



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

GOING BACK



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USMCVTA Member Participates in the Wall That Heals Event

On April 30, 2009, forty-years after his tour of duty in Vietnam, Pete Ritch, USMCVTA Member, participated in The Wall That Heals ceremonies in Apalachicola, Florida. The Wall That Heals, formerly known as the Traveling Wall, is a replica of the Vietnam Memorial Wall in Washington, D.C. The Wall That Heals is a traveling memorial that profiles the Vietnam War and allows visitors to see the names of Marines, soldiers, sailors and airmen who made the ultimate sacrifice, while serving in Vietnam. Over 58,000 names are listed on the Wall and visitors can make stencil copies of names.

The Healing Wall was on display from April 30 through May 3, 2009, in the Veterans Memorial Plaza in Apalachicola, which is also the home of the Three Servicemen Statue, a replica of the Vietnam Memorial Three Servicemen Statue in Washington, D.C.

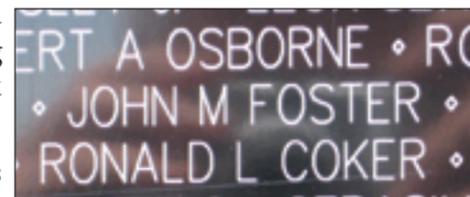
Pete was a volunteer worker during the Wall That Heals visit to Apalachicola and was interviewed by a local television station regarding the impact that the Wall That Heals has had on him.



In part Pete shared that he had located the names of two tank crewmen, John Foster and Robert Walkley, who were killed in an ambush in March 1969. Foster and Walkley were aboard the Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, Tank Retriever, when it hit a land mine and was ambushed west of Gio Lin near the DMZ. The retriever and its crew were coming to the aid of Ritch's tank which had hit a land mine and was limping back to Gio Lin.

Pete told the TV reporter that he had received more thanks, hugs and smiles during his time at the Wall than he did when he returned to the "World" in late 1969 as part of the first contingent of the 3rd Marine Division to exit Vietnam and turn over responsibility for I Corps to the ARVN.

If you have the opportunity to visit the Wall That Heals, do it. It is a great experience and the people associated with the Wall and the Museum that you'll meet are extraordinary.



Letter from the President

Whether you're ready or not, the New Year and a new decade has begun. I don't know about you but I am extremely hopeful that many of the unfortunate occurrences of the past several years are long gone and that our nation and the world can get right. I am afraid that the road to recovery may be a bit longer and bumpier than we want it to be. At least the USMC, as an organized fighting force, has pulled out of Iraq. That is a good sign.

I have recently read several accounts of Marine tanks being deployed in combat during Operation Iraqi Freedom. I am very proud to say that today's young Marine tankers have a lot of the same love/hate feelings for their tanks that we had in Vietnam. I do note that there are fewer corporals who serve as tank commanders or section leaders than we did. In fact, it seems as if Staff Sgts and Gunnys are the "tiger leaders" of today. Maybe that's because there are fewer tanks being deployed so there are fewer opportunities to "cut your teeth in combat" as there were 40 years ago.

It seems as if more of our membership is breaking out their old Vietnam photographs and are volunteering to write a short story to either accompany their photos or simply calling with a comment or statement. This is good. It not only serves to be cathartic for you...but it also gives us something to publish here. You do not have to be a Hemingway or some other fancy pants writer. If you'll just put the words on paper (or in an email) and send it to any of the members of the Board of Directors, we'll get your story "fluffed and buffed" and then printed in the Sponson Box & on the website for all to read and enjoy.

Your \$30 annual membership dues payment was payable on January 1, 2010. If you have not mailed in a check, please do it today. Make your check out to "USMC VTA" and mail it to USMC VTA, 5537 Lower Mountain Road, New Hope, PA 18938. Thanks

Semper Fidelis,

John

We are United States Marines, and for two and a quarter centuries we have defined the standards of courage, esprit de corps military prowess.

[Gen. James L. Jones, USMC (CMC); 10 November 2000]

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

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ON THE COVER: Col. William J. Davis, USMC (Retired) with his son, Will, return to Vietnam. They are standing in the Presidential Palace in Saigon (now Ho Chi Minh City) with one of the tanks that crashed through the gates 35 years ago this month

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Meet Your Board of Directors

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

Robert Vaxter

In May of 1967 I ran out of money for college; the draft was breathing down my neck so I joined the Marine Corps. I took the delayed enlistment program and went to boot camp in August of '67. As a Hollywood Marine I was issued my sunglasses and suntan lotion the first day of boot camp. From then on it was the usual routine for that period: boot camp, mess duty, ITR, boot leave, tank school, staging, and then across the big pond to Okinawa and on to Da Nang, Republic of South Vietnam.

I remember those first three days in Nam like they were yesterday. As the TWA flight circled the airport we were told by the stewardess (that's what they were called then) that we could not land because the runway was taking incoming. We circled for about 20 minutes and then landed in Da Nang. As it was four o'clock in the afternoon and the clerks were done for the day, we were sent to the transit area to spend the night. That night, we FNGs woke up to the sound of incoming mortars. Needless to say I dove into the bunker next to the hut. In my memory, the incoming seemed very close.

The next day we were processed and those of us who were tankers were put on an airplane and flown to Phu Bai. We were then told to go to the mess hall up on the hill and come back around one o'clock when the clerks would be there to process us. The roof of the mess hall was full of

holes from incoming the night before.

That afternoon we lined up in the battalion office and the clerk went down the line pointing at each man as he came to him and saying First Division, Third Division, First Division, Third Division, until he ran out of people to point at. That's how I ended up in Third Division. The same procedure was used to assign us to our companies. Those of us going to Charlie Company were flown to Dong Ha and put on a six-by to the Marine base just north of the city of Quang Tri.

The Marine Corps base at Quang Tri in February 1968 consisted of the Sea Bee area and a company of grunts that guarded the base. Charlie Company, Third Tanks, was at the rear of the base. We were told by the company gunny to toss our gear in one of the tents, the sides of which looked like Swiss cheese. We were told the NVA had set up a machine gun on the railroad tracks the night before and shot up the area.

So here I am, an FNG, who's been in country three days and every place I go to has either been mortared or shot up. I remember thinking that this is going to be one very long year. I spent my tour at all the fun spots in northern I Corps: Cam Lo, Cua Viet, Khe Sanh, and several other exotic places. They were all the fun places to be in 1968.



I returned to The World in 1969, got married, and had two more years in the Marine Corps. I worked as a police officer/firefighter for the city of Springfield, Michigan until I retired from full-time work in 1996. I took advantage of the GI Bill and went back to school. I attended Nazareth College in Kalamazoo, Michigan. I went to school during the day and worked at the police department at night. I graduated in 1979 with a BS degree in Police/Business Administration. I worked multiple part-time jobs until I retired officially in 2009.

I have had two marriages, two divorces, and two children from the first marriage, several grandchildren and basically a pretty good life.

Like the old saying, "I learned everything I needed about life in Boot Camp.

Improvises, adapt, overcome and persevere."

The last certainly has come in handy when interacting with the Veterans Administration with disability claims. Now as an older retired guy my job is to sit on the Board of Directors for the USMConvta and be a pain in the backside for everyone. ♦

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Letter to the Editor

John,

Wow!! The tears are still flowing from my eyes. Thank you for sharing that incredible Marine Corps recruiting commercial and refocusing my efforts.

The pride and the honor of being a part of the Corps and for being associated with heroes such as yourself is so humbling and yet so inspiring that it compels me to always try to do better and to do more with my life for others and particularly for my Marine Corps Brothers and Sisters. You and I belong to the only fraternity that exists today that believes and are prepared to die, for the ideals and principals that our founding fathers created through the divine guidance from God. Our work and our responsibilities as Marines, and particularly those of us who have survived the rigors of combat and the combat environment, have a duty to our fallen brethren to insure that the Nation they sacrificed their lives for remains the Nation that they honored and died for.

Although I left active service almost 40 years ago, the Corps has never left me. I too am ready to sign up again with you.

Semper Fi,

Mike Flick

E mail: mmpatriot@gmail.com

Dear John,

(Dah-yam! I always wanted to write a "Dear John" letter and here's my chance!)

Anyway, I would like to thank you and the membership for the gorgeous flowers that greeted my return from the hospital following surgery. They certainly brightened my room during some physically miserable days. I am glad to report that the surgery itself went very well and the doctors are calling for a complete recovery. (Dick's not getting rid of me that easily!) Again, thanks for your thoughtfulness.

Dona Carey

Napalm

The US used napalm during the Vietnam War [although technically speaking, it was not "napalm" per se because it included neither naphthalene nor palmitate, but instead was the Napalm-B

mixture of polystyrene, gasoline and benzene]. To its critics, napalm represented the fiery essence of all that was horrible about the war in Vietnam. Most people still associate napalm with the image of a young girl running with a group of other victims, skin peeling off in layers, after her village was doused with napalm. Images of napalm igniting in jungles, in villages, and on the people of Vietnam are still cultural icons of the era. It is routinely cited along with Agent Orange as an example of American apathy to the cruelty of modern weapons. Nearly 400,000 tons of napalm were dropped on targets in Vietnam, giving rise to the Army marching song which includes the chorus line, "Napalm sticks to kids!". Vietnamese fighter escort aircraft, when using napalm to clear landing zones, often made the strikes just before the helicopters arrived; the resulting fire and smoke constituted a serious hazard to the helicopters. It has been alleged that a single Army CH-47 chopper could drop two and one-half tons of napalm on an enemy installation. Naturally, this method of dropping napalm was only used on specific targets where tactical air could not be effectively used.

The US Marines however deployed the M-67A2 Flame-thrower tank. The combat vehicle had a distinguished career clearing hard to breach enemy bunkers, destroying enemy supply caches, clearing fields of fire for friendly troops and their main function of burning garbage dumps.

(Cpl) Doug Scrivner

USMC 1967-1970 Semper Fi RVN 68-69

BLT 2/7 B & C Co. 1st Tanks (Zippo) 1st

Mar.Div.

EDITORS NOTE: The classic picture described above of the girl running away with her clothes burned off was the result of a South Vietnamese Air Force airstrike on a friendly village. This picture has been misidentified for years and used by anti-U.S. groups as proof that we deliberately targeted civilians.

Mr. Peavey,

I received a letter from Mr. Moss along with some photos of my dad when he was

in Okinawa at Camp Hansen, Da Nang and Vieques Island. It's amazing how an address found in his wallet and a little research led to so much history. I have every intention of meeting Mr. Moss (my father knew I would seek him out).

He also sent me 3 letters my dad wrote; he kept them for 42 years. I am very thankful for the VTA - without it I don't think any of this would even be possible. Once again, thank you.

Devon

To All members

Can you help Leroy Kramer?

I am writing this note to ask if you would pass out some information for Leroy's daughter. As you know Leroy has Alzheimer's disease and our daughter has moved in with us in order to help me out with her father. She has become a travel agent and part of her salary is based on commission. All I am asking is that you give out her email address and phone numbers to family and friends and maybe they will use her to book their trips. She is working for Liberty Travel and they will match any price. Her email address is ryane@libertytravel.com and she is working out of 842 Schuylkill Mall, Frackville, PA 17931. The telephone number there is (570) 622-0521 and her first name is Liz. She can take care of everything via fax, mail and phone.

I would never normally do anything like this, but because of our situation and Liz going to be our means of support, I am reaching out to anyone that I have had some sort of communications with. Both Leroy and I hate doing this, but times are hard and, even though I had to go through hoops to get him covered by the VA for meds and doctors, there are some pills that they give him that do not help and he has to go to my Dr. to get name brands because they are the only things that will help him... so I will do whatever I can to get him what he needs... in fact whatever the family needs to keep going.

Thanks in advance John... anything will help

Lois

John,

Enjoyed the latest edition of the Sponson Box, especially the story "You Can't Beat Luck." You see, I had a similar thing happen. It was on an operation named "Luke Thrust." (*Ed Note: could it be Operation Mameluke Thrust ran in the Summer of 1968?*) We were receiving enemy fire from a hillside when several grunts using our tank as cover were trying to get our attention because the rear fender tank-infantry phone wasn't working. Unable to alert the TC (Lt: Morton Hurt, WA State) some grunt threw a rock into the drivers compartment striking my helmet to get my attention. (I had the hatch open, but my seat was lowered). Since we were receiving fire and I didn't know how close the enemy was my imagination/fear took over. Thinking it was an enemy hand grenade (I'm thinking the same thing as Robert Vaxter)..."HOLY SHIT!" I too immediately started grabbing for what I thought was a live hand grenade only to find a hand-sized rock, to my immediate relief. I always laugh about this now and have told the story to many. We did receive an RPG that same day in the road wheels and we didn't even realize it due to no serious damage and it didn't affect the tanks operation.

Another story I really enjoyed was "Submarine Pay." Forded many a river thinking our tank (A-11) wouldn't get out when the driver's compartment was full of water.

Best regards

Ed Hiltz

Nottingham, Maryland

John,

Yesterday Glen Hutchins and I were at the Marine Corps League club house for the Birthday party. I was talking with a former Marine. I told him he looked familiar to me, but I did not know why. While we were talking, he mentioned that he had been at NSA Ft. Meade. I am sure my eyes lit up. I asked when he was there. He replied 69-70. I told him I was there 69-71 in B Co. He said that he was A. Co.

I told him the job that I had there (security driver, alarm co). His response, "Yeah, and your nickname was Lurch."

It's a small Corps!

Bob Vaxter

I thoroughly enjoyed the latest Sponson Box and the stories on the reunion - made me wish I had two legs so I could have walked the decks of the Yorktown. As President, John, I give you most of the credit for getting things organized, although I know you had good help in your other men. Now I'm really looking forward to the time when you guys make it to the West Coast.

I read my wife some of the speech by the Colonel at the graduation of the Basic Class and thought she would strain (make that 'pee on' herself,) she laughed so hard!

Now that I have expended my praise, it is time for a little criticism. You, John, are a college graduate so I expect higher standards from you. You need someone to proof-read your articles because it is embarrassing to note some of the simple spelling errors, two of which really caught my eye. On page 23 there is a picture captioned "The Third Heard on the flight deck." Don't they mean the Third Herd?? And on page 38, halfway down the third column, the writer uses the expression "Holly shit!" Now we both know no real Marine talks like that and that he meant "Holy shit!" There are others, but you get the picture.

Thanks a heap

Semper Fidelis

James L. Langford

Editors Note: Jim is absolutely right concerning the number of grammatical errors we have in each issue; we are not happy when we discover them and really embarrassed when someone else points them out to us. The funny thing is that the editor's "Spell Check" shows that both examples pointed out by Jim are spelled correctly ... Dub! That's goes to show you just how dumb computers are! Thanks for pointing them out Jim!

