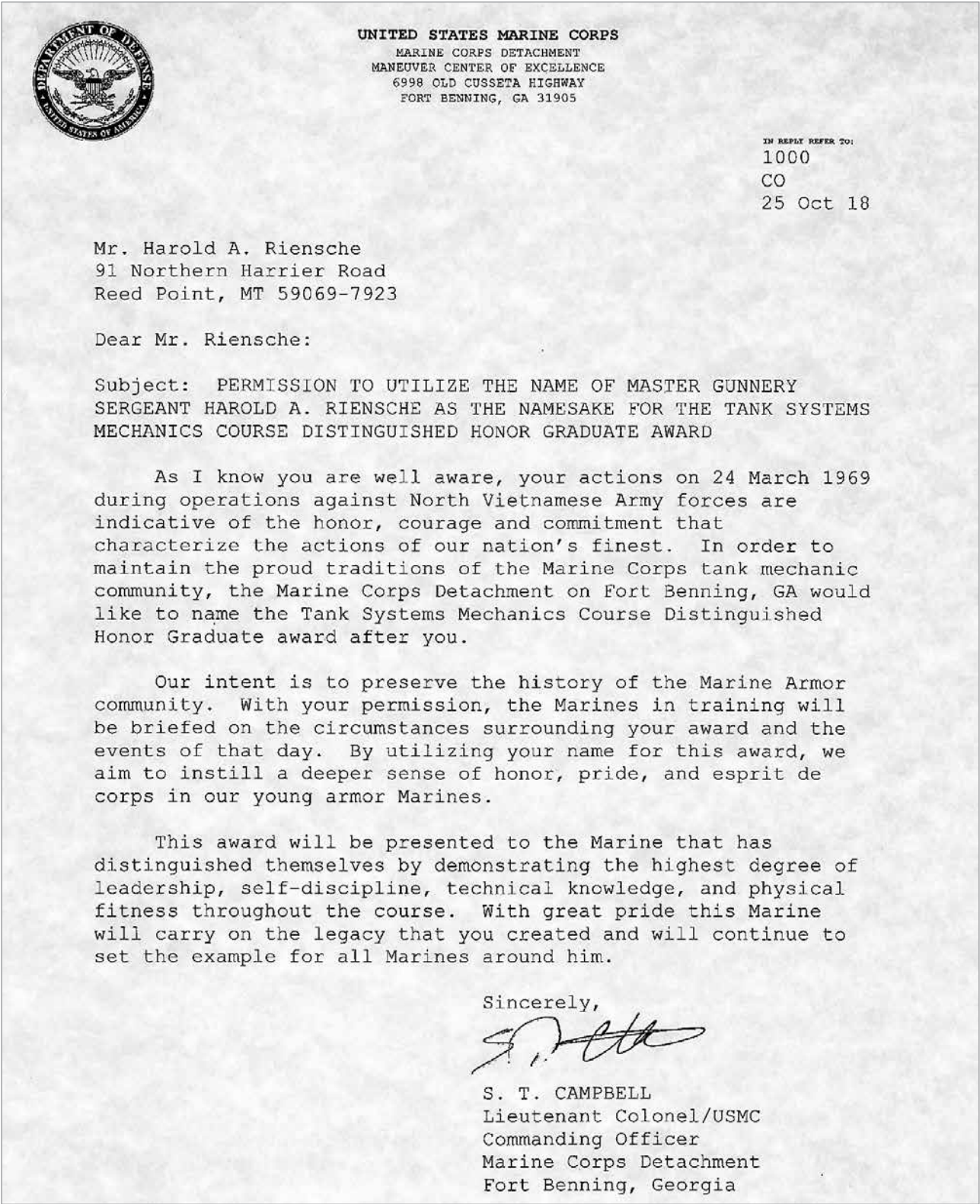
The Repose was in port for four or five days and every night I would make my way to the President's Club to drink Black Russians and listen to the bands. Sometimes, there would only be just a couple of us, and other nights there would be a large group. I always made it a point to stop, if only for a moment, and chat with the Chief. I liked the President's Club; it seemed quieter and more laid back than the other bars.

The day came, the Repose slipped out of Subic Bay and set course for the coast of Vietnam. It was a sad day. Over the years, I have often thought of the Chief and the President's Club and how life had treated them. The ship dropped anchor just off shore from Chu Lai in the middle of the night, sometime in the first week of March, 1967. The patients that were leaving the ship, me included, were off-loaded into Mike boats and taken ashore. We were just dumped on the beach to find our own way back to our units. With some directions from some C-Bees, a group of us made our way to the airfield. I was able to catch a flight to Da Nang and could probably have caught another one north to Dong Ha, but decided to spend the night in the transit barracks in Da Nang.

The next morning, with only a slight hangover, courtesy of a small EM Club I had grown fond of, I continued my trip back north. I arrived in Dong Ha mid-morning to find 1st platoon getting things squared away to move back out to Con Thien. I was concerned that I might be placed with another platoon, but since 1st platoon was there and had an opening, to my relief, I was back with them. Everyone welcomed me back and nothing was said about the accident. Siva had returned from leave but Sellers was now gone on his extension leave. Cpl. Hullings, a nice guy and a short-timer, was filling in for Sellers as gunner. The call came unexpectedly late the next afternoon. Someone was in a jam and needed help. We loaded our belongings and, within the hour, we rolled out of the gate at Dong Ha, first to help save someone's ass, and then to move back onto the hill at Con Thien. I was back into the routine, comfortable and confident, like I had never been gone. ■

RECAP OF THE FT. BENNING MINI REUNION SEPT. 2018

While attending our 2018 mini-reunion, the Marine Lt. Col. who is the commanding officer of the US Marine Detachment at Ft. Benning made a request to us. He wanted to create an award for the top student of each graduating class and to name that award for a highly decorated Marine tanker and tank mechanic from the Vietnam War. The colonel's motivation was to show his young Marine students that enlisted tankers and mechanics display high levels of valor and are recognized by the USMC. We just received a copy of a letter to the namesake for the Top Mechanic Award.



2018 FT. BENNING REUNION RECAP



Pete Ritch: The first-ever, informal VTA Mini-Reunion at Fort Benning, Georgia on September 5 – 8, 2018, was outstanding. Over 50 tankers and family members viewed a variety of military training events including the Parachute School, the USMC Tank School, the Tracked Vehicle Restoration Facility and a visit to the U. S. Army Infantry Museum. The highlight of the reunion was spending time at chow (lunch and dinner) with the current generation of Marines. Just when I was about to give up on young American millennials, I got a glimpse of our future and it's looking very, very good.

To the person, the Marines at the USMC Tank School, officers, instructors and students were impressive, dedicated and aware of what it means to be a Marine. The age range of the Marines I spoke with was 18 to 27, male and female, career and reserve and all focused on the importance of what they were doing and what they may be expected to do. They were bright, energized, well-spoken and listened to what a bunch of old tankers had to share with them. One of the female students walked past me and I asked, "Are you a Marine Tanker" and she replied "Your damn right I am!"

Ken Eksterowicz: Great job on the mini-reunion. Everything went very smoothly and I appreciate all the effort you put into making a meaningful time for all. It was so nice to meet a great bunch of guys, swap stories and reminisce about our tanker days. The young tankers were very impressive and are a great asset to the Corps. I wish them much success.

Roger Luli: My bride, Sherry and I had a wonderful time. We are already looking forward to Seattle. You planned just the right amount of activity for old people like us. We need to get some kind of video of the director of the tank museum. He has a wealth of knowledge. Great job!!!

Hank Brightwell: When we had the pizza party with the Tank School staff and students, the students that we sat with told us that they were told (by their Gunny) to only believe 50% of the stories that they heard from the "old" guys. Well as the night went on that 50%

inched up to 60%, then 70% and finally wound up at 90%. That was some of the best fun we all had in quite a while!!!

Carol Colucci—a VTA spouse: My husband Ron Colucci and I just returned for the Fort Benning mini-reunion. We had a great time seeing some old friends and making new ones. We have attended quite a few regular reunions which are well planned out with exciting stops as well as fraternizing time. I would highly recommend that every Marine tanker try to attend a reunion and of course, to bring their spouses. It's a great way to experience a special camaraderie. I was not married to Ron while he served but I feel a special bond with the men who did through these reunions.

My husband served in Viet Nam for a very short time as he was wounded after 9 months in-country. He was sent home to recover from his wounds. That short amount of time in-country doesn't stop him from pride in serving his country, making some lifelong friends and having memories, some bad but mostly good. When I see his face light up as he sees a friend from a past reunion and how they maybe never served side by side but share similar experiences it makes me even more proud of my Marine.

During this mini-reunion we were able to spend time with the incoming Marine tanker students. What a thrill for all!!! The young men asked the "seasoned" Marines about many things which turned out to be a true learning experience for both sides since so many things have changed over the years.

At the Tank Restoration Project we learned about historical tanks from many wars and countries which are being refurbished. After our detailed lesson, the guys were able to inspect the various tanks which they could even climb aboard (if they were able to ☺). What a thrill, 50 years later, for a bunch of grown men to revisit the machines of the past. I hope that everyone considers attending the reunion in Seattle; both the men and women will have a special experience. For God and country. ■



School house at the Tank Restoration Project



On the bus to the Tank School



"Blues" Unland and Guy Everest



Ben Cole and Hank Brightwell



First Timers Paulette and Charles West



Roger and Sherry Luli



Tracy and Joe Tyson



We formed up to march to the demonstration



Nancy and Bruce getting ready to jump



(L-R) McCauley, Najfus, Luli with a fully restored Ontos!!!