John,

Another small world story. I was at a friend's house just 3 days ago and an old buddy of his stopped by. We were B.S.ing and he (Tom) was in the Marine Corp and I said, "When did you go in?", and he said "Feb 66" and I said, "So did I." I said, "I went to boot camp in San Diego" - so did he. I landed on the yellow footprints Feb 26 and he could not remember what date.

I said, "I was in Platoon 358", and he said, "Platoon 357." Our Platoons graduated at the same time, but his was the Honor Platoon. Small World

Greg Martin

I served with M Co 3/7 from Nov '65 to Nov '66. My brother David Munoz served with 1st Tanks 1966-1967. I had a one-day visit with him at their post NW of Chu Lai in June '66. He told me, if I ever go on tank patrol, don't dangle my legs over the side of the tank. About a month later my platoon was sent to relieve C Co 1/5 while they went to help Gunny Howard and his recon team, since they were trapped by a NVA battalion. While manning the lines and as luck would have it, my squad was given the mission of going on tank patrol by Highway One. I passed on to my guys what my brother had warned me about and, wouldn't you know it, the lead tank that my fire team was on struck a land mine. The tank was disabled; a sprocket was blown off along with the treads, but no one lost their legs.

Semper Fi and Welcome Home!

Leonard "Lenny" Munoz

Christmas Eve 1967

We were out around the DMZ and the 'strip' for the better part of a month. Patrols, sweeps, pounding engineer stakes, stringing wire and bathing in bomb craters finally came to a stop on December 24th. We humped quite a ways out to a road, boarded trucks, and were transported to Camp Carroll.

In addition to showers and hot chow there were packages from home; more than a month's worth. The luckiest guys had some Christmas cheer in their packages and shared it with others. It was certainly different, but way better than sitting in a fighting position (hole) out near the DMZ. There was plenty of alcohol and food.

It was still early when all of a sudden two men from my platoon (F-3rd) squared off at opposite ends of the hardback tent. Our M-79 man, Smires (sp?) was pointing his weapon and yelling at another Marine accusing him of being the reason that

(Continued on page 9)

Looking For

GEORGE P. PUMPKINSEED

I'm trying to find the whereabouts of a fellow USMC Vietnam Tanker. His name is George P. Pumpkinseed. I believe that he was a Sioux Indian from South Dakota. He was in Charlie Co, 1st tanks in '68 and '69. Naturally we called him "Chief." I've talked to a lot of guys that remember him, but as far as I know, no one has had contact with him since he rotated in '69. I sure would like to make contact with him since he was a good guy.

LOCK"N"LOAD!!!

S/F

Todd Phillips

PO Box 196

Bellaire, Ohio 43906

Cell : 740-296-8184

E-mail: toddakabubby@comcast.net

LT. STEVE LARSEN OR LARSON?

Now for some self criticism: I know I am a dumb shit when it comes to tanks, but I, too, finished college, and am embarrassed to tell you I could not, repeat 'not', figure out how to post an "I'm looking for" message (you just did, Jim!). Would you be so kind as to take pity on a decrepit old Marine in his dotage and explain that operation to me?? I'm trying to find 1st Lt. Steve Larsen (or Larson), called "Magnet Ass" by his platoon because he ran over more mines than anyone else! He got out of the Corps in 1970 or thereabouts and moved to Oregon. That's all I know, but he was one of the good guys in Charlie Company and I would like to get in touch again.

Thanks a heap
Semper Fidelis

James L. Langford

Formerly First Sergeant, C Co., 3rd Tanks

Editor's Note: You were my First Sergeant but I never got to meet you. I had the two tanks out at Oceanview on the coast on the DMZ in the middle of nowhere. I think Lt. Larsen was my Platoon Leader that I only met twice in early 1969. No one came out to visit us, we were so remote. The LT was based at C4 about 8 miles south of Oceanview.

OPERATION STARLIGHT

Anyone that was on Operation Starlight is encouraged to contact Craig to give him an account of your experience.

CONTACT:

Craig Slaughter

900 Marye St.

Fredericksburg, VA 22401

(540) 373-6625

"M" 3/3 3rd Plt 0331 Guns Nam 65

Operation Starlite Survivor

Cslaug1037@aol.com or Cslaughter@

operationstarlite.com

www.Thirdmarines.net Co-Founder

www.OperationStarlite.com Founder



Can you ID anyone in this photo?

LT. J.A. JACKSON

Trying to find mustang Lt. J.A. Jackson 3rd Tank Battalion DMZ 1969 (former Saigon and Bangkok Marine Security Guard).

Paul C Burton, JD, MSED

paulcburton@comcast.net

(425) 401-0185 Home

SGT. GERRY (OR JERRY) HEARN

Looking for my former TC who I mounted out with Bravo Co., 5th Tanks in February, 1968 from Pendleton. He was also believed to have been on Operation Starlight on a previous tour and was wounded.

Robert Peavey

770-365-3711

3RD TANKS

I am enclosing a photograph taken around July, 1965 in Nam, of some members of Supply Platoon, H&S Company, 3rd Tank Bn. It's been 44 years since I've seen these fellow Marines, a few of their names have escaped my mind. If anyone out there recognizes any of these Marines could you please send me an email at maryjoe1967@yahoo.com. This old man would greatly appreciate it.

Semper Fi

Sgt. Joe Mastrangelo

evacuation, and was seen moving under his own power in that direction. It wasn't until several days later, when Bravo 1/1 was detached from duty with the 2/3 Marines and returned to their own battalion, that it was realized that no medical facility had reported receiving LCpl Gatewood for treatment. The two battlefields had been thoroughly swept beginning on 01 June and all known dead and wounded had been recovered. Although no-one was

looking for Gatewood specifically - after all, he had been wounded and evacuated - he had not been found during the sweeps. Simply stated, he had disappeared. Gatewood was classed as Missing in Action and was carried in that status until 23 Sep 1975, when the Secretary of the Navy approved a Presumptive Finding of Death. His remains have not been repatriated.

I've received recent information

indicating Gatewood (an African-American Marine) died of his injuries and his body was loaded onto a tank possibly belonging to the 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Mar. Div.

Thank you,

MSG Keith Rossmiller

Defense Prisoner of War/Missing

Personnel Office

SEA/Current Conflicts Research Analyst

Phone: 703-699-1243

keith.rossmiller@osd.mil

Letter to the Editor

(Continued from page 7)

Nelson McKenna (Mouse) was killed. The nameless man was Mouse's A-gunner and he was not with Mouse when he was shot on Nov 30th. There were those who thought he should have been at his gunner's side, but he had trouble negotiating the paddy mud and getting up the hill. I remember passing him.

The nameless man had a weapon drawn, too (45?), so there we were, sitting on cots trying to be merry, and these two guys are facing off like it was the OK Corral. In a heartbeat everyone was looking for a way to scurry out of that freaken' tent. I have no idea who put the lid on this event, but in the end no one was injured and we were all soon banished out to the perimeter bunkers to stand the lines for the remainder of Christmas Eve.

Ho, Ho, Ho.

Were the engineer stakes and wire part of Robert McNamara's 'Line'? Probably--didn't realize it then, though.

After that night I never saw the nameless Marine again. Probably best.

Tom F, Foxtrot 2/9 67-68

Semper Fi & Merry Christmas to all.

Guys,

Please include the following letter to the editor in the next edition of the Sponson Box. Thank you for publishing my article "Button It Up and Move Out" in the latest issue of the Sponson Box. At the Reunion, I was talking with Bob Skeels, a classmate of mine at Tank School and a Tank Platoon Commander with B Co., 3rd Tanks, in Vietnam.

I shared with Bob that I felt like I had a horseshoe in my pocket because I hit

three land mines during my tour. Bob told me that three mines was mere child's play, for he had found 12 land mines with his tank during his tour. He said that Bravo 6 would sweat bullets every time Bob got his tracks repaired and headed back out into the bush.

Thanks for a great reunion and excellent edition of the Sponson Box.

Semper Fi and Happy New Year- Y'all!

Pete Ritch

Bravo Co., 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division

Vietnam 1968/1969

Ho Chi Minh's Nightmare

I was very interested in your article that appeared in the July - September

Sponson Box. I am looking at two photos from 1966 that picture the M48A3 that has "Ho Chi Minh's Nightmare" painted on the gun tube.

The photo includes (SSgt/GySgt) Alvarado & myself. I believe it was taken on the finger of Hill 55 where the Bravo Co., 3d Tanks CP was located. I was a 2nd Lt. at the time and platoon leader of the 1st. Platoon. I later became the XO when Dix Garner took over as CO of Bravo Co. from Major Tunget (who was featured in the April - June Sponson Box). Your name sounds very familiar as, of course, does Sgt. Alvarado's - he was one of my section leaders.

Richard Nagle <rnagle74@cox.net



Ho Chi Minh's Nightmare

Special Stories

The below email was sent to me by one of the brave Marines that I had the privilege and honor to serve and see combat with over 40 years ago. I guess that I had put the incident on Christmas Eve so long ago from my mind. What a mistake. It is a story that I wish to share with you as I thank you for your leadership and encouragement in making the dream of a National Museum of the Marine Corps come true. Merry Christmas and Happy Holidays to you and yours!

Semper Fidelis,

Ron Christmas

Lieutenant General, USMC (Ret)

President & CEO, Marine Corps Heritage

Foundation

Christmas Day 1967 Vietnam

"I thought I might tell you a story on how I spent Christmas Day in Vietnam on 1967. Whenever I think of Christmas each year, this story always comes to my mind. It is not a story about combat, death, or sorrow. It is one of the most uplifting days of my entire life in Vietnam.

The only thing that could possibly compare to it would have been during the TET Offensive of 1968 during the Battle for Hue City when we took down the Communist flag from the Provincial capital building and raised "OLD GLORY," during some of the toughest and bloodiest fighting of the Vietnam War. But this story is not about war. It is about the true meaning of Christmas.

On December 25, 1967, my unit, the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, was at our Combat Base at An Hoa, with the exception of two companies which were positioned at our outpost at Nong Son, and our outpost at Phu Lac (6). Around 2300 hours at night, the Marines at our combat base at An Hoa began singing "Silent Night." I am talking here of some 700 to 800 Marines, in unison singing softly at first, then it grew louder, and louder, and louder, until the whole valley reverberated with the message of the Birth of Jesus Christ. The 40 plus Marines of a Marine CAP Unit 2 miles away heard it and joined in. The Marines at Phu Lac

(6), five to six miles away heard it. Then they picked up on it and began singing. Then across the Thu Bon River from Phu Lac (6), where elements of the 7th Marine Regiment were located picked up on it. It then traveled another six miles or so to hill 65 where the 5th Marine Regimental Headquarters was located, as well as the elements of the 3rd Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment picked it up. It was said that even elements of the 1st Marines, whose position was some 12 miles from us also joined in singing Silent Night. Then as if our Prayer honoring the "Prince of Peace," was heard by our Heavenly Father, one of the largest shooting stars I, or anyone else who was there had ever seen, went flying through the sky from east to west. I turned to my buddies and they just stared in unbelief and we all began to embrace and wish each other a Merry Christmas. I just thought I would share something that was very special to me and to over a thousand other Marines on Christmas night 1967 in a place most of us had not even heard of months before.

In the Nov 13 *Washington Times*, John Fales, author of the "Sgt Shaft" column and NAUS member, writes about attending a special event to celebrate the 234th birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps that began with the following prayer:

"O Lord, we have long known that prayer should include confession. Therefore, on behalf of the Marines, I confess their sins: Lord, they're just not in step with today's society.

"They are unreasonable in clinging to old-fashioned ideas like patriotism, duty, honor, and country.

"They hold radical ideas believing that they are their brother's keeper and responsible for the Marine on their flank.

"They have been seen standing when colors pass, singing the National Anthem at ball games, and drinking toasts to fallen comrades.

"Not only that, they have been observed standing tall; taking charge and wearing their hair unfashionably short.

"They have taken John Kennedy's words too seriously and are overly concerned with what they can do for their country instead of what their country

can do for them.

"They take the Pledge of Allegiance to heart and believe that their oath is to be honored.

"Forgive them, Lord, for being stubborn men and women who hold fast to such old-fashioned values.

"After all, what more can you expect: They're Marines!"

Veteran Statistics

Today, there are roughly 1.4 million on active duty, less than half the nearly 3.5 million people on active duty we had at the end of the Vietnam War. The estimated population of the United States on 1 JUL 09 was 307,041,000. According to the Bureau of Labor Statistics (BLS), 226,706,000 are in the work

force. Throw in another 20,000,000 illegal aliens (no one really knows with certainty how many illegal aliens are in the United States), and you have a population base of roughly 327, 041,000 that is being defended by 1.4 million. That equates to only four tenths of a percent (.4%) of the population is defending the

other 99.6%. If you include the 1.3 million in the Guard and Reserve who are now used as if they were active duty forces, there are a total of 2.7 million people defending the 327,041,000, or roughly eight tenths of a percent (.8%) defending the other 99.2%. In 1970, there were over 45 million living veter-

ans in the United States. In 1999 there were nearly 30 million veterans of which 18 million were in the work force. Today, the BLS reports there are 22,196,000 living veterans of which 12,169,000 are in the work force. Depending on the survey, upwards of 1,700 veterans now die each day!

Historically, the unemployment rate for veterans has been one to three percent below the national average. In JUN 09, the unemployment rate for all veterans was 7.8% while the national unemployment rate was 9.5%. These numbers will probably rise in the July unemployment report. Historically, members of the Guard and Reserve faced a full call up during World War II and a partial call up during the Korean War. Of the 37,000 Guard and Reserve members who fought in the Vietnam War, all but about 200 were volunteers. But since 1991, there have been over 20 full call ups of the Guard and Reserve! Many of the activations have been for

one and two year periods. Employers look on the component members as their human asset on loan to DOD, not as DOD's asset. Consequently, employers are quietly fighting back and not supporting the DOD call up policy. At present it appears that employers want to hire retired military, transitioning military that have completed their obligated service, and make great effort to hire our wounded and disabled warriors. But when it comes to hiring component members of the Guard and Reserve, employers will not hire them for solid economic reasons. This has manifested itself in the many reports from all over the country of companies using the excuse of the recession to target and lay off employees who are active members of the Guard and Reserve. Component Guard or Reserve member who have been laid off are requested to forward the information to contact@vetjobs.com who is collecting real examples for future testimony before Congress

This data has many ramifications. With 37 years of an all volunteer military, America now has two generations of citizens that have no idea of what really goes on in the military and the importance of having a strong military. This lack of understanding impacts political and social attitudes towards the military. The population base for veteran service organizations is dwindling rapidly which is why many are changing their membership rules in order to maintain membership in a rapidly declining demographic environment. Today, there are fewer defenders of our freedoms living who understand the importance of maintaining a strong military. And without a strong military, we cannot maintain our freedoms, our free market capitalist economy and our constitutional republic. Remember these numbers when you talk to your representatives in Congress. [Source: VetJobs Veteran Eagle 1 Aug 09 ++]

A Thank You to Vietnam Vets from a Marine in Iraq

A guy gets time to think over here and I was thinking about all the support we get from home. Sometimes it's overwhelming. We get care packages at times faster than we can use them. There are boxes and boxes of toiletries and snacks lining the center of every tent; the generosity has been amazing. So, I was pondering the question: "Why do we have so much support?"