(L-R) McCauley, Najfus, Luli with a fully restored Ontos!!!



A German King Tiger tank



John is one happy TC



WW 1 Tanks on display



Did somebody say "Tanks"?



The inside of a flame tank!!!



Every kind of tank ammo on display



The business end of a WW2 anti-tank gun



Paulette West said, "I can't believe I climbed up there!!!"



Joe Tyson has a new toy!!!



Ron found a photo of his tank in Vietnam



We hosted a pizza party



The USMC Tank School Staff gets a VTA plaque

Our Readers Write (Continued from page 7)

the Corps. The Commanding General of MCRD talked about what a great recruiter Lee had been for the Corps. We placed the GySgt. Emery brick into the Drill Instructor Memorial at MCRD.

California road to honor Marine icon R. Lee Ermey

Actor R. Lee Ermey, portraying "Gunnery Sgt. Hartman," yells at new Marine recruits in this scene from the 1987 movie "Full Metal Jacket" directed by Stanley Kubrick. (The Associated Press) California plans to pay tribute to "Full Metal Jacket" actor and Marine icon R. Lee Ermey by naming a road after him. A seven-mile stretch of road in Palmdale, California, known as Avenue N will be renamed R. Lee Ermey Avenue, in honor of the acclaimed actor and Marine veteran, according to a fundraising page associated with Ermey's supporters. Stars and Stripes reported that the stretch of road will also play the "The Marines' Hymn" when driving over special grooves in the road. California officials with Palmdale and Lancaster, Los Angeles County, and California Department of Transportation, approved the effort to rename the avenue but lack the funding to put the endeavor into action. Supporters of Ermey have since sprang into action by launching a GoFundMe page to raise \$150,000 to pay for street signs, highway signs and memorial plaques, according to the fundraising page. The stretch of road to be renamed was closest to Ermey's home of nearly 20 years, the Antelope Valley Press reported.

Tank Home



Don Whitton (aka Sgt Grit) sent this to us

What's Vietnam Like Today?

One of our members asked about "Leatherneck Square" today and if it would be worth it to go back to Vietnam to take photos of all of the old places that we knew 50 years ago.

Ronald Dudek replied: When you look at Viet Nam, first the "police action," then the Viet Nam conflict,

and finally we had balls enough to call it the Viet Nam War. During our ten- year-long involvement, and in I Corps in particular with the Marine Corps, many different units occupied all of these famous Tactical Areas of Operations (TAOR). Leatherneck Square is comprised of Con Thien (THE HILL OR PLACE OF ANGELS), Camp Carroll (Named after JJ CARROLL WHO WAS KIA BY A TANK SHORT ROUND), Cam Lo (also CAM LO AIRFIELD, CAM LO BASE CAMP, CAM LO BRIDGE ... BETTER KNOWN AS BASTARDS BRIDGE, CAM LO CAC, CAM LO CITY AND CAM LO RIVER VALLEY). And the last part of Leatherneck Square is Gio Linh (GIO LINH FSB, GIO LINH AIRFIELD, GIO LINH CAP, THE ALAMO, GIO LINH OUTPOST, AND GIO LINH SF CAMP. I've been going to this area leading tours since 2003, and I always tell visiting Vietnam vets that they should not expect to find a lot of old places. I used to give them a percentage of what they might be able to recognize (10%) but now it is probably down to less than 2%. Everything that the US built is gone. Everything has changed. The only thing left at Con Thien is the old French bunker; the rest is prosperous rubber and tapioca plantations. Camp Carroll has a monument erected by the NVA declaring the area secure after the ARVNS pulled out. Cam Lo has the new bridge but you can still see the pylons of the old bridge. Gio Linh is a village. Not many pictures to take anymore, you can come and see for yourself if you want.

The New USMC AAV



Rick Lewis was recently at Camp Del Mar on Camp Pendleton and he saw the replacement for the old amtrac ... the new Armored Amphibious Vehicle. No tracks, but two big propellers on the back. They are made by BSE Systems. The first delivery is mid-2019. As you can see, no tracks. I got a quick tour. There is a lot of important improvements over the old ones. It has what is called the "Cobra Gun System." It is very close to what's on the M-1 Abrams. The TC never has to stick his head out to fire the gun. It carries 12 combat-loaded Marines. It also gives them a "real time" view of what is in front of them before the troops come out the back. It is still slow in water, 10 knots ... but land speed is up to 60 mph. The Corps wants it dropped to 50mph. The "V" shaped hull is for mines and the side armor to reduce penetration. ■

Voices from the Past

BY: FRANCIS L. REMKIEWICZ – “TREE”

This was hard for me to write. To describe a meeting such as the one below and/or the ones I had with Suzanne Wunsch Johnson are very hard to put into words. I have a difficult time with the word “happy” ... but these meetings were pure joy to me. My heart, mind, spirit, and soul we’re all lifted up at the same time. And though these meetings are hard to put into words, they are indelibly emblazoned on my soul. I profoundly believe that these families belong as part of our family. These are Viet Nam Tanker family just as surely as your family and mine are. Thank you for letting me (and reminding me) to write this all down. I have saved the articles and the emails and the memories stored in a special place.

I was late in coming to the party, better known as the USMC Viet Nam Tankers Association, but when I arrived I discovered so many tried and trusted friends that 50 years ago seemed like yesterday. Sitting around the Torsion Bar or going on a field trip during our reunions gives each of us a chance to talk with one another in a manner in which only we know. We are not alone, as there are many groups like ours, but we are originals. We represent the presence of Marine Corps tanks in Viet Nam. There are no voices quite like ours.

There are, however, voices that are only committed to our memories. Voices we heard 50 years ago but not today. We travel to The Wall in DC and we pray, and we cry, and we talk, but our voices go unmatched, there is no response. But every now and then we are given a small miracle. Voices

we thought were silenced years ago can be heard. We all had one such response when we were honored to have Suzanne Wunsch Johnson present for our last reunion in St Louis. Suzanne was searching for her brother, Captain Michael Wunsch. Together, in our quiet and reverent conversations, brought the Captain back to life, if only for a few moments.

In July of this past summer, I had the great fortune of hearing another voice I thought I would never hear again. Through a means very much like how I met Suzanne, a nephew of Steve Dowdell reached out to me through e-mail and asked if I was willing to share some memories of Steve. Steve and I went through boot camp, ITR, and Tank School together. Our families lived close to each other in Southern California and, as many friends in the military would do, we promised each other that should something happen to either of us, the other would visit his parents. Steve never made it home, and I ended up in Long Beach Naval hospital for a few months. For some damnable reason, my seabags with all my personal gear never made it home. As a result, I looked for almost 50 years for Steve’s parents, but to no avail. Then, from seemingly nowhere, Steve’s cousin, Shane, emailed me. Would I share stories and memories of Steve? You bet. My second chance had arrived. By some twist of fate it turned out that not only Shane, but several members of Steve’s family, lived in an area in Southern California where my family vacations yearly, a place we call The Ranch.

I offered to have Steve’s family come over to The Ranch and to spend the day talking and sharing memories of Steve over a good old-fashioned Santa Maria barbecue. The family accepted! So, on that day in late July we met. I brought with me the Forgotten Tracks series of books, the last two issues of the Sponson Box, and a couple replicas of our famous M-48A3 tanks. They brought with them Steve Dowdell. We talked and shared memories and I tried to provide as much about the man that I knew well, but had only joined Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks, in early July of 1969. He was killed in late July. So, we talked and cried and talked some more. I had a day of pure joy. Shayne was joined by Steve’s sister, Susan, and another niece, Shawna. Here is how Susan described what happened that day.

“...the day with you and your family was lovely and healing. Thank you very much. I feel like we have made a friend of you and your family.

And add to that I felt you brought Steve to life again for me that day. I’ll never forget that. Thank you. Warm regards, Suzy.”

Later that night, as I stood outside the house and gazed at the billions of stars in the sky, I found myself talking to Steve. I am not prone to a whole lengthy conversation, not even with my family, but that night I told Steve about everything that happened. I thanked him for the warm and loving family he has and for the feeling of their great loss. No, Steve did not talk back, but deep in my soul I knew he was listening. ■

THE FIGHT TO KEEP ROUTE 9 OPEN

[Excerpted from a February, 2013 Leatherneck magazine article, “The Road to Khe Sanh,” authored by VTA member Jim Coan]

On 20 January, 1968, the Fourth Marine Regiment moved its headquarters to Camp Carroll in Northern I Corps and assumed responsibility for the security of all Marine bases along Route 9 from Cam Lo to Ca Lu. NVA gunners shelled Camp Carroll that night, which turned out to be the opening round of a concerted effort to cut Route 9 and isolate Camp Carroll.

On 24 January, a routine artillery resupply “Rough Rider” convoy was ambushed by a large NVA force just as the trucks were about to turn on to the Camp Carroll access road from Route 9. A reaction force of two tanks from Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks, and two Army M42 “Dusters” loaded aboard a platoon of Marines from H/2/9 and headed out to the rescue.

The lead tank was commanded by Corporal Harry Christensen. Standing alongside Christensen’s cupola with his pistol drawn was Captain Dan Kent, CO of Bravo Company, who was also the reaction force commander.

The relief force halted 100 yards from the ambush site, dismounted the grunts, and opened fire at NVA positions alongside the road. A bullet ricocheted off the tank and struck Christensen above his right eye. He placed a dressing over the wound and stayed in the fight. Christensen’s tank and an Army Duster charged closer to the ambush site.