In my opinion, it came down to one thing: Vietnam.

I think we learned a lesson, as a nation, that, no matter what, you have to support the troops who are on the line, who are risking everything. We treated them so poorly back then. When they returned was even worse. The stories are nightmarish of what our returning warriors were subjected to. It is a national scar, a blemish on our country, an embarrassment to all of us. After Vietnam, it had time to sink in. The guilt in our collective consciousness grew.

It shamed us.

However, we learned from our mistake.

Somewhere during the late 1970's and into the 80's, we realized that we can't treat our warriors that way. So, starting during the Gulf War, when the first real opportunity arose to stand up and support the troops, we did. We did it to support our friends and family going off to war. But we also did it to right the wrongs from the Vietnam era. We treated our troops like the heroes they were, acknowledged and celebrated their sacrifice, and rejoiced at their homecoming instead of spitting on them.

And that support continues today for those of us in Iraq. Our country knows that it must support us and it does. The lesson was learned in Vietnam and we are better because of it.

Everyone who has gone before is a hero. They are celebrated in my heart. I think admirably of all those who have gone before

me. From those who fought to establish this country in the late 1770's to those I serve with here in Iraq. They have all sacrificed to ensure our freedom.

But when I get back, I'm going to make it a personal mission to specifically thank every Vietnam Vet I encounter for their sacrifice. Because, if nothing else good came from that terrible war, one thing did.- it was the lesson learned on how we treat our warriors. We as a country learned from our mistake and now treat our warriors as heroes, as we should.

I am the beneficiary of their sacrifice. Not only for the freedom they, like veterans from other wars, ensured, but for how well our country now treats my fellow Marines and me. We are the beneficiaries of their sacrifice.

Semper Fidelis,

Major Brian P. Bresnahan

United States Marine Corps

On January 27, 2010, we received an anonymous donation of \$250 in memory of 1st Sgt. Jimmy Dodgen

THE HOTTEST DAY I CAN REMEMBER

BY TOM FINERTY, FOXTROT CO, 2/9

I HAVE TO RESEARCH TO FIGURE OUT the month, week, and day. I'm guessing that it was sometime around July or August. The year is easy to remember, 1968. The day doesn't matter though, because I can just go to the names and dates of death and be exact. It was well before the monsoon season. Everything was bone dry and dust floated after every scratch of the scorched earth. This stretch of land was like a moonscape void of vegetation. Only some distant hedgerows were visible. What were trees were now stumps and the bushes had just begun to sprout again. Shade wasn't at a premium because there was none. Defoliation and bombs made sure of that.

It was larger than a battalion-size operation, and we were trucked to a drop-off point. I can imagine the enemy watching the rolling clouds of dust that betrayed any semblance of surprise. We were never very good at it, anyway. Always seemed that the only thing we didn't bring was a band.

This was not a one-day trip and everyone was loaded with gear. How many pounds? Didn't matter? It was the total weight of food, water, ammunition, grenades, rifle, socks (yes, socks), flak jacket, helmet, extra ammo for the M-60s, extra rockets, and, in my case a 25-pound radio, to round things out.

Off the trucks we jumped and the 'sweep' was under way. Imagine several thousand men walking forward; not in

single file, but abreast, 15 meters apart, trying to stay aligned. Then imagine a rubberband and you'll have a better picture.

We may have thought we started early to get a jump on the heat, but the sun was relentless and, by around noon with the rubberband undulating across the landscape, men started dropping out from heat exhaustion. 'Dropping out' doesn't seem to describe men just falling over, passed out, and not by choice. Their skin was no longer wet and their faces were a strange color.

It was then that we heard the mortars leaving the tubes. Those hedgerows. All these years later that 'woomp', 'woomp', 'woomp' is burned into some distant part of my brain, I suspect forever. "Incoming", was the yell, but we kept moving forward. The 3 guys out in front of our sweep, our 'point' men, were the first to be felled by the falling mortars.

I didn't yet know that Mike Thomas had the top of his head removed, but soon I would be lifting his body onto a tank. Yea, we had some tanks that day and what fine targets they make, but that's a story for another day. There are too many.

That radio I mentioned, the 'prick 25', had been my possession for some six months. First at the squad level, and now I was shadowing Lt. Knight, our platoon commander. He had replaced Lieutenant Paul Manola, who had put his time in (6 months for an officer) and rotated to a more 'secure' duty station. (Days

like this I wondered why I refused his offer to do the same.) Lt. Knight moved forward 'on line' and encouraged his men to keep moving - not an easy task. There were more incoming rounds in the air. RPGs and rifle rounds were making their presence known by whistling by. I kept looking at the large holes made days earlier by our bombs and pointing them out to the lieutenant. "Here's a nice big one, let's get in until the incoming stops". Maybe I only thought that; then again, maybe I was screaming (inside?). No matter, Lt. Knight never even looked for refuge. It was as though there was no incoming for him. On the other hand, I knew I was about to die following this crazy S-O-B around.

Were we responding in kind with our firepower? I think we were, but I really don't remember. I knew I wasn't. I was still reluctantly following the Lt., and listening to, and passing along dispatches. Some of it is still a blur. Maybe it was the overwhelming chaos of the heat and enemy projectiles felling so many guys. Then again, maybe it was looking down at Mike Thomas and seeing his brains spill out as I lifted him onto that tank and thinking that it looked like pink cantaloupe.

I didn't know then, but the day was hardly over. Before it would end, there would be ice cream, and, more incoming. It was the tanks..... those damn tanks.

MICHAEL EDWARD THOMAS

LCPL - E3 - Marine Corps - Regular

Length of service 1 years

His tour began on Dec 6, 1967

Casualty was on Jul 9, 1968

In QUANG TRI, SOUTH VIETNAM

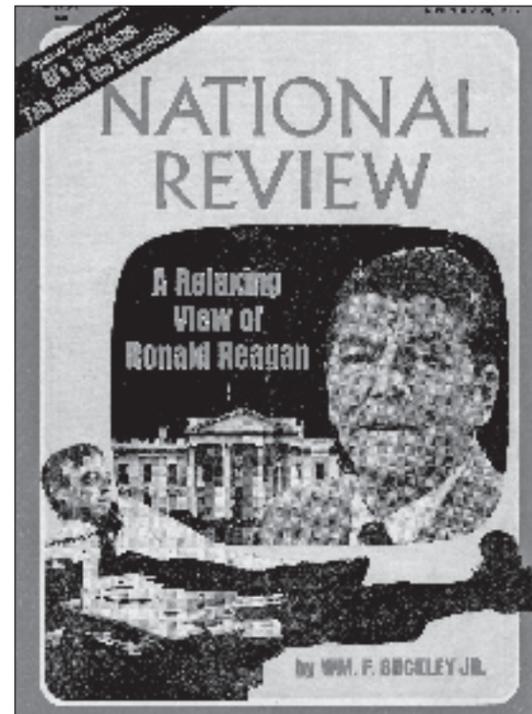
HOSTILE, GROUND CASUALTY

ARTILLERY, ROCKET, or MORTAR

Body was recovered

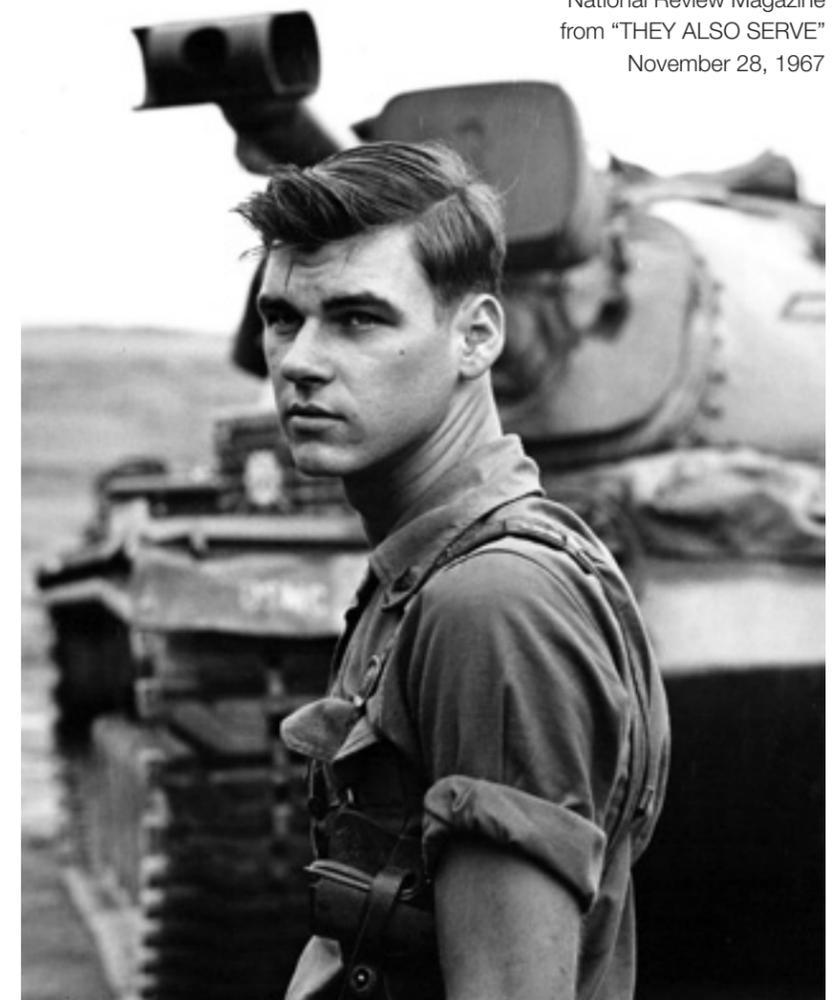
Panel 52W - Line 8

THREE OF OUR OWN MADE NATIONAL REVIEW MAGAZINE 43 YEARS AGO!



"I enlisted in the Marine Corps because I was getting to be pretty old and I felt I should get my military service over and done with. I'm not an officer or anything, but I do know that they're making it very hard to fight this war. We go out and we see the guys around us getting shot up and everything, but we're not allowed to fire back because some politician in Washington say's you can't. The only way to deal with the commies here is to put as much pressure on as you can - push right over the DMZ, and let them know that we're tired of playing around... You know, it's really pretty miserable here. For the last couple of weeks we've had to sleep out in the rain every night. There is no sort of shelter we can get in, so we just have to stay out there in the rain and mud. Doing that gives a guy a lot of time to think. It's hard to believe that I've been over here almost a year. It seems like the States has changed so much--all these riots and things. We've got a good thing there at home--especially when you compare it to what's happening here. Nobody makes demonstrations or anything here. We just try to stay alive."

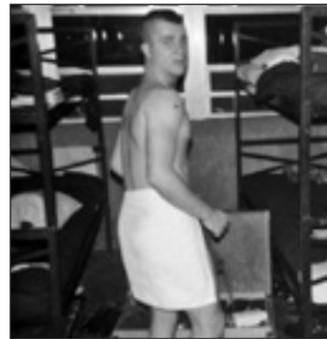
Corporal Ronald V. Davidson
National Review Magazine
from "THEY ALSO SERVE"
November 28, 1967



Corporal Ron Davidson

Name That Tanker

Who is the second person from the left in this group photo? He has since upgraded from Black Label over the past 40 years, but is still quite the partier. Only people who are not in the picture or didn't take the picture are eligible. An undetermined yet cheap prize awaits the correct answer. Call Bob Peavey ASAP with your answer.



Last issue's winning response was the fastest answer ever received for a Sponson Box contest. Ken Whitehead correctly identified the young L/Cpl tanker pictured in his skivvies as our own Marty Steele – yes, as in **Lt. General Martin Steele!** Ken says that he had an unfair advantage in that he was Marty's S-3 Chief early in his officer career and he owes Marty a few favors - especially one concerning Ken's bus driving skills, but that's another story (Ken promises to write us a story about the bus incident).

Did you make any landings in Vietnam?

Leatherneck magazine has asked the Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation to produce an article on the "Operation Deck House" series of operations along the South Vietnamese coast. There has been little written and even less published about this important series of ship-to-shore operations that involved tanks in multiple and significant roles. Please contact Ray Stewart if you have any information, experience, and/or stories - first hand experience or "sea stories" or both - that you can contribute to this most important project. This is a great opportunity to show our Tanker "stuff".

Background: "Operation Deck House" was the name given to the ship-to-shore operations of the Special Landing Force (SLF) in Vietnam in 1966 and 1967. While tanks were embarked on SLF committed ships, they were not always

landed for offensive operations. However, even in cases such as these, very often Tankers were sent ashore as Grunts.

Any information on participation by Tankers in the Deck House Operations series of landings is very much appreciated.

Deckhouse I – 18-30 June 1966. South of Qui Nhon

Deckhouse II – 18 July 1966. DMZ

Deckhouse III – 16-29 August, 1966. Saigon/Delta.

Deckhouse IV – 15-24 September 1966. DMZ

Deckhouse V – 6-15 January 1967. Delta region

Deckhouse VI – 16 February to 3 March 1967. Northern I Corps

Contact:

Ray Stewart
usmcvthf@comcast.net
(253) 835-9083

What Members are Doing

A Brotherhood

I just got home last night from DC. My high school buddy is a Vietnam grunt and we attended the 2/9 reunion. I also went & looked for a boot camp buddy that was in 1/9 (their reunion was at the same hotel) and looked for some from 2/1 (their reunion was at a Holiday Inn nearby). We went to the Museum of the Marine Corps on Wed. Then we went on to Quantico to check out the base. We went on down to Yorktown to play tourist. The next day we

started on our way to Camp Lejuene, but the weather from Hurricane Ida was so bad with all of the rain & wind that we decided to head back to Ohio on Friday morning & save Lejuene for the next trip to DC. We had a great time with the guys from 2/9 (my high school buddy's unit). They treated me like one of the boys. It truly is a brotherhood...

(Cpl) Doug Scrivner
USMC 67-71 RVN 68-69

"Combat is to the Soul, what heat is to Steel"
"SAEPE EXPERTUS" "SEMPER FIDELIS" "FRATRES AETERNI"
Often Tested Always Faithful Brothers Forever

Small World

Saturday I was having lunch on November 13 at the "Burton Cafe" (Burton Texas - the town I was born in). As I observed Mary Jane Zorn go to a table and have a book autographed, I noted that the name of the book was "The Final Salute". Mmm, where have I seen that before? Oh yeah, could it have been at our USMCVTA Reunion in Charleston, South Carolina on Saturday, August 22, 2009? Yes, it was! He was one of our guest speakers – Jim Sheeler! So I tapped him on the shoulder and told him about our reunion – he was quite surprised, also!

Here is what our local KWHI Radio website in Brenham Texas had to say:

**PULITZER PRIZE WINNING
AUTHOR SHEELER IN BRENHAM
TODAY**

Pulitzer Prize winning author Jim Sheeler says that a journalist needs to 'take somebody to a place they've never been before.' The place he takes the reader of his book *Final Salute*, is that horrifying moment when loved ones of a soldier, sailor, airman or Marine, see officers of the Armed Forces come to their door to tell them their son, daughter or even husband or wife has been killed in action. Sheeler spoke to students at Brenham High School this (Friday) morning, in a belated Veteran's Day program, about his book and how the Armed Forces informs the families about their lost loved ones.

Sheeler says he began writing the book while working as a reporter for the Rocky Mountain News and he covered the death of the first military casualty of the Iraqi War from Colorado. He was



Scrivner (center) with Dick Kinney & Jim Tiner of 2/9

touched to know that a Marine guard watches over the body, 24 hours a day, before it is laid to rest. He followed up on what happens to the families after that and how they adjust to this most terrible form of death.

Sheeler spoke again this evening at Blinn College.

Final Salute was part of a month long reading project sponsored by the Lifetime Learning Program.

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Barnett Person Honored

AUSTIN, Texas, Feb. 28, 2006 – The Defense Department honored five black military pioneers during its observance of National African American History Month here at Huston-Tillotson University Feb. 24-25.

Among the five honorees were two battlefield heroes: Silver Star medal recipient Barnett Person of Fort Worth, Texas; and Bronze Star with "V" device for valor recipient Jack McDowell of Long Beach, Calif.

Person, a retired first sergeant decorated with the Silver Star Medal for gallantry in Vietnam, also received two Purple Heart. Person said he was hit by enemy fire on May 8, 1967, and again on Aug. 29.

The former tank retriever driver and later a tank gunner said he wasn't wounded during the Korean War.

The Silver Star citation cited Person for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a platoon sergeant with Company A, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, in Vietnam.

The decoration's citation stated that during the early morning hours of May 8, 1967, the area of Person's and other units came under intense enemy mortar and artillery fire from a numerically superior North Vietnamese Army force. When the enemy penetrated the perimeter defenses in several places, "Person reacted instantly, calmly directed his 90 mm canister fire into the oncoming Viet Cong," the citation

read. "Disregarding enemy attempts to destroy his tank by exploding satchel charges against the turret, Person fearlessly increased his fire, employing both his main armament and his machine guns.

The citation said he "was responsible for killing more than 40 North Vietnamese soldiers, preventing the perimeter from being overrun and undoubtedly turned what could have been a potentially dangerous situation for friendly troops into a complete rout of a numerically superior enemy force."

With A Little More Luck . . .

Hi John

It seems like yesterday we were having lunch in Seattle together at the 2005 Reunion. I sure would like to know who made off with the time. Well, what happened to me this year has been never-ending. In July of 2008 the VA found a bad Aortic Valve in my heart. When I was in the ER they did a CAT scan and found my appendix enlarged. The doctors said they needed to take care of the appendix first and did the operation in Nov. My appendix turned out to be cancer, which they said is very rare to have and is real deadly. They got it all!

In January of this year the doctors were able to do my heart valve replacement. I am doing ok even with the tick it makes. My wife Candi was at the VA doing some volunteering the week after my operation and I was home recovering when our F350 4X4 7.3D crew cab truck was stolen out of the VA parking lot. That left Candi stranded there and no way home. I finely had a neighbor, our only neighbor, drive and pick her up.

Then Candi's father passed away...a WW2 Navy veteran. We had to go move Candi's mom down to AZ with us from Oregon. That is why I am building her a mobile home, which is 14X48 one bedroom, bath, kitchen, living room and an outside porch. I am doing all the work from the frame up, including electrical, plumbing and gas. I will keep you informed on the progress.

Then 8 weeks ago Candi was

delivering the water bill next door when she was attacked by killer bees from under the house. She jumped on the quad to try and get away. She went about 350 ft and hit some soft sand, then rolled. She got up and walked home trying to call me, but the bees were all around. I finely heard her yelling for me. I ran out to the gate and washed off the bees with water. She was having trouble breathing, but not from the many stings- she had 6 broken ribs! The paramedics had to air flight her out to a Trauma 1 hospital. She is just now healed up to be able to lay down flat in bed, instead of sleeping in the lift chair.

I am still riding my Harley and enjoying it. I have also been volunteering twice a week at the VA helping my fellow Veterans. Candi is going back to volunteering once she gets healed up. Back in 2002 the VA, the state of Oregon and Social Security permanent retired me at 100%. I sure wasn't looking for that. At that time the Doc found a growth between the two halves of my brain. I have been on high doses of morphine along with 14 other kinds of meds. That didn't stop me, I still keep on truckin', doing things like ride our horses, my Harley, building things and helping people along with volunteer work. God has been with me all my life, even in Vietnam when I got my two Purple Hearts.

I did get all my pictures from Vietnam scanned, now I can e-mail you copies along with a story about them. Well, I will keep in touch.

Tom Colson Sr
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P.S. Guess what just happened? I got a call from the Tucson Police last night and they found my truck. The Douglas Police pulled it over down in Douglas by the Border about 150 miles from here. They arrested the person that stole the truck. The truck had been modified and cut up with hiding compartments all over it. The thief had been hauling drugs for the last 9 months. Here is a picture of the truck before it got stolen.

This November I was the Guest of Honor/Speaker at the Birthday Ball for Delta Co. 4th Tank Bn. Some of these guys have seen three deployments to the Sandbox. Some had received knitted hats from our own Jim Coan and his wife (and they still have them). What a great bunch of young warriors! I was deeply honored and humbled to be in the presence of these young studs. The award they gave me was overwhelming (and it weighed 11 pounds).

Attached are some of the photos we took.

Semper Fi

Pappy



Pappy gets award from Delta Co., 4th Tanks

Hi John! Here is a recent picture of Rod Henderson and me on the tank that I was a guest speaker at the dedication ceremony a few years ago. Cpt. Rod Henderson had not been on one since 1968. He wore the campaign cover presented to him by his old 3rd herd, Bravo Co, 1st tanks at the last VTA reunion. I was the last person to be inside this tank before they sealed up the turret. Two old goats on a tank, ha ha... Have a great holiday.

Semper Fi

Ron Davidson
(815) 627-9150
ron@vipproducts.net



Rod Henderson and Ron Davidson salute you

Jokes

The reason the Air Force, Army, Navy, and Marines bicker amongst themselves is that they don't speak the same language.

For instance, take the simple phrase "secure the building".

The Air Force will take out a 5 year lease with an option to buy.

The Army will post guards around the place.

The Navy will turn out the lights and lock the doors.

The Marines will kill everybody inside and set up a headquarters.

Submitted by
David R. Ray
GySgt USMC (RET)

No details, please!

This X-Ray was supplied by Pappy Reynolds. He said he was playing a joke on a VA X-Ray technician to prove he is a Marine through and through. You'll have to ask Pappy how he got the EGA there in the first place.



Return to Vietnam 40 Years Later

BY BILL DAVIS

FORTY YEARS HAVE PASSED SINCE I was in Vietnam. For most of that time, I never thought I would return as a tourist. This changed last year when an old friend who served in Vietnam in the U. S. Army as a door gunner on an UH1 Huey Helicopter and I decided to return and see for ourselves how Vietnam changed since 1969.

Our group consisted of eight veterans, three wives and William, my 42-year-old son. The trip spanned 15 days and took us from Los Angeles to Hanoi, Hue, Leatherneck Square, Camp Carroll, Khe Sanh, the Ashau Valley, DaNang, Hoi An, Chu Lai, Pleiku and Ho Chin Minh City (Saigon).

The evening of August 8, 2009, we met the other members of our group in Los Angeles and were briefed by Military Historical Tours on the trip details. In the early hours of the morning, we left Los Angeles International Airport and flew to Hanoi via Taipei. While in Hanoi, we visited the Ho Chi Minh Mausoleum, the grounds of the Presidential Palace and the Hanoi Hilton. After leaving the Hanoi Hilton, we added a visit to the

marker showing where John McCain parachuted into Truc Bach Lake after his A-4 Skyhawk was shot down by a missile. Surprisingly, the marker identifies him as an officer in the USAF. We only stayed in Hanoi a day and a half before departing via Vietnam Airlines for Hue/Phu Bai in the early morning hours of August 12.

Leaving the Hue/Phu Bai airport, which is located on the old Marine Corps Air Facility, we drove north on Highway Route 1, stopping at some of the key points from the Battle for Hue during Tet in 1968. Our guide, Captain Ed Garr, USMC (Retired), gave a commentary as we walked to the some of these sites. Two of the most significant were the Shell Station and the Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) compound. The site of the Shell Station is now occupied by a Petrolemax gas station. This station was the site where Captain Chuck Meadows took cover and found maps of Hue City that he used throughout the battle and as cited in "Marines in Hue City: A Portrait of Urban Combat, Tet 1968" was, for a time, the only maps his

battalion had of the city. We stopped at the site of the MACV compound where the American advisors to the 1st ARVN Division successfully held out against the VC and NVA forces until relieved by Marine Infantry and four tanks from 3d Tank Battalion. After checking into the Huong Giang Hotel on the Perfume River, we toured the Forbidden City and the royal palaces inside the Hue Citadel.

Beginning in 1995, the Vietnamese government began rebuilding and repairing the Citadel's buildings. It is now one of the major tourist sites in Vietnam for foreigners. One of the key buildings that has been restored is the Flag Tower where the VC Flag flew for 25 days during the fighting for the city. Some of the other buildings that have been restored are the Ngo Mon Gate, Thai Hoa Palace, the Hall of the Mandarins and the Royal Library. An interesting note during our stay in Hue was that, during the war, our hotel was an Army of the Republic of Vietnam Officer's Quarters.

Early on the morning of August 13, we departed Hue and drove north on Route

1 toward Quang Tri and Dong Ha. Our first stop was at the site of Camp Evans and Landing Zone Nancy where nothing remains of the bases. Our next stop was LZ Sharon, which is now a Vietnamese military base. A short distance from Sharon is the scarred remains of the Quang Tri Catholic Church, which serve as a reminder of the 1972 battle for the province. After crossing the Quang Tri River we continued down a modern divided highway until we reached the site of the former Quang Tri Combat

Base and drove as close as we could to the site of the Headquarters area of 3d Tank Battalion. The area is now rice fields and duck ponds, but the road that led to the U.S. Army's Camp Red Devil in 1968 and 1969 is still there.

We continued on to Dong Ha, which is now the capital of Quang Tri Province. There are no signs of the Dong Ha Combat Base but the old LCU ramp at Dong Ha on the Cam Lo River remains and is being used by the Vietnamese Navy.

Crossing the new Dong Ha Bridge, we

proceeded up Route 1 and stopped at the old 1st ARVN Infantry Division camp at Gio Linh. There is an old M41 Tank hull on the right hand side of the road. Across the road is a large military cemetery for NVA soldiers killed in action during the war. Every province and many towns have military cemeteries for NVA and VC dead. The ARVN dead, however, were disinterred and buried in family plots without any reference to their military service.

Leaving Gio Linh, we soon came to the Ben Hai River and the site of the Demilitarized Zone and the old frontier between South Vietnam and North Vietnam. Across the Hien Luong Bridge are a small museum complex and a very large Vietnamese (NVA) flag.

We turned off Route 1 on a connecting paved road to Con Thien by way of the Market Place. The entire route is bordered by rubber trees, as is the area around Con Thien. The only sign of the old combat base is the French Bunker, an occasional ammo box, rotting sand bags and duds scattered around the area.

Traveling south down Route 15 on a modern paved road, our next stop was the Wash Out which now has a bar and restaurant overlooking the stream and there is a new bridge at the site. On the other side of the stream is a small lumber saw mill. Further south is Cam Lo Bridge and a new road connection to Route 9 and the town of Cam Lo.

Leaving Cam Lo, we drove back to Dong Ha on Route 9 and stopped at Vinh Dai, the site of B Company, 3d Tanks base camp from January 1969 until the company re-deployed to Okinawa later that year. Today Vinh Dai is occupied by a large and modern rock crushing operation. During the war, the site was also a rock crusher operated by the U.S. Navy Seabees. When I was in Vinh Dai, it was home to the Seabees, B Company, and a U.S. Army twin 40 mm "Duster" battery.

Our hotel in Dong Ha was built by the Soviet Union, but has recently been remodeled. The rooms were basic, but very clean. The hotel is near the site where the Dong Ha Combat Base was located. Nothing remains of the base. The site is filled with houses, small business operations, government offices and farmland.



Dong Ha Boat Ramp 1968



Dong Ha Boat Ramp today



Ngo Mon Gate

Departing the hotel at 7 am, we drove through Cam Lo and then over a winding two-lane paved road to Mai Loc. Mai Loc is now a training area for the Vietnamese Military and a small farming community. An old access road connects Mai Loc with Camp Carroll. Carroll is covered in heavy vegetation and pepper plants and features an unkempt NVA monument commemorating the surrender of the camp by Colonel Pham Van Dinh, Commanding Officer of the 56th Regiment, 3rd ARVN Infantry Division on April 2, 1972.

Our next stop was at the Rockpile and the Razorback. Materials from both outcroppings are being processed for gravel and, noticeably, are reducing these landmarks in size. The area is littered with thousands of .50 caliber and 5.56 projectiles along with discarded ammo boxes.

The site of Vandegrift Combat Base is now home to farmers, Montagnards and a Vietnamese Army Camp with no signs of the camp, as we remember it.

Gone is the dirt road to Khe Sanh and the base site is now planted in hundreds of acres of coffee plants. The airstrip has some scrub vegetation, but, for the most part, is characterized by long strips of the red clay soil of Vietnam. There is a small museum on site with outside displays of 155 mm artillery, a UH1 and CH47 helicopters, a M41 Tank hull, along with piles of rusting ammo and helicopter parts. The museum has displays of US,

ARVN and NVA military equipment and weapons, along with maps of opposing forces and position. There are also vendors selling fake military lighters, medals and badges.

Continuing our trek westward on Route 9, we came to the site of the Special Forces camp at Lang Vei. This past year, the Vietnamese government constructed a monument with a NVA PT76 Amphibious Tank mounted on top. From Lang Vei, we drove to Lao Bao on the border between Vietnam and Laos where we experienced one of the surprises of the trip. Not only does Lao Bao have a traditional Montagnard outdoor market, but it also has a big box store, much like COSTCO, where you can buy French Cognac, Korean appliances and American laundry soap. The other surprise was our modern four-story air-conditioned hotel in Huong Hoa (Khe Sanh town).