Just as Capt. Kent shouted, “We’re taking fire from both sides of the road,” two bullets struck him in the back. Cpl. Christensen grabbed hold of the captain and, struggling with all his might, was able to pull him back atop the turret. Before he could get the captain inside the turret, two RPGs struck the tank, further wounding both Marines. Then, a recoilless rifle round exploded on the turret, wounding Christensen again and blowing Capt. Kent off the tank. The blast set off a fire inside the turret. The badly wounded tank commander ordered his crew to bail out. Another RPG hit the tank, knocking Christensen to the ground,

where he rolled into a ditch. As he raised his head, he could see Capt. Kent’s lifeless body lying in the road.

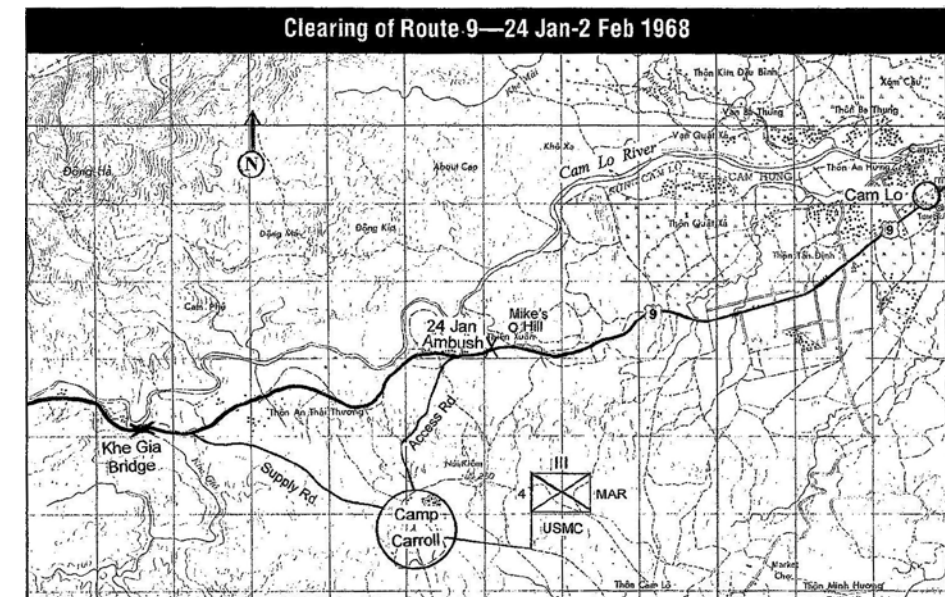
When a second relief force from Dong Ha reached the chaotic scene, accompanied by two UH-1E helicopter gunships overhead, the NVA broke contact and hastily retreated, taking their dead and wounded with them.

Back at III MAF Headquarters, concern was mounting over the NVA’s ability to strike almost at will along Route 9. The 3rd Bn., 4th Marines choppered in from the Trace area of Leatherneck Square to beef up security. Their mission was to secure Route 9 from the Khe Gia Bridge to Cam Lo, nine kilometers to the east.

In the predawn hours of 27 January, the NVA attacked M/3/4, which was situated atop a little hill just north of Route 9 near the previous 24 January ambush site.

India and Lima companies joined the fray in a fierce day-long battle to defend “Mike’s Hill.” The NVA were driven off, leaving behind 130 KIA. The Marines lost 21 KIA and 62 WIA, a heavy price paid to secure the vital main supply route (MSR); however, intelligence sources warned that large numbers of NVA troops were continuing to move into the area.

Situated astride Route 9 was the Cam Lo District Headquarters compound. Alerted to expect trouble during the imminent TET holiday, U. S. Army advisory staff at the compound requested Marine reinforcements. On 1 February, two squads from D/1/4 and a squad from E/2/9 showed up to help and assumed positions around the compound perimeter. At 0215 the next morning, the compound was hit by hundreds of rounds of recoilless rifle, rocket, and 82mm mortar fire. The Army district advisor was killed in the initial barrage. His assistant, Army Captain Raymond McMaken, found the only radio still operable and contacted fire support bases at C-3, Dong Ha, and Camp Carrol, 30-311. A steady rain of artillery fire from multiple >>



batteries blasted enemy assembly areas, weapons positions, and suspected withdrawal areas.

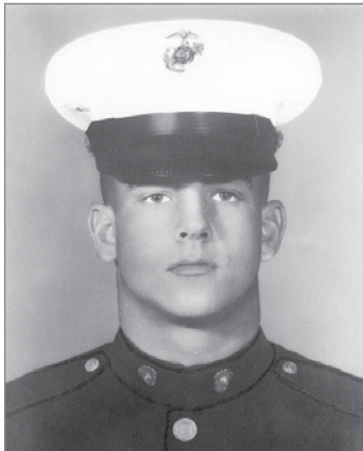
At 0430, a Marine tank and Ontos reaction force from FSB C-3 charged cross-country toward the Cam Lo compound. Seeing this armored counter-attack roaring down upon them, the surviving NVA troops broke contact and hastily retreated north across the Cam Lo River, then west into the hills. They left behind 156 of their dead for the Marines to bury.

Those outnumbered defenders of the District Headquarters had triumphed against seemingly impossible odds. Fewer than 50 Marines, plus a handful of Army advisors, had held off and defeated at least two NVA battalions and a sapper company. Army Captain McMaken said later, "The Marines just stacked them up on the wires. They were magnificent." Marine Corporal Larry L. Maxam would receive the Medal of Honor (posthumously) for his heroism that night. Two other Marines received the Navy Cross.

Because of the determination of the U. S. Marines to prevent the NVA from severing Route 9, that vital MSR would remain open to Ca Lu and beyond for the duration of the war.

Medal of Honor Citation

The President of the United States in the name of The Congress takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to
CORPORAL LARRY L. MAXAM
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
for service as set forth in the following CITATION:



For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty while serving as a Fire Team Leader with Company D, First Battalion, Fourth Marines, Third Marine Division in the Republic of Vietnam. On 2 February 1968, the Cam Lo District Headquarters came under extremely heavy rocket, artillery, mortar, and recoilless rifle fire from a numerically superior enemy force, destroying a portion of the defensive perimeter. Corporal Maxam, observed the enemy massing

for an assault into the compound across the remaining defensive wire, instructed his Assistant Fire Team Leader to take charge of the fire team, and unhesitatingly proceeded to the weakened section of the perimeter. Completely exposed to the concentrated enemy fire, he sustained multiple fragmentation wounds from exploding grenades as he ran to an abandoned machine gun and commenced to deliver effective fire on the advancing enemy. As the enemy directed maximum fire power against the determined Marine, Corporal Maxam's position received a direct hit from a rocket propelled grenade, knocking him backwards and inflicting severe fragmentation wounds to his face and right eye. Although momentarily stunned and in intense pain, Corporal Maxam courageously resumed his firing position and subsequently was struck again by small arms fire. With resolute determination, he gallantly continued to deliver intense machine gun fire, causing the enemy to retreat through the defensive wire to positions of cover. In a desperate attempt to silence his weapon, the North Vietnamese threw hand grenades and directed recoilless rifle fire against him inflicting two additional wounds. Too weak to reload his machine gun, Corporal Maxam fell to a prone position and valiantly continued to deliver effective fire with his rifle. After one and a half hours, during which he was hit repeatedly by fragments from exploding grenades and concentrated small arms fire, he succumbed to his wounds, having successfully defended nearly one half of the perimeter single-handedly. Corporal Maxam's aggressive fighting spirit, inspiring valor and selfless devotion to duty reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country.

/S/ RICHARD M. NIXON

Editor's note: The name Larry L. Maxam is inscribed on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial ("The Wall") on Panel 36E, Row 078.[2]

JANUARY 24, 1968

BY HARRY CHRISTIANSEN

On January 24, 1968, I was the tank commander of Bravo 42, the company blade tank. At noon on that day, my Commanding Officer Daniel W. Kent advised me that there had been an ambush at the base of the hill; we were to be the reaction force. My tank would be in the lead with two army dusters (M42), the company flame tank, along with a platoon of grunts loaded on the tanks bringing up the rear. We met at the gate to Camp Carroll and proceeded toward the ambush site. On the way, the radio was alive with requests for aid

and we could hear the explosions and small arms fire in the distance. Taking a right on highway 9, we were able to identify the ambush site which was still under heavy fire. Captain Kent and I began to coordinate fire of the 90 at enemy positions on both sides of the road. We began to experience small arms incoming fire which disabled the tank infantry phone; the captain and I were able to coordinate fire by hand signals. Shortly thereafter I was hit above my right eye by small arms fire which ricocheted off the tank's turret. The captain and a corpsman approached me to see if I was able to continue commanding the tank. The captain made a decision that would later cost him his life by remaining on the outside of the tank. I believe he did this to insure my own safety, having been already wounded once, this decision probably saved my life.