Leaving Huong Hoa on Saturday, August 15th, we are driving to Hue by way of the A Shau Valley. Leaving Route 9 at the Da Krong River Bridge, we followed part of the Ho Chi Minh Trail past Tiger Mountain (site of Dewey Canyon battle) to A Luoi and then on to Hue and back to the Huong Giang Hotel. After checking into the hotel, we walked across the Trang Tien Bridge and explored the huge Dong Ba Market and enjoyed a traditional Vietnamese dinner at the Hotel Saigon Morin.

Leaving Hue the next morning we started the next phase of our trip,

exploring DaNang, Hoi An, Chu Lai, and Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon).

We began the second phase of our journey on August 16 when we left Hue for DaNang. Shortly after leaving Hue, we stopped along the road to take photos of a young farm boy who met us at the bus and began posing for photographs on his Water Buffalo. At the base of the road leading to the Hai Van Pass are the magnificent Lang Co beaches. They are a beautiful expansive section of beaches that rival any in the world. Atop the Hai Van Pass, we were treated to magnificent views of DaNang, Red Beach and China Beach.

The vendors at the pass were by far the most aggressive we experienced during the trip. They have perfected the art of high-pressure sales. Since there is a new tunnel taking Route 1 through the Truong Son Range that bypasses the pass, most of the visitors these days are tourists and we are considered fair game for the vendors. DaNang has grown a great deal since the war and is a busy port and business center for Central Vietnam.

Stopping at Red Beach and the site where 3d Battalion, 9th Marines landed on March 8, 1965, we found a large and popular beachfront bar and restaurant. The area that was the site of the Force Logistics Command shows no signs of the unit ever having been there and this was true for the area where III Marine Amphibious Force headquarters was located. China Beach is experiencing extensive development,

especially on the beach near Marble Mountain where many large luxurious hotels are being built. At Marble Mountain there are many old military aircraft hangers still being used by the Vietnamese military. After visiting a marble and stone factory and sales area, we stopped at the Thang Loi Silk Factory. This factory was one of the most interesting sites during our trip. Watching the young artisans spinning the silk and sewing silk artwork, tablecloths and clothing was an amazing interlude in our trip.

Proceeding to Hoi An, we checked into our hotel and walked through the old quarter of the city. Historically the city has a long and rich history and was a major trading center during the 16th and 17th Centuries. One of the most interesting buildings is the Japanese Covered Bridge. It is one of Hoi An's most prominent symbols. Built in 1593, the bridge connected the Japanese community with the Chinese section of the town. Hoi An is a UNESCO World Heritage site and enforces strong conservation rules governing repairs and prohibits modern alterations to the buildings. The colonial French buildings now house art galleries, craft shops and restaurants. The city has become a major tourist area. We were among the only Americans, but French, Germans and Australians were well-represented.

Early in the morning on August 17, we departed our hotel in Hoi An and stopped at the Dien Ban Veterans cemetery, which is for VC and NVA war dead from Quang Nam Province. Our next stop was Hill 55.

As you drive up the central rib of the hill, you quickly see that it is the key position in Quang Nam Province. At the top of the hill, you come upon a huge monument dedicated to the Viet Minh, who defeated the French in July 1954. From Hill 55, we looked out on what will be familiar names to many of USMCVTA members: Charlie Ridge, Happy Valley and the Arizona Territory.

Leaving Hill 55, we drove past Hill 65 and stopped at Hill 37. Once again, there is another large military monument. Near the hill is the site where Liberty Bridge once stood. The bridge is gone, but there is a small operating ferry transporting mainly Vietnamese riding motorbikes.



Red Beach 1965



Red Beach near Da Nang Today

There is also an office of the Wood Checking Bureau, collecting taxes on logs moved down the river.

That evening, we had an interesting experience where we ate dinner. As we were leaving the restaurant, we noticed a large framed collage with photos and certificates that told the military history of a VC Officer. It turns out that this former VC Officer now owns the restaurant, along with a number of buildings and other businesses in Hoi An.

The next morning, August 18, we left Hoi An and continued driving south on Route 1. Our first stop was LZ Baldy. The two Army helo Pilots in our group

operated from here quite a lot in 1968 – 1969. LZ Baldy is now a Vietnamese Army Base and we couldn't enter to look around.

The next stop was Chu Lai, the creation of Lieutenant General Victor Krulak, USMC. Chu Lai was, as noted by Colonel Allan Millett, USMCR (Retired) in his book, "Semper Fidelis: The History of the United States Marine Corps," a Marine enclave built to supply close air support in Southern I Corps and Northern II Corps. Colonel Millet also pointed out that this gave III MAF a rationale for extending its operations in Quang Tin and Quang Ngai provinces. Following the war, it was a Vietnamese Air Force base, but two years



M41 Tank hull at Khe Sanh



Old artillery position on Hill 55 today

ago it became a commercial airport. The airport sits in the middle of the huge area that was the base during the war. One of our group, Dick Waters, was assigned as a platoon commander with 1st Tanks from June 1966 until November 1966, and with the Chu Lai Defense Command from December 1966 until February 1967.

The area, where the helo's pads were, is now an Automobile Driving School. Close by the driving school and on the beach is "Linda's Restaurant." Linda worked for the Marine Corps during the war and, in a small way, continues to connect with the Corps with banners hanging from the ceiling of the restaurant that have USMC Stickers interspersed with beer logos. Our final stop in Chu Lai was Hill 43, which briefly was 1st Tank Battalion's Command Post and the home to A Company and C Company, 1st Tanks. The hill has a commanding view of the old base area, along with the airport. It also is directly above a large Vietnamese Army Base. As we talked about the

Marine Corps in Chu Lai, it came to light that our Vietnamese guide was the son of the VC Commander for the Area.

We continued driving south and stopped at Quy Nhon before going to An Khe, and Pleiku. Our final stop was Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon). While most of us never saw Saigon during the war, it should be included in the itineraries for anyone returning to Vietnam. The city boasts 7 million people and is the economic engine for the whole country. Seeing the former Presidential Palace, the site of the United States Embassy, and the other landmarks we heard about during the war helps bring the question of seeing what happened to Vietnam in focus. So much has changed in the last 40 years. Vietnam, like the United States, has changed dramatically. This trip brought back many memories and, traveling with our group, provided different perspectives on the Vietnam War.

We saw Vietnam from the experiences of Marine tankers, Marine infantrymen, a Marine helicopter pilot, two Army

helicopter pilots, an Army helicopter door gunner, wives, a son and our Vietnamese guides. As mentioned earlier, there were many surprises. The places where we were based and the areas where we fought are gone for the most part. There are signs throughout the country that bring back memories, but the reality today is that Vietnam is a country with modern and efficient road systems, major construction and building programs stretching from Ho Chi Minh City to Hanoi, and a very young, educated, and hard-working population. While Vietnam boasts unconstrained economic growth, it is a one-party state with a very tightly controlled political and governmental structure.

All in all, it was a great walk back through history. ♦

Return to Vietnam



Bridge over the Ben Hai River



China Beach

All photos by Bill Davis

Return to Vietnam



Camp Carroll 1968



Camp Carroll today



The Rockpile today



Old Cam Lo Bridge



SVN Presidential Palace in Saigon

Return to Vietnam



Chu Lai Air Base Hangers



Hill 43 in Chu Lai

Charge

BY GREG KELLEY

OK.... I'VE TOLD THIS STORY BEFORE, but I can swear that nothing has "grown" over the years. Here it is:

I'm not good with dates, or even the names of the operations and various sweeps I was on, but I can remember other details pretty well. Anyway, I was up on Gio Linh sometime in early '67 gunning 2-4 as member of Alpha Company 3rd tanks. Anyone who spent time at either Con Thien or Gio Linh knows you spent a lot of time either in the tank or in a trench or ducked down behind a sandbag wall due to the shells being tossed into your perimeter. Well, after a few days of particularly relentless hammering by some NVA artillery, I guess the C.O. of the hill had gotten to the point where he just wanted to do something more than continue to hunker down and toss shells back aimlessly. So, that day, our tank commander, I think his name was Nickodemus, came back from

his short morning meeting and told us we were heading out with another tank, a squad of grunts and two Army twin 40s. Remember, the Army had several quad fifties and twin 40s up there with us. Our orders were to run across the "Z" and into North Viet-Nam as fast and as far as we could go, then pick out any targets we could find, toss some 90 at them and get back as fast as we could. Well, we drove our tank up out of our hull defilade position and a few minutes later we were all assembled for this suicide mission. The whole idea was to catch them by surprise, I guess. So we did just that.

Not meaning to piss off any Army personnel who might be reading this, but I lost a lot of respect for the Army that day. Both twin 40s quit on us half way in. They hightailed it back to the hill, leaving our two tanks and a squad of grunts to charge into North Viet Nam with half the fire power we set out with.



Army Dusters

Anyway, a few minutes later, our tank wound up perched somewhat overlooking an expanse of low land and we began looking quickly for anything suspicious to blow away. I spotted a dark shape far across the expanse that looked like two or three hooches side by side, and put the gun on them so my tank commander could check them out. Well, as anyone who's been in that area knows, there should not have been any hooches around at all. We decided to take a shot. The target was just outside of direct fire range, as my first H.E. exploded a couple of hundred yards or so, low. I employed some human "super-elevation" of my own and took another shot. It exploded square at the base of the hooches. We tossed a couple of more shots at the same level, but a hair to each side, and then watched in amazement at a giant secondary explosion, and then a few smaller ones. We backed out and ran back to the hill with the other tank and grunts. The whole "attack" took no more than two hours or so.

Later on, we were told that we had knocked out the North Vietnamese artillery site that had been hammering us. We were also told, and I don't know if this is true or not, that we were the only tank in Viet Nam to knock out an enemy artillery position by direct fire in North Vietnam.

I've looked back on that quick strike into from Gio Linh into North Vietnam many times over the years and I've wondered who the C.O. of the hill was who gave the order. He must've been one crazy mother. I do know we enjoyed a few days of relative quietness after that!

No shit, really... ♦

SUBJECT: FAREWELL OF THE MARINES FROM IRAQ

UNCLASSIFIED

Please pass on,

SgtsMaj, MGySgts, CMDCMs, Marines and Sailors, Saturday, 23 January at 1100 will mark the end of the Marines in Iraq as an organization. II MEF (fwd) will conduct a Transfer of Authority Ceremony with the First Armored Division without a Relief in Place from any incoming unit. USF-W (formally MNF-W) will merge with USD-C (formally MND-Baghdad) and will cease to exist.

After 6 years, over 850 Marines and Sailors killed in combat and another 8800 wounded we have completed our mission. At our peak, we had almost 26,000 Marines and Sailors on deck, close to 200 aircraft, over 380,000 pieces of ground equipment, and were averaging close to 2000 significant events a month. We have added a whole new generation of Heros; and names like Al Nasiriyah, Fallujah and Ramadi will be added to our History books.

Words can't begin to explain the magnitude of effort and sacrifice our Marines and Sailors have gone through to help the Iraqi people. Each year since the initial invasion, Marines and Sailors from

all over the Corps have been a part of the revolving I MEF (fwd) and II MEF (Fwd) Commands. Each year has been different with its own sets of unique challenges and each successive year, the incoming organization has built upon the successes of the outgoing organization.

This year was no different, we didn't have anywhere near the level of fighting that previous MEFs have done. However, we did conduct many operations, maintained security, continue to professionalize the Iraqi Security Forces, develop good governance and economics, assisted with the continued establishment of the Rule of Law and oversaw the peaceful transition of the provincial government. We also had one unique mission that we can call our own. That was to finally bring the Marine Corps home. Over the past year, we have simultaneously conducted the responsible drawdown of 24,000 Personnel, over 34 COPs and FOBs, including Baharia, Rawah, and TQ and sent six years worth of equipment out of theater.

For those of you who served with me this year, thank you. It was long and difficult at times, with our own set of challenges, but we did it.

It has been an honor to serve with you.

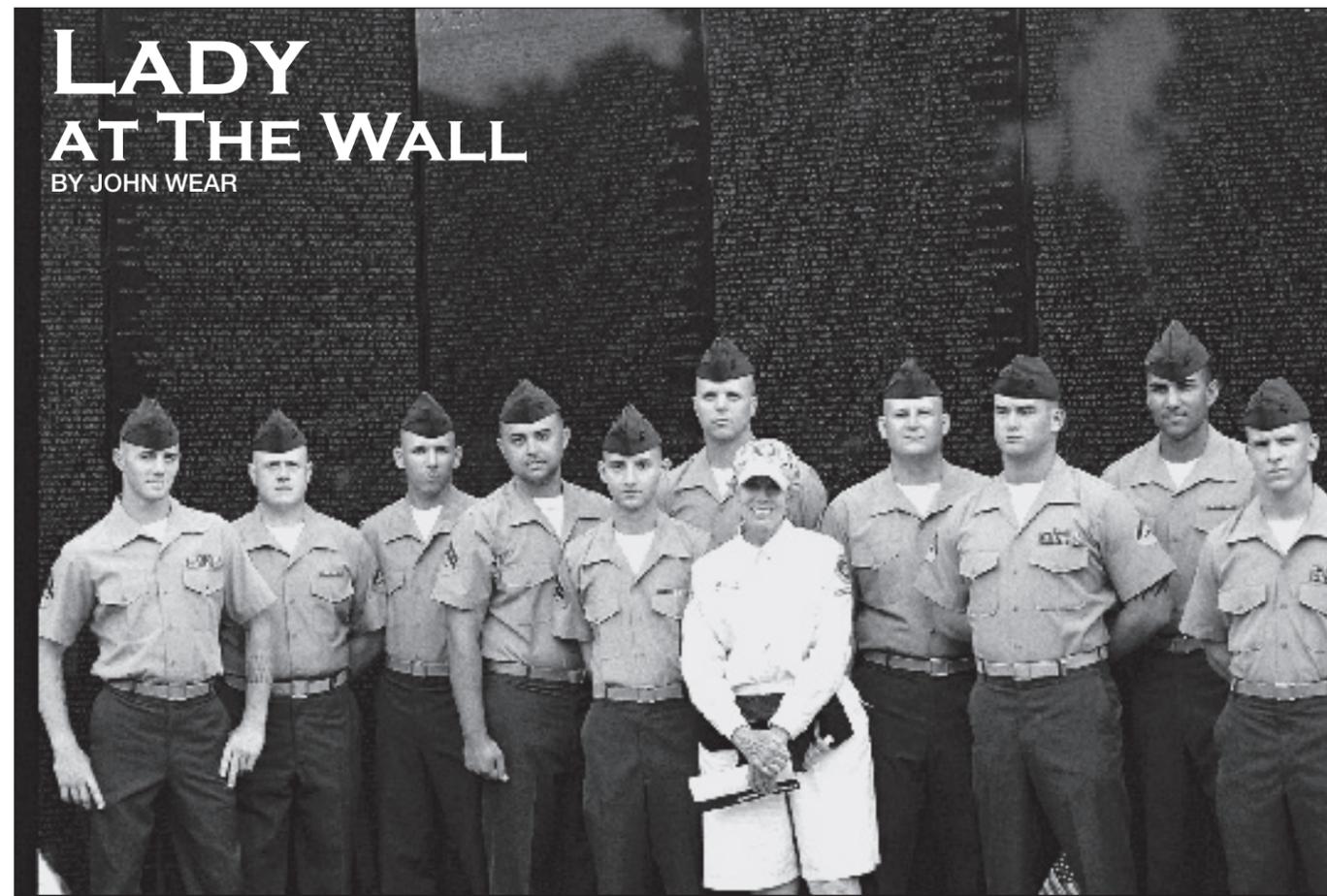
For those of you who have left your boot prints over here at least once during the last six years; thanks to you too. You set the stage for us to finish the job. It has been costly, it has been challenging, it has taken a while with quite a few dark days. But, in the end, it was worth it.

All Marines and Sailors, including those who remained stateside have contributed to the overall success of the Marines and Sailors in Iraq and; all of us have known someone who didn't make it back alive or has permanent injuries. It is up to us to ensure that those who follow never forgot their sacrifice or what we did here.

Collectively, we have added another illustrious chapter to the successful story of our Marine Corps. One that all of us can be proud of.

Semper Fidelis,

K. Carpenter
Sergeant Major
United States Force - West, Iraq
(Previously Multi National Force - West) II
Marine Expeditionary Force (Fwd)
21 January 2010



A long time ago I agreed to get a rubbing of a certain KIA who had been a spotter for a buddy of mine who was a Marine sniper in Vietnam. I had been to The Wall several times so I knew what to expect for my visit. In fact, I had lived in DC for three years and I went to The Wall whenever I heard that there would be something happening there. This next trip was to be made around The Birthday of the Marine Corps (Nov 10th) and Veterans Day (Nov 11th). I knew that The Wall would be a madhouse with visitors, but I was determined to fulfill my promise. So that you know, I had never actually touched the black granite before. Don't ask me why, because I do not know. I just couldn't make myself touch it in the past. The morning of my task came and so I headed to the Lincoln Memorial after the wreath laying ceremony at the Iwo Jima Memorial and then over to the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. I knew that there were volunteers around the memorial answering questions and handing out paper and pencils for people to make their rubbings. Standing there chatting with several visitors

was a volunteer lady. As I walked up and stood there waiting to speak to her, she turned, gave me a huge smile and then asked if she could help me. I said that I'd like to make a few rubbings. She reached into her backpack and handed me a few papers and a short pencil. She then asked me if I knew where the names were. I said that I did, thanked her and walked off. I went to the first name that I had promised that I would give to my Vietnam Marine brother. There it was. Oh God! Can I really do this? My hands were shaking. I actually touched The Wall, but my hands would not move. It was as if an electric charge was holding them to the black granite and not allowing me to make the rubbing. I heard a gentle voice behind me. It was that nice lady volunteer. She said, "Here, let me help you. I know that this is sometimes hard to do." I almost cried. Actually when she stood up and handed me the piece of paper, I did get all teared up and could not speak. She hugged me. What a wonderful lady!!! Later on that day, I was able to make another rubbing of the first name and then I walked over and made

rubbings of some of my buddies whose names will be forever young in my heart.

Fast forward a few years. I got an email from someone about the condition of the landscape around The Wall. For one reason or another, Park Service had recently decided to cut the lawn around the memorial every-other-week versus every week. I contacted the Park Service and a very nice supervisor replied to my e-mail that the decision was recently reversed and that the lawn was to be cut weekly during the spring and summer months. I then sent an e-mail to the person who alerted everyone about the problem. As it further turns out, the wonderful lady volunteer (Betty Henry) who helped me get the first rubbing was the person who I replied to. I told her of the above story and thanked her again. It turns out that she is a widow of a career US Marine. That makes her even more special in my heart.

Jokes

A young Marine officer was in a serious car accident, but the only visible permanent injury was to both of his ears, which were amputated. Since he wasn't physically impaired, he remained in the Marines and eventually rose to the rank of General. He was, however, very sensitive about his appearance.

One day the General was interviewing three Marines for his personal aide. The first was an aviator and it was a great interview. At the end of the interview the General asked him, "Do you notice anything different about me?"

The young officer answered, "Why

yes, sir. I couldn't help but notice that you have no ears."

The general got very angry at the lack of tact and threw him out.

The second interview was with a female Lieutenant, and she was even better. The General asked her the same question, "Do you notice anything different about me?"

She replied, "Well, sir, you have no ears."

The General threw her out also.

The third interview was with a Marine Gunny. He was articulate, looked extremely sharp and seemed to know more than the two officers combined (is that any surprise?).

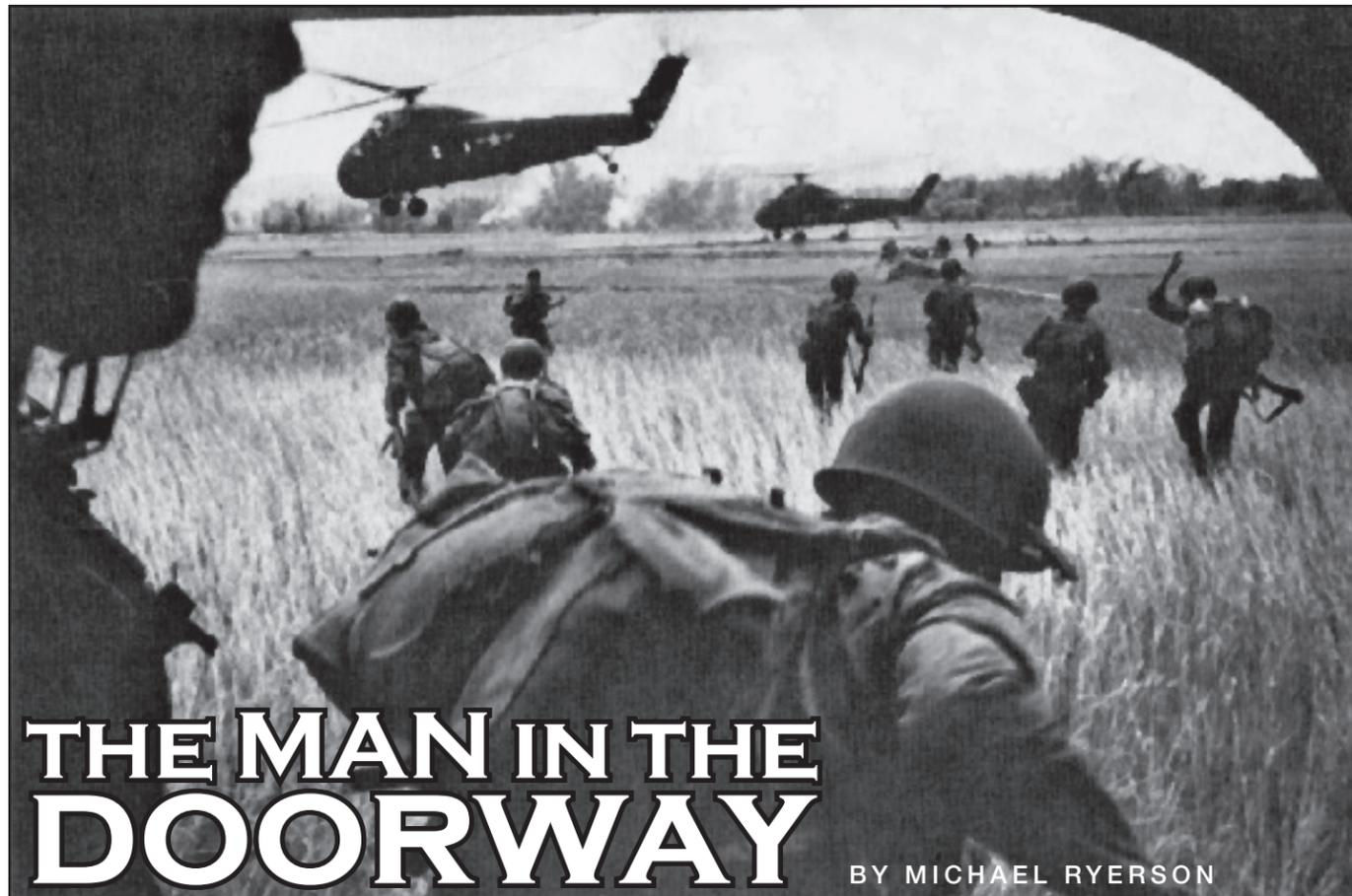
The General wanted this guy and went ahead with the same question, "Do you notice anything different about me?"

To his surprise the Gunny said, "Yes sir; you wear contacts lenses."

The General was very impressed and thought, what an incredibly observant Gunny, and he didn't mention my ears. "And how do you know that I wear contacts?" The General asked.

The sharp-witted Gunny replied, "Well, sir, it's pretty hard to wear glasses when you have no f*ckin' ears."

Submitted by John Wear



BY MICHAEL RYERSON

THEY CAME IN LOW AND HOT, CLOSE to the trees, and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward and we raced for the open doorways. This was always the worst for us, we couldn't hear anything and our backs were turned to the tree line. The best you could hope for was a sign on the face of the man in the doorway, leaning out, waiting to help with a tug or to lay down some lead. Sometimes you could glance quickly at his face and pick up a clue as to what was about to happen. We would pitch ourselves in headfirst and tumble against the scuffed, riveted aluminum, grab for a handhold and will that son-of-a-bitch into the air.

Sometimes the deck was slick with blood or worse, sometimes something had been left in the shadows under the web seats, sometimes they landed in a shallow river to wash them out. Sometimes they were late, sometimes...they were parked in some other LZ with their rotors turning a lazy arc, a ghost crew strapped in once too often, motionless, waiting for their own lift, their own bags, once too often into the margins.

The getting on and the getting off were the worst for us but this was all he knew, the man in the doorway, he was always standing there in the noise, watching, urging...swinging out with his gun, grabbing the black plastic and heaving, leaning out and spitting, spitting the taste away, as though it would go away...

They came in low and hot, close to the trees, and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward and began to kick the boxes out, bouncing against the skids, piling up on each other, food and water, and bullets... a thousand pounds of Cs, warm water and rounds, 7.62mm, half a ton of life and death. And when the deck was clear, we would pile the bags, swing them against their weight and throw them through the doorway, his doorway, onto his deck and nod and he'd speak into that little mic and they'd go nose down and lift into their last flight, their last extraction. Sometimes he'd raise a thumb or perhaps a fist or sometimes just a sly, knowing smile, knowing we were staying and he was going, but also knowing he'd be back, he'd be back in a blink, standing

in the swirling noise and the rotor wash, back to let us rush through his door and skid across his deck and will that son-of-a-bitch into the air.

They came in low and hot, close to the trees, and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward, kicked out the boxes and slipped the litter across the deck, and sometimes he'd lean down and hold the IV and brush the dirt off of a bloodless face, or hold back the flailing arms and the tears, a thumbs-up to the right seat and you're only minutes away from the white sheets and the saws and the plasma.

They came in low and hot, close to the trees, and dropped their tail in a flare, rocked forward and we'd never hear that sound again without feeling our stomachs go just a bit weightless, listen just a bit closer for the gunfire and look up for the man in the doorway.

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Michael Ryerson
4830 Creekbend Drive
Houston, Texas 77035

US giant bunker-buster bomb project rushed since Iran's Qom site discovered



September 27, 2009 The Pentagon has brought forward to December 2009 the target-date for producing the first 15-ton super bunker-buster bomb (GBU-57A/B) Massive Ordnance Penetrator, which can reach a depth of 60.09 meters underground before exploding. DEBKAFfile's military sources report that top defense agencies and air force units were also working against the clock to adapt the bay of a B2a Stealth bomber for carrying and delivering the bomb.

The Pentagon has ordered the number of bombs rolling off the production line increased from four to ten - a rush job triggered in May by the discovery that Iran was hiding a second uranium enrichment plant under a mountain near Qom - a discovery which prompted this week's international outcry.

Congress has since quietly in-

serted the necessary funding in the 2009 budget.

All this urgency indicates that the Obama administration has been preparing military muscle to back up the international condemnation of Iran's concealed nuclear bomb program, its sanctions threat and his willingness to join the negotiations with Iran opening on Oct. 1 in Geneva. Tehran may have to take into account a possible one-time surgical strike against its underground enrichment facility as a warning shot should its defiance continue. In particular, the world powers this week demanded that Iran open up all its nuclear facilities and programs to full and immediate international inspection. Failure to do so could bring forth further US military action.

According to our military sources, the earliest date for the accelerated Pentagon program to produce a su-

per bunker buster bomb mounted on a stealth bomber is December 2009 or January 2010. This, too, is three years ahead of its original schedule.

Pressed into service are two US Air Force research centers for work on adapting the radar-evading stealth bomber to the giant bomb: the Air Force Research Laboratory at Wright Patterson Air Force Base and the Munitions Directorate and Air Armament Center, both headquartered at Eglin Air Force Base in Florida.

Last month, DEBKAFfile quoted Air Force Lt. Gen. Mark Shackelford as disclosing that the Pentagon had decided to accelerate the production of 10-12 giant bunker buster bombs in response to intelligence received of Iranian and North Korean underground nuclear plants.

FACTS

The largest current bunker buster is 5,000 pounds;

This one is 30,000 lbs!

Length: 20.5 feet (6 m) [5]

Diameter: 31.5 inches (1 m) [6]

Weight: 30,000 pounds (13.6 metric tons)

Warhead: 5,300 pounds (2.4 metric tons) high explosive

Penetration:

200 ft (61 m) of 5,000 psi (34 MPa) reinforced concrete

26 ft (8 m) of 10,000 psi (69 MPa) reinforced concrete

130 ft (40 m) of moderately hard rock

The story of 'TANK'

Submitted by LLOYD "PAPPY" REYNOLDS

THEY TOLD ME THE BIG BLACK LAB'S name was Reggie, as I looked at him lying in his pen. The shelter was clean, no-kill, and the people really friendly. I'd only been in the area for six months, but everywhere I went in the small college town, people were welcoming and open. Everyone waves when you pass them on the street.

But something was still missing as I attempted to settle in to my new life here, and I thought a dog couldn't hurt. Give me someone to talk to. And I had just seen Reggie's advertisement on the local news. The shelter said they had received numerous calls right after, but they said the people who had come down to see him just didn't look like "Lab people," whatever that meant. They must've thought I did.