After expending much of the 90's ammunition and a good deal of the .30 caliber ammunition, we decided to rush into the ambush site as enemy activity seemed to have diminished. We were wrong, they were waiting for us. I was passed a grease gun and a flak jacket as the .50 caliber was damaged when the charging cable broke. As we rushed into the ambush site, we began taking fire from both sides of the road. I was able to kill several RPG teams as they began to fire at the tank. Captain Kent then shouted to me to pick up the little bastard we'd seen in the soft cover on our way back. I said, "Why wait, sir," and I shot him. I turned to Captain Kent to acknowledge this when two rounds entered his back and exited his chest, splashing me with his blood. I crawled across the turret to render aid and to assure him he would be alright. By now, we were still taking heavy automatic weapon fire and RPG fire. As I tried to drag him into the tank we were both wounded again by RPG fire. I tried again; the same thing happened. On multiple occasions I tried to drag him to the tank

commander's cupola, but was again wounded by RPG fire. I then entered the turret, came up through the loader's hatch and grabbed the captain again. At this time a large projectile (I believe a recoilless rifle round) impacted the tank and blew the captain off the tank and wounded me again. This caused a fire inside and outside of the tank. After attempting to extinguish the fire I ordered the crew to bail out. As I began to jump from the tank, I was wounded again but was able to crawl into a ditch by the side of the road. I had been wounded in both hands, both arms, my face, head, chest, knee and back and was bleeding profusely. The corpsman was dead, I couldn't reach the medical kit inside the tank and so spent the next several hours praying as we continued to be pinned down by heavy automatic weapons fire. Eventually aircraft flew into the site dropping bombs and napalm. The napalm was so close I could smell the gasoline.

Ultimately, the enemy broke contact and I was evacuated to an aid station in Dong ha. That's another story, the horrors of which you cannot describe. Somewhere I lost consciousness and I woke up briefly in a hospital somewhere in Vietnam with a tube in my bladder, an IV in my left arm and my right arm in traction. I thought the day would never end. Thereafter I was flown to Yokosuka, Japan, where I spent two weeks being stabilized, then I was flown to a naval hospital very close to my home for eight months.

I was discharged from the naval hospital in late August, 1968, then married September 1, 1968, and returned to college September 8, 1968, earning my Bachelor's Degree, Master's Degree and Law Degree. I continue to practice law today in my home town. The Silver Star I was awarded for the actions on 24 January 1968 I share with Captain Daniel W. Kent and all of the other brave men who fought and struggled that day. ■



Sgt Harry Christiansen



Capt Dan Kent

The Dumbass Saved Us

BY: BR MCDONALD



This incident occurred in October of 1966 with 1st Platoon, A Co., 3rd Tanks. The light section was occupying Hill 65, which was about 30 miles southwest of Da Nang in some nameless, God-forsaken valley. We were told to return to Da Nang and meet up with the heavy section. I had just made corporal and was now a gunner, along with Sgt. Tews as the TC, L/Cpl Sanders as the driver, and PFC Ritter the loader.

We met up with the heavy section in Da Nang and we were introduced to

our new platoon leader, Lt. D. Rohleder. The Lt. said that we were leaving in the morning on US Navy LCUs and that we were going north to the DMZ. The next morning, we loaded up on the boats and floated up the coast where we disembarked at Dong Ha. At that time, Dong Ha was just a small airstrip. Once we off loaded, we were then told that we would be leaving that same day for a place that I had never heard of called Con Thien.

For some reason, we got delayed in Dong Ha for an additional three days.

We had to set up our own perimeter security with our tanks along with a company of grunts and a squad of engineers. During those three days, we got to know the Lt. and we learned that he really did know his stuff about tanks and tank warfare. He also told us that he was a distant relative of German Field Marshal Rommel. And for an officer, he really was a good guy.

The engineers had dug their foxholes beside our tanks so we got to know them fairly well. There was one member of the engineer crew that the

rest of the engineers didn't like. They considered him a real dumb ass.

On the morning of the third day, we left Dong Ha and headed for Con Thien. The Lt. was the TC of the second tank with Cpl. Payne as his gunner. Our tank was the third in the column and Gunny Giese, our platoon sergeant, was the fifth tank. I believe that Sgt. Hamilton had the first tank and Sgt. Brown had the fourth tank. We traveled down Route 9 for quite a distance and then turned north on to what looked like a cart trail.

Since I was sitting in the gunner's seat, I was not in the ideal position to be seeing what was happening outside. Looking through my gunner's periscope, I could see the engineers sweeping the trail for mines, and the grunts on either side of the tanks as security. We were moving at a pretty good pace for a few hours until we came to a small bridge over a creek. This was a gook bridge, not a well-built American bridge. It was very narrow but it looked like it would hold a tank. The creek was fairly deep and it had banks that were about five feet high with lots of bushes and grass alongside of it. The engineers swept the crossing for mines and crossed onto the other side with a squad of grunts.

The Lt. told the first tank to cross, which it did, and then it drove about 50 yards down the trail on the other side. The Lt. then moved his tank onto the crossing. I was looking through my periscope and saw black smoke blowing out of the back of the Lt.'s tank as the driver floored the accelerator to cross the creek. All of a sudden, Cpl. Payne came onto the air yelling, "The Lieutenant's dead! The Lieutenant's dead! The Lieutenant's dead!!!"

The Lt.'s driver drove the tank to where the first tank was parked and stopped. Then Gunny Giese came over the radio and told Cpl. Payne that he had to guide our tank across the bridge. Cpl. Sanders had buttoned up and needed help getting across the bridge.

At this point, we didn't know how the Lt. had been hit, but I never understood why Sgt. Tews and PFC Ritter didn't button up. Cpl. Payne was calling out instructions for L/Cpl Sanders to move onto the crossing. As we moved onto the bridge, an RPG hit us on the left side. PFC Ritter and Sgt. Tews both fell down into the turret and L/Cpl Sanders drove us off the right side of the crossing, bellying the tank on the bank of the creek. I turned and looked at Sgt. Tews and PFC Ritter lying on the floor of the turret. Both of their faces were red and their eyes were glazed over, and both appeared as if they were in shock. I had seen some of the blast and smoke from the RPG come into Ritter's loader's hatch and knew that we were taking fire from the left. A few seconds later, another RPG round hit our left side and our engine went dead. Again the blast and smoke came into Ritter's hatch and I felt the tank move. People were on the radios telling us to get out of there, not knowing we were stuck (bellied on the creek bank) and our engine was dead. I heard somebody exclaim, "They're killing that tank!"

I brought the gun tube around to our left side, looking for anything to engage, but all I could see was clear blue sky. A third enemy anti-tank round hit us and I told myself, "I'm going down fighting!" and I fired the 90 mm sending an HE round out into the wild blue yonder.

A gook mortar team started hitting us right after the Lt. was shot. This put all of the grunts and engineers on their bellies on both sides of the trail as they took cover from the incoming. I could hear the mortar rounds hitting outside and then there was a lot of rifle fire for a few seconds. Then everybody started yelling "Cease fire! Cease fire!"

Sgt. Tews and PFC Ritter started coming out of their daze and we all climbed out of the tank. That's when I observed a silver dollar size hole in our hull and three dead gooks in the creek. I asked a grunt how many had hit us and he pointed at the three bodies and

said, "There they are."

While the medevac choppers were coming in, we hooked up tow cables to the Lt.'s tank, and they pulled us off of the creek bank and up to Con Thien.

After we got to Con Thien and later that night, I found out what happened. Those three gooks had dug a tunnel just below the water line in the creek and it appeared that they had been there for several days waiting for us. The mortars started right after the first rifle fire and after the Lt. was shot. I am pretty sure that they knew that the Lt. was in the second tank and that the gun shots were the signal for the mortars to start shooting. None of the grunts, engineers or tankers had heard the shot when it was fired, but when the mortars came in, they took cover.

That one dumbass engineer had taken cover to the left side of the trail on the north side of the creek crossing. He said that he had his head down in the grass when he heard gooks talking. He had to get up on one knee to look down into the creek. He saw three gooks. One with an AK, one with the RPG launcher, and one with the extra rockets. The one with the RPG fired a rocket and hit the tank. The dumbass engineer pulled out his .45 pistol and, without thinking, started shooting at the gooks. A couple of grunts were on the south side of the creek and saw him shooting into the water. They then saw the gooks and they opened up with their M-14 rifles. The grunt told me that all three gooks were still standing when he started shooting at them with his rifle. He was pretty sure that the engineer might not have hit anything with his pistol, but that he showed everybody else where the gooks were.

I am now sorry that I thought that the Marine engineer was a dumbass because he probably saved our lives. If that gook had hit us with his RPG six inches to his left, he would have hit inside of the turret and quite possibly killed us all. Of course, word went back to our company that the whole platoon had been knocked out and all of us were killed. ■

Tet 1968 was a strange week for the 2d Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Tanks. The Khe Sanh combat base had its second battle of the year in the saddle of Hill 881 on January 20, 1968. An uneasy truce was declared by the Viet Cong for the Tet Lunar New Year holiday that was to run from January 27 through February 3. Rocket attacks against Da Nang, the Marble Mountain area, and Chu Lai put the truce to rest on the night of January 29–30.

The “Death Dealers” had been out with the infantry of the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, cruising the tree lines for about three days looking for the enemy. We were all about to become heavily involved in what was probably the biggest running gun battle of the Vietnam War, the Tet Offensive.

Tet was the culmination of a long-planned offensive by Hanoi. The enemy had managed to attack almost every installation and city of any significance in South Vietnam. At the time, they believed that this would lead to a popular revolutionary uprising of the common people to overthrow and eject the Saigon government as well as the American allies. During the offensive the American press speculated that we had lost control of the war, despite the fact that virtually every battle was won by U.S. and South Vietnamese forces. Later in the war there were questions concerning the full commitment of Viet Cong forces as a means for the Hanoi government to avoid sharing power with the forces of the south. The Viet Cong were effectively eliminated from the battlefield during the aftermath of the offensive, and northern supply lines were drained to the extent that it would be two years until they were back at their previous effectiveness.

As gunner on an M-48A3 tank, designated as C-23, I often didn’t leave the inside of the turret for three days at a time. Like the other crews, I ate and slept in the tank, urinating into the tank hull to be flushed out later. My tank commander, Sgt. Ralph MacDonald (Sergeant Mac), let me out ev-



The Fight for Hoi An

BY: D. C. FRESCH

ery now and then to see the light of day for about five minutes at a time.

Because tankers are cockier than many other Marines, we were having trouble coordinating with the infantry. Working as close to the tree lines as we did while evacuating wounded, it was essential that our tank have a team of infantry to suppress RPG attacks. It took a considerable number of complaints to get the support, and then it was quite a production to finally get our grunts to pull back when we needed to engage the main gun. Our second problem turned out to be the 2d Battalion, 3d Marines, commanding officer’s inexperience at tank-infantry operations. As the sun was setting on about the third day of operations, after having found recent evidence of enemy activity in the area, he insisted on a night assault into the next tree line. Against our complaints and explanations of bad tank terrain, the assault began with our predicted result of two tanks severely bogged down in

the mud and the other two engaged in removing them. It was a nasty job to recover a tank in the mud of a Vietnamese rice paddy.

The assault was then called off and we spent an uneasy night in the open. Artillery dropped harassment and interdiction (H&I) fire around us, and gunships and fireflies overflowed our position throughout the night. It was very spooky. Considering we had yet to engage the enemy, someone higher up was taking great care to protect us. Did they know something we didn’t?

It was the night of January 29–30. The next dawn would see all five provincial capitals attacked and the I Corps headquarters compound breached by VC and main force NVA. The communists had come out of their holes and hideouts to do battle.

With the arrival of morning, we hurriedly ate our C-rations and coffee and then saddled up to hit the tree line from the night before. Monitoring the radios, we heard reports from

the infantry of enemy fighting holes and abandoned web gear. The enemy’s positions had been hastily evacuated during the night.

Everyone cleared the tree line and stopped to regroup. Mac got out to confer with the infantry, and I climbed up to get a little daylight and man the TC’s fire controls. Something did not feel right. I believe that everyone who has lived through combat has experienced this uneasy feeling at one time or another. I climbed down into the TC’s seat and started to traverse the turret toward the tree line by sweeping left to right across our front. The gun sights drifted across some horizontal banana trees and my alarms went off. “Bunker!” Suddenly, I was looking down the tube of a 75mm Chinese recoilless rifle manned by six NVA ready to put a “window” in my tank’s turret.

I squeezed off the main gun and got a click sound for my effort. I didn’t know what the problem was, but I also didn’t have time to deal with it. I climbed up on the tank, yelled to Mac what I had seen, opened up with the coax machine gun, and radioed the next tank down the line to put some 90mm cannon rounds where my machinegun fire was going. At that moment, all hell broke loose. About seven hundred NVA, the main effort of the NVA 2d Division, were moving out of the hills west of An Hoa to attack the Da Nang Air Base as part of the Tet Offensive.

We were engaged most all day, working right up in the tree lines with canister rounds and beehives (90mm shells loaded with hundreds of small, arrow-like flachettes). When we needed more ammunition, we evacuated wounded, loaded up with more rounds and then returned to the fight.

As the battle wound down, the crew was talking on the intercom about how we could wrap this up and get back to the area for some rest and showers. I had been monitoring the radios and listening to the 1st Platoon mixing it up in Hoi An. From the

transmissions I heard, it sounded as though they were in a very tough fight. Hoi An was about fifteen miles south of us on the Song Thu Bon River. An undetermined number of NVA had crossed the river from the south, out of the barrier island area, entered Hoi An, and not so politely requested that the ARVN soldiers leave town. There was a pitched battle, but the NVA won out and had most of the town in their hands. The small Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) compound in Hoi An was surrounded, and the American advisors there were fighting a desperate battle for survival. I had a friend with the fourteen-man Marine security detachment at Hoi An. Our tanks based there took hits, most from RPGs, and several were knocked out of the fight.

We were low on ammo and running low on fuel from fighting for three days and being heavily engaged all morning. Just the same, we were instructed to head for Hoi An. We would be refueled and re-armed there. We were told that the trucks to resupply us were already on their way.

Leery of an ambush on the roads, we headed cross-country, flat out through the desert area above Hoi An and we arrived at the outskirts of the city without incident. Blitzing into the city proper, we crossed a bridge, which terrorized some locals, and soon passed a Shell gas station. We joked that we should pull in and fill up. We arrived at our rally point with the 1st Platoon and were told that our fuel supply convoy had been ambushed on the road and blown up on Highway 538 west of the city. I have since learned that a bulk fuel specialist was killed in the ambush attempting to get our fuel to us. And I learned from another friend who was part of the convoy escort that the explosion was caused by a command-detonated mine.

We were facing a potentially disastrous situation. No fuel and no ammo is no way to enter a battle. Firefights were raging throughout the city as we linked up with elements of the

2d Blue Dragon Brigade of the ROK (Korean) Marine Corps. We solved our resupply problem by dragging out the hand pumps and hoses and siphoning fuel from the tanks that had been knocked out of service. We also stripped those tanks of their ammunition and distributed it among our four battle-ready tanks.

Hoi An was a mess. There were firefights taking place all over, and four different military organizations were involved: the Korean Marines, the cutoff U.S. Army compound, the widely scattered ARVN, and us. In addition, the civilians were trying to get out of the middle of everything. Taking into consideration the damage to the 1st Platoon, it was decided that we would try to run two tanks north into the city from both the east and the west, then turn into the city. We’d just blow it away house by house by moving toward the MACV compound, supported by the Koreans. Language and communication problems quickly arose. This was the 2d Platoon’s first time working with the Koreans and we were not communicating well. It was a moot point since everything would soon come apart.

The second of two tanks, we started up a narrow street to the west of the city. Closed in by one- and two-story buildings, we had limited visibility and even less maneuverability. We crept down the street, guns facing to the northeast, looking into every nook and cranny. The ROK troops were following us rather than supporting us as I watched our lead tank start its turn to the east.

WHAM! BLAM! The tank rocked to the left nearly on its side, and I saw smoke and flames shoot from both hatches. It slammed back to the street and just sat there and smoked. I couldn’t believe what I had just seen through the limited vision of the gun sights. My world went into slow motion and all sound dropped away as I waited for movement from our lead tank and anticipated continued fire on ours. It seemed >>

Getting the Band Together, Again

BY: STEPHEN FALK

to take forever, but the crew, covered in soot, finally crawled out of the turret and sought cover at the side of the smoldering tank. They had taken two rapid-fire RPG hits in the space of a heartbeat. I would like to think that we always reacted quickly to circumstances, and perhaps we did; I suffered time compression throughout this incident. It seemed to take some time until several tankers with their .45 grease guns ran up to provide cover fire, allowing the crew to get back to us. We were effectively stopped in our advance. I remember thinking, “F—— this! Just f—— this! I’m going home! Good-bye!”

All I could see in my mind’s eye was the next RPG coming through my gun controls and turning me into paste. I actually pushed up from my seat to leave when I thought, “Where the hell am I gonna go? It’s just as bad if not worse anywhere out there.”

I really didn’t want any of this, but I sat down and was determined to find that jerk with the rocket before he found us. I’m sure that other things were going on out there, but in the gunner’s seat it was just the NVA and me. I traversed the gun back and forth looking at the street. I felt as though I burnt out both my eyes one at a time and soaked myself in nervous and real sweat while our tank idled in the street. I was trying to will those gun sights to show me something, anything.

The radios were squawking something about the NVA trying to withdraw disguised as refugees and that we should try to separate the wheat from the chaff. A steady stream of civilians started to move out of the street that we had tried to turn into. An old man carrying a straw package appeared out of the alley and took cover under the front of the blown tank. Thinking that the package could conceal a rocket, I notified Mac, and he was going nuts trying to get permission to fire. Permission was slow in coming, and understandably so, because there was a

flood of civilian evacuees leaving the area. Mac finally bounced some .50 rounds under the tank and ran off the old man.

When our lead tank was hit, the ROKs simply left us, but the ARVN showed back up and fought like hell. Those ARVN were fighting for their homes. They lived in Hoi An and so did their families. I guess that made all the difference in the world to them.

Knowing that we were out in the street alone, I renewed my efforts to locate the site from where the RPGs had been fired. I damned near went blind searching, but finally noticed a slot at street level that looked like a storm drain. I keyed my combat vehicle crewman (CVC) helmet to tell Mac what we had, and in short order he ripped a load of .50 into the slot. Later exploration would reveal two dead North Vietnamese with an RPG in a below-ground room. Unlike the fighting at Hue, we never got the opportunity to engage our main 90mm guns in the city. We were effectively blocked almost immediately by our damaged tank and were reduced to fighting a careful, defensive machine-gun battle primarily due to the flood of refugees fleeing the city.

We eventually worked our way into the city but I couldn’t tell you how. The rest of the day was a blur as we fought through the narrow streets. The next thing I remember was night falling as we had all of our tanks sitting outside the gates of the MACV compound. Some of the officers from the installation came out to bring us food and thank us for their rescue. They shared their tales of the last few days’ madness. They were overjoyed to have our tanks there.

Everything about Hoi An seemed a bit otherworldly that night. We had never worked within a city before and were faced with an entirely new set of circumstances. As if to punctuate this feeling, a jeep with driver and a Vietnamese pas-

senger roared out the MACV gate and down the street. The vehicle ricocheted off the buildings on both sides of the street like a ball in a pinball machine, then flipped over. I just stood there and stared. The driver was drunk and was taking one of the Vietnamese employees home. This was the capstone to this whole weird past week. They both lay in the wreckage of the jeep moaning, and I was waiting for Rod Serling to step out of the wings and explain all of this. Strange days.