But at first, I thought the shelter had misjudged me in giving me Reggie and his things, which consisted of a dog pad, bag of toys, almost all of which were brand new tennis balls, his dishes, and a sealed letter from his previous owner. See, Reggie and I didn't really hit it off when we got home... We struggled for two weeks (which is how long the shelter told me to give him to adjust to his new home). Maybe it was the fact that I was trying to adjust, too. Maybe we were too much alike.

For some reason, his stuff (except for the tennis balls - he wouldn't go anywhere without two stuffed in his mouth) got tossed in with all of my other unpacked boxes. I guess I didn't really think he'd need all his old stuff, that I'd get him new things once he settled in. but it became pretty clear pretty soon that he wasn't going to.

I tried the normal commands the shelter told me he knew, ones like "sit" and "stay" and "come" and "heel," and he'd follow them - when he felt like it. He never really seemed to listen when I called his name - sure, he'd look in my direction after the fourth or fifth time I said it, but

then he'd just go back to doing whatever. When I'd ask again, you could almost see him sigh and then grudgingly obey.

This just wasn't going to work. He chewed a couple shoes and some unpacked boxes. I was a little too stern with him and he resented it, I could tell. The friction got so bad that I couldn't wait for the two weeks to be up, and when it was, I was in full-on search mode for my cell phone amid all of my unpacked stuff. I remembered leaving it on the stack of boxes for the guest room, but I also mumbled, rather cynically, that the "damn dog probably hid it on me."

Finally I found it, but before I could punch up the shelter's number, I also found his pad and other toys from the shelter... I tossed the pad in Reggie's direction and he sniffed it and wagged his tail... the most enthusiasm I'd seen since bringing him home. But then I called, "Hey, Reggie, you like that? Come here and I'll give you a treat." Instead, he sort of glanced in my direction - maybe "glared" is more accurate - and then gave a discontented sigh and flopped down. With his back to me.

Well, that's not going to do it, either, I thought. And I punched the shelter phone number.

But I hung up when I saw the sealed envelope. I had completely forgotten about that, too. "Okay, Reggie," I said out loud, "let's see if your previous owner has any advice..."

To Whoever Gets My Dog:

Well, I can't say that I'm happy you're reading this, a letter I told the shelter could only be opened by Reggie's new owner. I'm not even happy writing it. If you're reading this, it means I just got back from my last car ride with my Lab after dropping him off at the shelter. He knew something was different. I have packed up his pad and toys before and set them by the back door before a trip, but this time... it's like he knew

something was wrong. And something is wrong... which is why I have to go to try to make it right.

So let me tell you about my Lab in the hopes that it will help you bond with him and he with you.

First, he loves tennis balls. the more the merrier. Sometimes I think he's part squirrel, the way he hordes them... He usually always has two in his mouth and he tries to get a third in there. Hasn't done it yet. Doesn't matter where you throw them, he'll bound after it, so be careful - really, don't do it by any roads. I made that mistake once, and it almost cost him dearly.

Next, commands. Maybe the shelter staff already told you, but I'll go over them again: Reggie knows the obvious ones - "sit," "stay," "come," "heel." He knows hand signals: "back" to turn around and go back when you put your hand straight up; and "over" if you put your hand out right or left. "Shake" for shaking water off, and "paw" for a high-five. He does "down" when he feels like lying down - I bet you could work on that with him some more. He knows "ball" and "food" and "bone" and "treat" like nobody's business.

I trained Reggie with small food treats. Nothing opens his ears like little pieces of hot dog.

Feeding schedule: twice a day, once about seven in the morning, and again at six in the evening. Regular store-bought stuff; the shelter has the brand.

He's up on his shots. Call the clinic on 9th Street and update his info with yours; they'll make sure to send you reminders for when he's due. Be forewarned: Reggie hates the vet. Good luck getting him in the car. I don't know how he knows when it's time to go to the vet, but he knows.

Finally, give him some time. I've never been married, so it's only been Reggie and me for his whole life. He's gone everywhere with me, so please include him on your daily car rides if you can. He sits well in the

backseat, and he doesn't bark or complain. He just loves to be around people, and me most especially.

Which means that this transition is going to be hard, with him going to live with someone new. And that's why I need to share one more bit of info with you...

His name's not Reggie.

I don't know what made me do it, but when I dropped him off at the shelter, I told them his name was Reggie. He's a smart dog, he'll get used to it and will respond to it, of that I have no doubt. but I just couldn't bear to give them his real name. For me to do that, it seemed so final, that handing him over to the shelter was as good as me admitting that I'd never see him again. And if I end up coming back, getting him, and tearing up this letter, it means every thing's fine. But if someone else is reading it, well... well it means that his new owner should know his real name. It'll help you bond with him. Who knows, maybe you'll even notice a change in his demeanor if he's been giving you problems.

His real name is Tank.

Because that is what I drive.

Again, if you're reading this and you're from the area, maybe my name has been on the news. I told the shelter that they couldn't make "Reggie" available for adoption until they received word from my company commander. See, my parents are gone, I have no siblings, no one I could've left Tank with... and it was my only real request of the Army upon my deployment to Iraq, that they make one phone call to the shelter... in the "event".... to tell them that

Tank could be put up for adoption. Luckily, my colonel is a dog guy, too, and he knew where my platoon was headed. He said he'd do it personally. And if you're reading this, then he made good on his word.

Well, this letter is getting too downright depressing, even though, frankly, I'm just writing it for my dog. I couldn't imagine if I was writing it for a wife and kids and family. But, still, Tank has been my family for the last six years, almost as long as the Army has been my family.

And now I hope and pray that you make him part of your family and that he will adjust and come to love you the same way he loved me.

That unconditional love from a dog is what I took with me to Iraq as an inspiration to do something selfless, to protect innocent people from those who would do terrible things... and to keep those terrible people from coming over here. If I had to give up Tank in order to do it, I am glad to have done so. He was my example of service and of love. I hope I honored him by my service to my country and comrades.

All right, that's enough. I deploy this evening and have to drop this letter off at the shelter. I don't think I'll say another good-bye to Tank, though. I cried too much the first time. Maybe I'll peek in on him and see if he finally got that third tennis ball in his mouth.

Good luck with Tank. Give him a good home, and give him an extra kiss goodnight - every night - from me.

*Thank you,
Paul Mallory*

I folded the letter and slipped it back in the envelope. Sure I had heard of Paul Mallory, everyone in town knew him, even new people like me. Local kid, killed in Iraq a few months ago and posthumously earning the Silver Star when he gave his life to save three buddies. Flags had been at half-mast all summer.

I leaned forward in my chair and rested my elbows on my knees, staring at the dog. "Hey, Tank," I said quietly.

The dog's head whipped up, his ears cocked and his eyes brightened.

"C'mere boy."

He was instantly on his feet, his nails clicking on the hardwood floor. He sat in front of me, his head tilted, searching for the name he hadn't heard in months.

"Tank," I whispered.

His tail swished.

I kept whispering his name, over and over, and each time, his ears lowered, his eyes softened, and his posture relaxed as a wave of contentment just seemed to flood him. I stroked his ears, rubbed his shoulders, buried my face into his scruff and hugged him.

"It's me now, Tank, just you and me. Your old pal gave you to me." Tank reached up and licked my cheek. "So whatdaya say we play some ball?" His ears perked again. "Yeah? Ball? You like that? Ball?" Tank tore from my hands and disappeared in the next room.

And when he came back, he had three tennis balls in his mouth. ♦

WANT TO RECEIVE THE NEXT SPONSON BOX?

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c/o John Wear,
5537 Lower Mountain Road,
New Hope, PA 18938**

I KNEW A GREAT Marine

L/CPL P.R. EMMITT MOS 2841

I WASN'T MUCH OF A MARINE, AT least not the Marine I wanted to be. At seventeen I thought jumping out of a perfectly good airplane was a great idea; man that was for me. So I quit high school and joined the Marine Corps. At recruit graduation I received the series T-67 (Iron Man) physical excellence award. At ITR, when I received my orders, imagine my surprise when I received orders to report to either OCS or Radio Repair School; picture the Staff Sergeant's surprise when I protested. Well, I wasn't extending my enlistment for OCS; so... after some arguments about not being placed in a Recon unit, I found myself back at MCRD

in Schools Battalion in the summer of '64. The only similarity between Schools Battalion and the "real" Marine Corps is that we lived in Quonset huts and wore utilities. But the similarities ended there; all that was required of the students was to pass exams. I passed all my exams without ever opening a book. I enjoyed Schools Battalion... a lot, so much that, near graduation, my best friend and I were called into the school's Sergeant Major's office, his first comment was: "So... you're Emmitt & Butler - I have heard so much about you two". (We knew right off, this wasn't going to go well). He closed his lecture with: "If I see you two again, I will

put you in the brig". Man, did we have a good time at Schools Battalion.

Soon after arriving in Las Pulgas at Camp Pendleton, in the summer of '65, I joined the base swimming team and won the 11th Naval District Championship; beating a number of naval officers including a Lieutenant Commander. I was well on my way to representing the Marine Corps at the All Navy Championships, or so I thought... in spite of being repeatedly told I wasn't going, there I was on the deck of the USS Gunston Hall (LSD-5) en route to Viet Nam.

I had my utility jacket off and was reading a novel, when Gunny Thorpe

found me up on deck. "Why aren't you working?" he asked. "Doing what?" I answered. Gunny Thorpe sent me to see Sgt. Siva. I had heard stories about Sgt. T.J. Siva, and the number of MP's it took to subdue him, when necessary. I was apprehensive... "Sgt. Siva, I'm here to fix your tank," I said. "My tank is fine!" He responded. "Sgt. Siva", I said, "Gunny Thorpe sent me, I have to check it out. So, what kind of problem are you having?" Sgt. Siva showed me his helmet and the cord stretched tightly to the gunner's comm. box. "Why's it plugged in there?" I asked. "My comm. box has never worked; they told me it's got problems in the turret rings; it can't be fixed". I climbed in the tank to look saying "I'll check it out". A few minutes later I climbed back out and said: "Sgt. Siva, I have to swap your comm. box with the gunner's box to localize the problem." Well... that sure as hell got Sgt. Siva's attention. "Bull S**t", he screamed. I pleaded: "It's really the only way to tell what's wrong and I'm really good at this stuff". Sgt. Siva's response was: "FINE, BUT YOU F**K UP MY TANK AND I WILL THROW YOU OVERBOARD." Now, we had been at sea for a few days and I'm a strong swimmer, but ...shit. I swapped the boxes anyway and found out it was the tank commander's box that was defective, not the turret rings; and I lived to see another day.

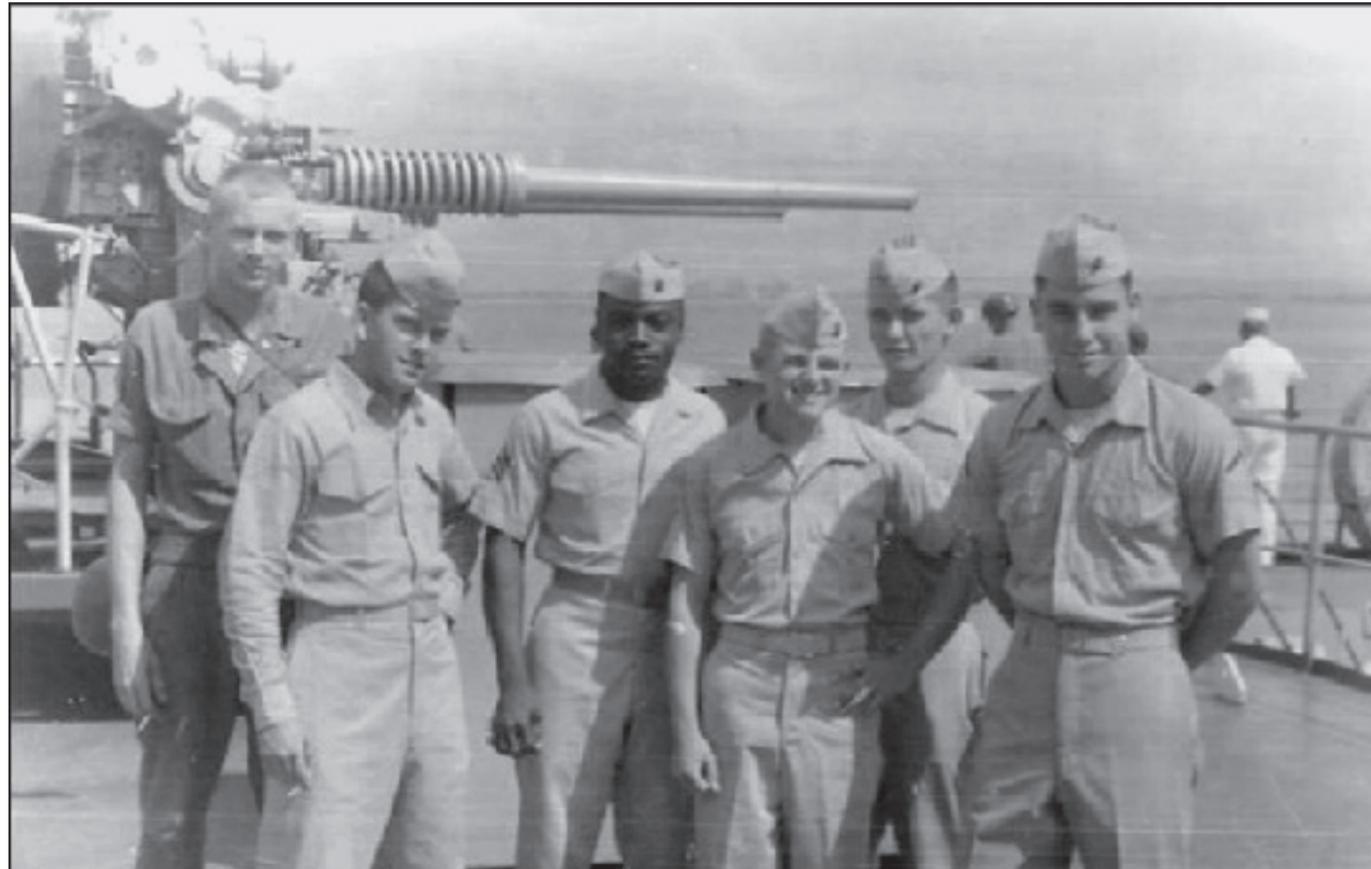
I found the ship's comm. shack. The Navy techs were a lot friendlier than I expected. Their NCO set me up with a bench and some tools and I set out to find out what was wrong with the T.C. comm. box. Every time I reported my progress to Sgt. Siva his response was the same: "Who gives a crap, just make my cord longer." To which I would answer, "If I can't fix the box, I will." Then, sitting at my work bench, wondering why this damn box checked out OK but still wouldn't work, one of the wires sprung loose from its connection inside the box. I soldered the loose wire back and reinstalled the box in Sgt. Siva's tank. I powered up the intercom and Sgt. Siva's helmet now had background noise, I blew into the microphone and heard my breath; I had fixed it (no marathon swim for me). I asked Sgt. Siva to check out the box - it was now in good working order.