What We Learned

The challenges of using tanks were exacerbated by the harsh conditions of the urban environment. Tanks that were protected by infantry could act as effective close-in fire support. Tank main guns used against hardened targets yielded more precise results than could be achieved from artillery. Tank fire caused less collateral damage. Tanks that advanced with infantry protection also delivered a shock effect that intimidated defending dismounted enemy troops.

Effective tank-infantry cooperation requires detailed and precise coordination. Communication and command relationships must be established prior to an operation. Infantry and tank crewmen alike must be aware of each other’s capabilities. All elements of the tank crew should be kept apprised of the tactical situation throughout the vicinity of their vehicle. The accompanying infantry must guard against enemy snipers and RPG teams. The tanks must be regularly resupplied with fuel and ammo. We tried to move off the main roads to prevent creating easy targets for the enemy. Tanks could be used as armored resupply vehicles and ambulances to meet the needs of the screening dismounts as required.

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I left RVN during the 1968 Tet Offensive, in February. I had plans, definite plans, and like so many, just wanted to get back to the “world” and make them happen and forget the thirteen months I had just completed.

I had been engaged to my high school sweetheart, and was, in fact, scheduled to marry in fewer than two weeks. My further hopes included attending college to obtain an education degree, and to earn certification to teach high school English in my home state of New Jersey.

In fact, I did marry on 24 February, 1968. Looking for acceptance to college, I found that all but one of the New Jersey teachers colleges, newly changed in name to the “state colleges,” had gone through their application and acceptance processes and were not interested in someone beyond that norm. Jersey City State College, my Mother’s Alma Mater, still was open to admissions requests, and I applied and was accepted there.

I matriculated and finished my requirements for graduation in three years and began teaching English at Northern Valley Regional High School in Demarest, N.J., in September of 1971. By that time, my wife, Marcia, and I had already had our first child, Christine, and my plan was to settle into some sort of “normalcy” and live my life.

I left Nam with the names and addresses of maybe a half dozen guys. Over the next few years, I only had contact with a few of those. These contacts were off and on, at best. I probably don’t have to tell any Vietnam Vet that normalcy was not as normal as one would think, or hope. I pretended not to notice, and hoped with some fantasy, perhaps, that others would not notice either.

By 2008, I was already retired for several years, and the void in my well-being would make the 800-pound gorilla in the room cringe with trepidation. I had little idea what it was.

I had re-established contact with my Marine Corps buddies Lee Ullmer and Gary Felix. Lee was returned to his Wisconsin roots, and, again, making cheese. Gary was retired from his career as a Fremont, California firefighter, and continued as a contract worker for the department, “spec-ing” its apparatus. Gary’s work took him regularly to Appleton, Wisconsin. If I could travel to Wisconsin during one of Gary’s trips, the three of us could get together. We made plans and made it happen.

What happened? I am not exactly sure, but part of it was the casting aside of some, perhaps a number, of burdens. These were two of the men who had had my back in RVN. These were men with whom I could speak, and share, and know there would be understanding with no judgment. We spoke of the forty plus years of absence and experiences and family and life. We shared a comradeship unknown outside of the Marine Corps. We spoke as if we had never been apart.

I have done foolish things, but I am not a foolish man. I knew

this had to go on. I knew it had to expand; I knew it had to grow. It took time. Gary and Lee and I kept in a much more frequent touch with each other. Stirred by another Marine, Plainfield, N.J., Fire Commissioner Cecil Allen, I began application for VA benefits which I grew more and more to understand, I was owed for my Marine Corps service. I sought to better understand what those benefits were and how to seek to attain them. I began looking for others with whom I served.

If VA benefits seem another topic, I need to tell more. My first attempt at a claim married my lack of knowledge with a well-meaning volunteer service officer. Trusting he knew what he was doing, I followed his lead. The resultant award for my diabetes, tinnitus, PTSD, hearing loss, enlarged prostate, and chloracne [which the service officer said I had] was twenty percent disability.

My first thought: “Oh, I guess I was wrong in my expectation.” Having taught thousands of kids how to do profitable research, I knew I better take a closer look. Not knowing at the time about a notice of disagreement, I went this time to a well-known, well-regarded VFW paid service officer to file an appeal. He [very wrongly, I believe] told me I was lucky to get anything, that I should be happy with what I got, but he would file an appeal if I insisted. I walked out and tried to forget about it.

I began using meagre research techniques to try to locate others with whom I had served. I began, simply, with what I remembered. I remembered many names. I remembered “Lump,” “Gums,” “Ski.” I had to go deeper. I was amazed to find that forty-some years earlier, I had written names on the backs of photos. Does anyone else remember that proper prior planning prevents piss-poor performance?

I began searching names, looking for phone numbers, seeking addresses. I followed leads that gave me possibles, but insufficient info that I could, however, use in taking next steps. I found Randall T. Brown right there in Tennessee, as he had always been—on Facebook. I saw a photo of a former student, Barbara, with other women she described as “classmates from elementary, high school, and college.” One of them was another former student who was Carmine Montemarano’s cousin Theresa Troiano. Barbara gave me her contact info, I wrote to Monte.

I found Lt. Fuzz. He told me he had run into another Marine in Illinois. I found his phone and called him. Sadly, he didn’t like the idea of what I knew and remembered, and he suddenly stated he was NOT in First Tanks, but Third Tanks—he didn’t know me, but could get me a good deal on a new Chevy. Sad. If I used his four-syllable last name, you would easily see that there were not two guys with that name in the Corps, let alone in two different tank battalions at the same time.

Jim Sefrhans, KIA in Nam, is another story, but Jim, as most do, had family. I located his sister Carol. Contact with her >>

yielded her contact with Joe Vernon and Mike Hermes. I found Joshua Santana through his town’s tax assessor. Larry Zuley was the result of another of my guesses of it being the right one with my mailed photos from Vietnam: “if this is you, the other picture is me, please call me.” Assuredly, some people got that missive and wondered: “What kind of nut would send such things through the mail?” Larry responded.

I found Bob Veach’s cousin, Bob Veach, another Vietnam Vet who then put me in touch with his cousin. Unfortunately, I found some guys through their obituaries. After scouring New Jersey sources for Major Bob Croll, a hell of a good officer and terrific guy, whom I knew to be from “down the shore,” I found his week-old obituary from a place in nearby Pennsylvania.

Time had passed, and it was time to get together again. We planned a trip to Florida to make it easy for one of the guys with whom I had shared a hooch in Nam. I thought things were set, but that guy was not dealing well with reunion, and he cancelled and told me he would be out-of-state during our planned reunion. I cancelled.

Four or five months later, five of us agreed to a reunion in Washington, D.C. I didn’t know if we needed a plan, so I made one. It would include my contact at the Pentagon for an “insider’s tour,” my cousin Major General George Smith, called “Digger.” Digger had had an interesting Army career, spending a good deal of time working at the Pentagon for the Navy. During World War II, his father, shot down over enemy territory and imprisoned, was finally liberated by the unit my father was in. Digger’s tour for us included the Marine Corps wing and passing the Commandant’s office. There we were greeted by a group that included a USMC Lt. General and a Major General: Maj. Gen Mark Brilakis, a former student of mine.

The other planned event was a tour of the Capital arranged by a Metro D.C. police officer Greg Rock, whose partner’s father was the Senate’s Sergeant of Arms. Greg, a longtime friend of my son Steve, had lived with my family for several years, and is the brother of my son Tom’s wife, Eileen. Along with visits to the Wall and Arlington, it was a rewarding time together.

Meanwhile, the reunion itself was added to just a week prior to its reality. Bob Veach decided he could not actually miss the opportunity, and Josh Santana just had to be there. We purged our souls and memories, honored our brothers, and cursed the villains who disregarded our being.

The fruit of my labors pursuing the VA benefits I deserved [I am now 100%] was in the ability to now help others. What to ask for and, more importantly, how to ask became a more and more honed skill. I developed an approach that circumvented the VA tack used on [or against] me of not dealing directly with precise issues. My composition, research and literary skills had come to fruition.

Joe Vernon had a claim in, Ken Morrissey initiated a claim, Gary Felix...well Gary’s situation is worth a few more words. After identifying precisely what were the fruits of his PTSD, I helped him develop an approach that would in his claim’s cover letter identify each area of disability and, then, have a support-

ing letter from a friend, relative, or coworker that dealt exactly with that condition and giving examples and illumination of it in real context. After a notice of disagreement with the first result, he got the 100% he deserves.

Finding Jim Swinnie in Missouri was not easy, but once done, we decided to meet nearby. Joe Vernon’s real estate expertise yielded us a great house on Lake of the Ozarks. Larry Zuley drove down from his home. Bob Veach returned, Ken Morrissey, Kent Harter [another if this is you, this is me recipient]. Twelve of us made that trip. Gary Felix and Lee Ullmer, and Monte, of course. We had a terrific house, plenty of room, and always set a place for those who could not be there or were no longer with us.

The USMCVTA [Vietnam Tankers Association] was chartered in 1999. Several of our First Tanks H&S Company group were members. Joe Vernon wondered if we could “plug into” their reunions and planned to go to San Antonio to investigate. Mike Hermes planned to go [but had to back out when his wife Susan took ill] as well. I decided I couldn’t miss the opportunity. Larry Zuley had shared with me a story about meeting Jack Schuyler [Maj. John Schuyler, First Tanks S4 during thirteen months from 1967 to 1968] in Washington, D.C. at the first VTA reunion. I hoped, because he had been my direct boss in the First Tanks’ Four Shop, I would see him there. That didn’t happen; but what did was well worth the trip. I made some new friends, gained some new wisdom, and decided our little group could fit into the larger reunion every other year. Another plus, Terry Wallace was there and became part of our group.

I gained contact with Jack Schuyler and we began regular phone contact. Our group grew to twenty-six, with as many as seventeen meeting at our reunions. Some of the Marines weren’t enlivened by the prospects and the hopes I saw when we started. Sadly, I have had no success trying to locate guys, even knowing their middle names and where they were originally from. Further, some were found only by obituaries. Tragically, three died in one car accident...signaling deeper troubles. I was invited to Jack Schuyler’s ninetieth birthday party, but he passed a few weeks before, in June of 2018. Tom Baranski was one of our own; he too has since gone to guard the streets above, never making a reunion.

Beginning with the VTA reunion in D.C. in 2015, we have asked our wives to join us. The fruit of that has been bountiful. Dealing with PTSD in a spouse is never easy, sharing that reality comes with many rewards. My wife, Marcia, has remained a staff of my life for over fifty years, becoming acquainted with, and making friends with my Brothers’ wives has been excellent, for her, for me, for the group.

“If there is no Heaven, then just being in the same room with these men for all time would be good enough for me.” —John Morrissey, an Air Force F-105 pilot

***Editor’s note:** The author, Steve Falk, passed away on Monday, August 6, 2017. We are truly blessed to have had Steve write this wonderful story prior to his untimely death. ■*

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Rules: The coupon will be your raffle ticket to be surrendered at the door of the meeting room before 08:59 PST for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic

room rate (\$129) plus taxes. Prize value: \$500.00+tax.

The drawing will be held at the conclusion of the same meeting. The tickets will be selected from the people who are in the meeting room prior to 08:59 PST. No late comers will be permitted to enter in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President’s watch set to atomic clock standards

THINGS TO DO IN SEATTLE



For those of you who are planning to attend our 2019 Seattle reunion and for those who may be wanting to do more than the VTA-sponsored group activities, here is a nice list that was compiled by the people of the Seattle Visitors Bureau. If you see something that you'd like to do, please give the listed number a call or go on their website and book your own activity as far in advance as you can. As a reminder, the special reunion hotel room rate (\$129 per night) is good for three days before and three days after the actual reunion dates, so you can come early or stay over and spend as much time in the city as you want. In addition, the nice lady who sent us this list said: "The Museum of Flight, Tillicum Village, and Chihuly Garden & Glass are among my favorites!"

The Museum of Flight – We plan to visit this as a group.
9404 E Marginal Way S
Seattle, WA 98108
Phone: (206) 764-5700
Website: <http://www.museumofflight.org>

Description:

Enjoy the wonder of flight in one of Seattle's most spectacular settings. The 15-acre campus features over 175 air and spacecraft, the original Boeing Aircraft factory, flight simulators, fantastic 3D aviation and space movies, and dozens of fun, interactive exhibits and family activities. With the addition of the Aviation Pavilion—a 3-acre, open-air gallery, showcasing 18 of the world's most important airliners and military aircraft—The Museum of Flight has more to offer than ever before! When you visit you can climb aboard the supersonic Concorde, the only full-scale NASA Space Shuttle Trainer, the beautiful Boeing 787 Dreamliner, and the Air Force One that served presidents Eisenhower, Kennedy, Johnson and Nixon. Stand in the shadow of the infamous M-21 Blackbird spy plane—the fastest aircraft ever flown.

The Apollo exhibit, which opened in May 2017, offers an up-close look into the space race and features the original F-1 engines that launched Apollo 11 to the Moon. From the world's oldest fighter plane to current spacecraft, you'll see the machines and experience the stories of those who flew them. After touring the galleries, you can enjoy a meal at Wings Café or relax on the airport patio and take in all of the runway action. Take flight with The Museum of Flight!

Future of Flight Aviation Center & Boeing Tour
8415 Paine Field Blvd.
Mukilteo, WA 98275
Phone: (425) 438-8100
Website: <http://www.seattlesouthside.com/attractions/21-future-of-flight-aviation-center-and-boeing-tour>

Description:

The Boeing Everett factory tours are conducted to showcase The Boeing Company and the Everett product line, the 747, 767, and 777. As part of the tour, visitors will be located in the largest building in the world by volume (472,000,000 cubic feet). On the Boeing flight line, visitors will see airplanes in various stages of flight test and manufacture for airline customers around the world. Visitors come from every walk of life and from every region of the globe, all with a common interest — to see the number one aerospace leader in the world: The Boeing Company. Reservations for groups are required.

USS Turner Joy/Bremerton Historic Ship Association
300 Washington Beach Ave
Bremerton, WA 98337
Phone: (360) 792-2457
Website: <http://www.ussturnerjoy.org>

Description:

The Bremerton Historic Ships Association is where the destroyer "USS Turner Joy," the last Forrest Sherman class destroyer built, is located. While some of these ships were later converted to guided missile destroyers, "Turner Joy" remains close to her original 1959 configuration. The destroyer has been restored to reflect the appearance during her active years between 1960 and 1982.

LeMay-AMERICA'S CAR MUSEUM®
2702 E D St
Tacoma, WA 98421
Phone: (253) 779-8490

Description:

The LeMay America's Car Museum is the largest automobile museum in North America and has an important story to tell about the past, present and future of Automobiles. LeMay created America's Car Museum as a celebration of America's love for the Automobile, and it truly is a wonderful tribute. The Museum includes 160,000 sq. ft. of showroom space along with car storage, a cafe/restaurant, and reserve-able meeting space.

Argosy Cruises & Tillicum Village
1101 Alaskan Way Pier 55
Seattle, WA 98101
Phone: (206) 623-1445

Website: <http://www.seattlesouthside.com/attractions/7-argosy-cruises>

Description:

Argosy Cruises has been celebrating the breathtaking beauty of the Pacific Northwest for over 60 years. This family-owned and Seattle-operated company has become the Northwest's premier cruise company. Argosy Cruises offers must-see tourist attractions, such as the Lake Cruises, Locks Tours, and Harbor Cruises. Or, experience the Northwest's tribal culture with our Tillicum Village adventure. Cruise to historic Blake Island — legendary birthplace of Chief Seattle. On arrival you'll be greeted with steamed clams in savory nectar. Inside our cedar longhouse, watch salmon being carefully prepared over open fires as it has been for centuries, before you have a chance to taste it for yourself during your wonderful Salmon Bake. After your meal, sit back and enjoy our one-of-a-kind stage performance and imagery combining Coast Salish storytelling and live, traditional Native American dance. Be sure to make prior reservations for your group.

Pike Place Market—We plan to visit this as a group.
85 Pike Street
Seattle, WA 98101
Phone: (206) 682-7453
Website: <http://www.pikeplacemarket.org/>

Description:

The Pike Place Market is a special place; internationally recognized as America's premier farmers market. This

nine-acre historic district hosts ten million visitors each year who come to experience the unique sights and sounds of Seattle's downtown public market. Helping to make up the Market experience are more than 100 farmers, 190 craftspeople, nearly 300 commercial business people and 240 street performers.

Chihuly Garden and Glass

305 Harrison
Seattle, WA 98109
Phone: (206) 753-4940
Website: <https://www.chihulygardenandglass.com/>

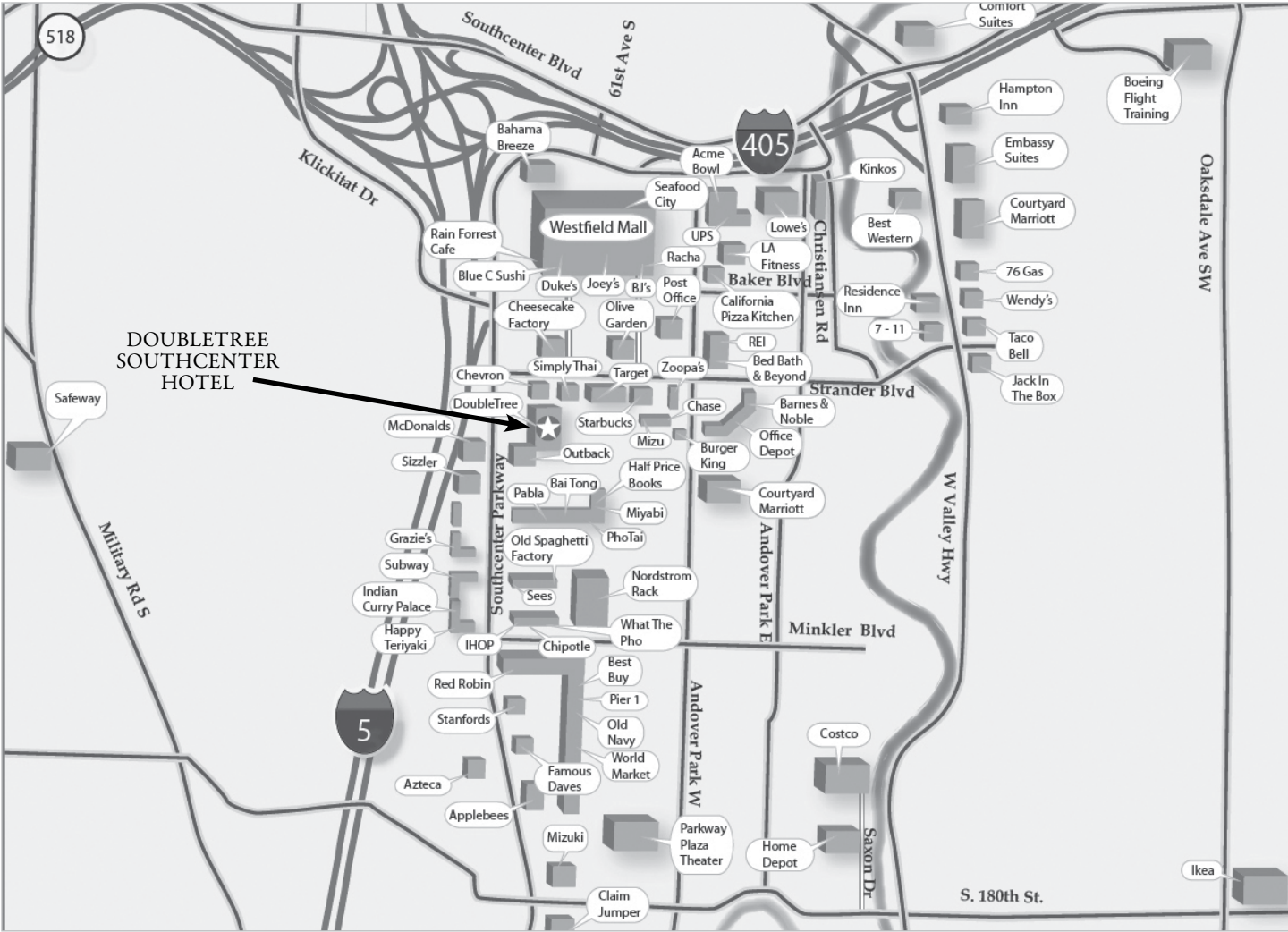
Description:

The Chihuly Garden and Glass Exhibit is located at the base of the Space Needle and offers an amazing, comprehensive collection of Dale Chihuly's significant series of work. The Exhibition hall is composed of eight galleries and three Drawing Walls. Each exhibit has a separate title and a different mood: The Glass Forest, Northwest Room, Sealife Room, Persian Ceiling, Mille Fiori, Ikebana and Float Boat, Chandeliers, Macchia Forest, and the Drawing Walls. Not sure what all of that entails? Each room is its own magnificent expression of glass, color and art, and you'll just have to go there yourself to experience what each individual gallery has to offer. Check out the pictures of some of the exhibits; but while the pictures may be worth a thousand words, the real thing will leave you speechless.

Space Needle
400 Broad Street
Seattle, WA 98109
Phone: (206) 905-2140
Website: <https://www.spaceneedle.com/home/>

Description:

10 seconds: see the sparkling waters of Puget Sound. 20 seconds: Mt. Rainier becomes a huge snow cone. 30 seconds: skyscrapers appear like giant Legos. 41 seconds: you're up saying "Ohhhhhhhh" on the O Deck. Get your pointing finger ready! Every degree of the O Deck's 360-degree view commands your attention. Snow-capped Mt. Rainier to the south and the Cascade Mountains to the east, the majestic Olympics to the west. You just can't hide from this view. Float planes land below you on sparkling Lake Union. Ferries, cruise lines and cargo ships cross Elliott Bay. The city streets are abuzz with activity. This is a major city opening up before your very eyes. Want to get closer to the action from your perch? No problem. Our complimentary Swarovski Telescopes magically empower you to spot a friend in the stands buying a hot dog a couple of miles away at Safeco Field, home of the Seattle Mariners baseball team. You don't have to guess what you're looking at. We've got all the answers and so will you. Colorful, imaginative environmental graphics around the outer edge of the level, and the informative displays along the interior contain more descriptive data and trivia than one can hold in a single head. You will even find a surprise or two. Sorry, no hints. You'll smile even bigger when you find them. ■



Restaurants within 2 Blocks of the Seattle Reunion Hotel

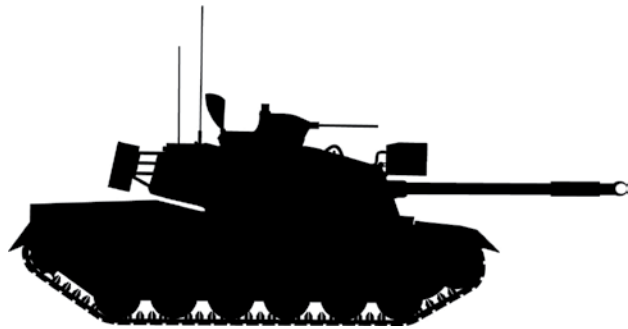
85°C Bakery Café	Chowking	Kizuki Ramen & Izakaya	Ruby Thai
Applebee's	Cinnabon	Mizuki	Sarku Japan
Auntie Anne's Pretzels	Cloud Nine Creamery	Moctezuma's Mexican Restaurant	Seafood City Marketplace
Azteca	Din Tai Fung	Nordstrom E-Bar	Simply Thai
Bagels, Etc.	Duke's Chowder House	Nordstrom Marketplace Cafe	Sizzler Steak House
Bahama Breeze	FROM MILK	Old Spaghetti Factory	Speckled Frog
Bai Tong	Fruititude	Olive Garden	Starbucks
Baskin Robbins	Godiva Chocolatier	Outback Steak House	Subway
Bayou Grill	Grazie's	Pabla	Taco Bell
Ben & Jerry's	Grill City	Panda Express	TCBY
Big Orange	Gyros and Kebabs	Pho Tai	Unicone Crepes
BJ's Restaurant and Brewhouse	Happy Teriyaki	Piroshky Piroshky	Valerio's Tropical Bakeshop
Blue C Sushi	IHOP	PokeWai	Villa Italian Kitchen
Boba Smoothies	Indian Curry Palace	Potato Corner	Wetzel's Pretzelspen
Braganza Tea	Ivar's	Rainforest Cafe	Wendy's
Buffalo Wild Wings	Jack in the Box	Red Ribbon Bakeshop	Yopop
Burger King	Jamba Juice		
Candy Tyme	Joey's Kitchen		
Charley's Grilled Subs	Johnny Rockets		
Cheesecake Factory	Jollibee		
Chipotle	Kitanda		

If it is raining, the hotel shuttle bus will drive you within a mile of the hotel.



2019 Seattle
Reunion Schedule
Thursday, October 31 – Monday, November 4
Schedule is subject to change

Thursday (Oct. 31)	0900 – 2330	Arrival Day – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside The Torsion Bar hospitality room (in the _____ room). Sign up for VTA History Interviews Fri and Sun
	0900 – 2330	The Torsion Bar is Open Lunch & Dinner on your own
Friday (Nov. 1)	0600 – 0845	Complimentary breakfast buffet
	0900 – 1100	Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (in the _____ room) Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion! <i>Must submit ticket before 0900 in the meeting room and be present for the drawing to win</i>
	0900 – 1100	Ladies Coffee (The _____ Room)
	1100 – 1530	Free Time and lunch on your own
	1100 – 1530	The Torsion Bar Open
	1600 – 1700	Italian Buffet Dinner (in the _____ room)
	1700 – 1900	Live Auction! (in the _____ room)
Saturday (Nov. 2)	1900 – 2300	The Torsion Bar Open
	0600 – 0930	Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!! Complimentary breakfast buffet
	1000 – 1015	Load buses to tour downtown Seattle (On side of hotel)
	1045 – 1300	Tour Pike Place Market Lunch on your own
	1300 – 1315	Load buses for next tour



OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM
2010 Seattle Reunion
Double Tree Hotel–Southcenter
October 31 – November 4

Want to save \$30?
Mail your registration before August 30

	1345 – 1600	Tour Museum of Flight and VN Memorial As soon as we off load buses we'll take reunion photo
	1600 – 1645	The Torsion Bar Open Dinner on your own
Sunday (Nov. 3)	Open Day–All Day Open day to tour city if you choose Interview Schedule Posted in Torsion Bar Lunch on your own	
	1000 – 1600	The Torsion Bar Open
	1700 – 2130	FAREWELL BANQUET (_____ Ballroom) NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat & tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket is highly encouraged.
	1700 – 1745	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	1800 – 1815	Presentation of Colors and remarks
	1815 – 1900	Dinner Served
	1900 – 1905	05–minutes–Head Call
	1905 – 2130	30 minutes – Guest Speaker 45 minutes – Fallen Heroes 05 minutes – 2021 Reunion
	2130 – 2400	The Torsion Bar Open – Last Call.
Monday (Nov. 4)		Departure Day

Please Print all information

Member's Name: _____

Guest's Name (s): _____
and relationship _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Cell Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Vietnam Tank or AT Bn: _____ Co: _____ Years in-country: _____ to _____
(Circle "Tank" or "AT" above)

Are you a first time attendee? YES _____ NO _____ MOS _____

Would you like to participate in our personal interview program? YES _____ NO _____

Your USMC VTA membership dues must be **current** in order to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent please mail your dues with this registration (or the dues will be collected at the sign-in desk). No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions (banquet), bus transportation & lunch, meeting facilities, hospitality room, beer & sodas and other expenses associated with the cost of hosting the reunion. Registration fee does not include your sleeping room, taxes or air fare..

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the Seattle reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to Aug 30, 2019. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association
16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106-8937

Please note: If the last two digits of “EXPIRE” on your address label is “18” then your 2019 membership dues are now payable.

**Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30* and mail to:
USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611**

***Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.**