When Sgt. Siva heard his crewman's voice in his helmet, which was connected to his comm. box, his eyes lit up, he grinned and just said: "Emmitt, you're a f**k'n genius." Boy, did I feel terrific! I went back to the ship's comm. shack and thanked the guys for letting me use their facilities. The guys in the comm. shack were always great friends. When one of our tanks submerged in salt water on a landing, it was with their guidance that I was able to save the radio set.

One day, after we landed in Phu Bai, T.J. asked me if I would like to learn how to be a tank loader. He told me to get my gloves and we climbed in his tank. He proceeded to teach me how to safely conduct business with the cannon's breech, how to identify each round and why he placed them that way in the honey comb around the turret. T.J. also thought me that rolling back my gloves would keep the glove from getting accidentally

caught in the breach. I still wear my gloves this way when I'm working in the yard. I only remember going out on patrol with T.J. once and, because I was transferred to DaNang a little later, I would never get to see T.J. grin like that again.

The second place I went after reporting to DaNang was the tank commander's tent. I informed the TC's that I just transferred in and was a Radio Repairman and had arranged with my Sgt. to go out in the field with a tank crew; as long as my radio work was done. They mockingly asked: "Who the hell taught you how to load a tank?" and I responded proudly: "Sgt. T.J. Siva". I went on patrol in DaNang whenever the opportunity presented itself. I'm one of the lucky ones; this was all just a great adventure for me. But, it's like I said, I really wasn't much of a Marine, but Sgt. T.J. Siva was a great Marine and I was a better Marine for having once known him. ♦



Conrad, Martin, Lewis, Hobson, Gibson & Emmitt on LSD



"TJ" Siva

The Boys of QUANTICO © 2007

The OCS/TBS Class of 4-67 had their second reunion in San Diego this last week, 16-20 September. This was our second reunion; the first was in DC in 2007. We graduated in May, 1967, when the Vietnam War was in full swing and most of us went straight there to fight during that period which included the Tet Offensive. We lost 35 of the 500

lieutenants who graduated with our class. Two of our graduates have since lost sons in Iraq. Below is a poem which was read at our first Memorial Service at The Wall in DC in 2007. We read it again and will continue to read it each reunion until the last of us falls. It was written one stormy night in Austin, TX, inspired by a few fingers of Jack and fond memories of his

brothers in the past, present and future by John Augustine, who served as an artillery officer during those days and is now a successful lawyer in Austin. None of us can read it aloud without a bit of tremor in our voices.

Semper Fidelis and welcome home,
Lt Col Sam Grant, USMC (ret)

THE BOYS OF QUANTICO © 2007

John Augustine (H-1)

From all across the country
They came to join the Corps.
They walked away from everything
Knowing not what was in store.

They pledged their lives & loyalty
For reasons only they would know.
God bless the men who joined back then,
The Boys of Quantico.

In '66 they came 500 strong
To find and follow their dreams.
Could they prove they had the stuff
To become an Officer of Marines?

Now some were born to money
While most were regular Joes.
They all faced the test of OCS,
The Boys of Quantico.

They came to test their mettle,
To march & fight & drill.
To push beyond their pain & fear
One clear goal, theirs to fulfill.

Thru sweat & blood they earned their Bar
And the greatest title one can bestow.
Known as "Marines" 'til Heaven's scenes,
The Boys of Quantico.

At TBS, in classrooms & in the field
For days & nights they trained, you see.
For their mission was to learn to lead
A platoon of Marine Corps infantry.

Their work was hard, but each man knew
In the end, to war they would go.
They did their best at TBS,
The Boys of Quantico.

Soon orders came for all of them
To serve their tour in Vietnam.
They'd lead their troops to the fight
In Hue City, An Hoa & Khe Sahn.

They led & loved those in their charge
And bled & died fighting the foe.
One and all, they each stood tall,
The Boys of Quantico.
Most came home, though some did not.

All served with honor to behold.
Some were wounded in the flesh,
But all were touched in the soul.
At home they worked to make a life,

To never forget times long ago.
They faced their fear & shed a tear,
The Boys of Quantico.
With years & years of living,

They come to meet again.
They'll laugh & cry with drinks held high
And they'll remember when

They served with pride and honor
For those who died so long ago.
God bless the men who served back then,
The Boys of Quantico.

ICE CREAM & INCOMING

BY TOM FINERTY, FOXTROT CO, 2/9

NEAR LATE AFTERNOON OF THAT hot July day, each company began to set up a defensive perimeter and set in for the evening, or so we thought.

Word came down that the tanks assigned to our company had built up too much pressure while maneuvering in the heat of the day. Our particular tank was a 'flame thrower', which would have been useful against bunkered enemy troops, but, so far, no bunkers to assault. The enemy was there, but out of sight. Thus far, our tank only ferried casualties and heat-exhausted Marines, and we had plenty of those.

A squad was selected to accompany the tank outside the loose perimeter we had set up. They had moved out about two hundred yards when the tanks began expelling flames to ease their built-up pressure.

At almost the same time, helicopters began coming in from the south for re-supply and medevac. We thought they would be bringing water. Many had no water and, those who did, had very little. To my surprise, water wasn't on the delivery list, but there was ice cream, yes, ice cream. Someone must have thought we were at an amusement park instead of in the DMZ. Ice cream instead of water; this is a joke, right?

The tanks spraying flames and the

choppers landing and departing didn't go unnoticed by enemy forward observers. Moments later I heard a distant sound, one I hadn't heard yet, like a muffled boom. In an instant, the screaming sound of enemy artillery from the north was coming our way. Based on where the first shells hit, it was clear that the tanks were the target.

Panic set in for those providing security for the tank. Projectiles, sounding like a speeding train, were screaming down on them and they had nowhere to hide. They headed towards the tanks for safety, which was not a good choice. The tankers knew this and were waiving frantically for them to get away.

The tanks began heading back towards our defensive perimeter, along with the embattled squad and the incoming artillery. The distant 'booms', now registered forever as a sound I'll never forget, hit right along our front. No one had a hole dug yet and the exploding shells and searing hot shrapnel sprayed in every direction. From my position facing the deck, I could hear the unusual noise of the metal fragments as they whizzed overhead.

"Corpsman up", was the next sound I heard. We had wounded, and, as we'd soon find out, dead.

The incoming rounds were faster than anything I ever knew. I don't know how

many were fired, but I'm sure there were a number of volleys from more than one gun.

I don't know how many were killed or wounded, but I remember 'Franks'. Frank Cauthen was hit by shrapnel and died instantly. He was a corporal and he'd been with Fox 2/9 for 11 months and 12 days. That's a long time in a rifle company as a grunt. He was a black man with a big smile and, at near six foot, 170, looked like a halfback. 'Franks' had 'time in'. He was 'short', with a rotation date of about August 16th. He probably would have been out of the bush by August 7-8, at the latest. So, he had about 25 days left. A damn shame for sure. Things like this don't sit well with the troops. Seeing a man put his time in and rotate gives hope to each person that humps the hills. Seeing one die with 25 and a wake up is bad for business and morale. I know it makes no sense to say 'it ain't fair, but that's the exact feeling. 'Franks' put in almost a year in the worst conditions and was in the home stretch and, poof, gone. There is no God. There is no justice.

Ice cream wasn't very much a treat that day. Water would have done just fine.

FRANK REGINALD CAUTHEN

CPL - E4 - Marine Corps - Regular

Length of service 1 years

His tour began on Jul 27, 1967

Casualty was on Jul 12, 1968

In QUANG TRI, SOUTH VIETNAM

Hostile, died of wounds, GROUND CASUALTY

OTHER EXPLOSIVE DEVICE

Body was recovered

Panel 52W - Line 17

VETERAN INFORMATION

AGENT ORANGE RECORD OF NEGLECT UPDATE 01:

Documents show that decisions by the U.S. military and chemical companies that manufactured the defoliants used in Vietnam made the spraying more dangerous than it had to be. As the U.S. military aggressively ratcheted up its spraying of Agent Orange over South Vietnam in 1965, the government and the chemical companies that produced the defoliant knew it posed health risks to soldiers and others who were exposed. That year, a Dow Chemical Company memo called a contaminant in Agent Orange “one of the most toxic materials known causing not only skin lesions, but also liver damage.” Yet despite the mounting evidence of the chemical’s health threat a review of court documents and records from the National Archives has found the risks of exposure were downplayed and the spraying campaign would continue for six more years. Records also show that much of the controversy surrounding the herbicides might have been avoided if manufacturers had used available techniques to lessen dioxin contamination and if the military had kept better tabs on levels of the toxin in the compounds. Dow Chemical knew as early as 1957 about a technique that could eliminate dioxin from the defoliants by slowing the manufacturing process, according to documents unearthed by veterans’ attorneys. Since the Vietnam War, dioxin has been found to be a carcinogen associated with Parkinson’s disease, birth defects and dozens of other health issues. Thousands of veterans as well as Vietnamese civilians were directly exposed to the herbicides used by the military. Debilitating illnesses linked to defoliants used in South Vietnam now cost the federal government billions

of dollars annually and have contributed to a dramatic increase in disability payments to veterans since 2003.

Documents show that before the herbicide program was launched in 1961, the Department of Defense had cut funding and personnel to develop defoliants for nonlethal purposes. Instead it relied heavily on the technical guidance of chemical companies, which were under pressure to increase production to meet the military’s needs. The use of defoliants led to massive class-action lawsuits brought by veterans and Vietnamese citizens against the chemical firms. The companies settled with U.S. veterans in the first of those suits in 1984 for \$180 million. Since then, the chemical companies have successfully argued they are immune from legal action under laws protecting government contractors. The courts also found that the military was aware of the dioxin contamination but used the defoliants anyway because the chemicals helped protect U.S. soldiers. A 1990 report for the secretary of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs found that the military knew that Agent Orange was harmful to personnel but took few precautions to limit exposure. The report quotes a 1988 letter from James Clary, a former scientist with the Chemical Weapons Branch of the Air Force Armament Development Laboratory, to then-Sen. Tom Daschle, who was pushing legislation to aid veterans with herbicide-related illnesses. “When we initiated the herbicide program in 1960s, we were aware of the potential for damage due to dioxin contamination in the herbicides,” Clary wrote. “We were even aware that the ‘military’ formulation had a higher dioxin concentration than the ‘civilian’ version due to the lower cost and speed of manufacture. However,

because the material was to be used on the ‘enemy,’ none of us were overly concerned.”

Military scientists had been experimenting with herbicides since the 1940s, but funding cuts in 1958 left few resources in place to fully evaluate the chemicals for use in Vietnam. “I was given approximately 10 days notice to come to Vietnam to undertake ‘research’ in connection with the above tasks,” wrote Col. James Brown of the U.S. Chemical Corps Research and Development Command in an October 1961 report to top brass just as the defoliation program was ramping up. “Thus, a large order was placed on a very poorly supported research effort.” The military launched a limited herbicide program in 1962 that involved 47 missions. At the time, relatively little was known about the health effects of dioxin, in part because cancer and other illnesses can take decades to develop and the herbicides had only been in wide use since 1947. But documents uncovered by veterans’ attorneys show the chemical companies knew that ingredients in Agent Orange and other defoliants could be harmful. As early as 1955, records show the German chemical company Boehringer had begun contacting Dow about chloracne and liver problems at a Boehringer plant that made 2,4,5-T, the ingredient in Agent Orange and other defoliants that was contaminated with dioxin. Unlike U.S. chemical companies, Boehringer halted production and dismantled parts of its factory after it discovered workers were getting sick.

The company studied the problem for nearly three years before resuming production of 2,4,5-T. In doing so, the company found that dioxin was the culprit and that they could limit

contamination by cooking the chemicals at lower temperatures, which would slow production. Dow said it didn’t purchase the proprietary information on the technique until 1964 and didn’t start using it until 1965. Records show it did not inform other manufacturers or the government about the technique until the military began planning construction of its own chemical plant to make herbicides in 1967. By that time, Dow also had developed a procedure to test dioxin levels in batches of 2,4,5-T. The company provided that technique to other companies in 1965 but not to the military until 1967, the company said. Earlier in the decade, nearly two dozen military officials and chemical industry scientists met in April 1963 to issue a “general statement” about the health hazards from 2,4-D and 2,4,5-T. No one raised concerns about using the chemicals in Vietnam, according to minutes from the meeting. Evidence focused largely on the fact that more than 300 million gallons of the compounds had been used domestically since 1947, even though the formulations for Vietnam would be far more concentrated and contain more dioxin. “The committee concluded that no health hazard is or was involved to man or domestic animals from the amounts or manner these materials were used in aforementioned exercise,” the minutes show.

In 1965, the chemical companies involved in producing the defoliants met at Dow’s headquarters in Midland, Mich., to discuss the contaminant’s threat to consumers. “This material (dioxin) is exceptionally toxic; it has a tremendous potential for producing chloracne and systemic injury,” Dow’s chief toxicologist, V.K. Rowe, wrote to the other companies on 24 JUN 65. But none of the companies informed the military personnel charged with overseeing the defoliation contracts of the safety concerns until late 1967, according to depositions from the lawsuits. Internal documents from multiple companies indicate they were worried about the specter of tighter regulation. Only after a study for the National Institutes of Health showed that 2,4,5-T caused birth defects

in laboratory animals did the military stop using Agent Orange, in 1970. Alan Oates, a Vietnam veteran who chairs the Agent Orange committee for Vietnam Veterans of America, said veterans have had little luck in their legal fight for compensation since the 1984 settlement. Veterans have argued unsuccessfully in court that the settlement was insufficient because it came too early for thousands of people whose illnesses did not develop until after all the settlement money had run out. One unresolved issue, Oates said, is whether chemical companies can be held liable for health costs associated with birth defects seen in the children of Vietnam veterans. “Now that it’s starting to show it has an impact on future generations, what is the recourse for those folks?” Oates said.

[Source: Chicago Tribune’s Part 5 Agent Orange’s lethal legacy 17 Dec 09 ++]

COSTLY AGENT ORANGE-HEART DISEASE LINK LOOMS

Tom Philpott | December 31, 2009

The cost of war -- on veterans’ health and taxpayer wallets -- will loom a little larger in the new year when the Department of Veterans Affairs issues a final rule to claim adjudicators to presume three more diseases of Vietnam veterans, including heart disease, were caused by exposure to Agent Orange.

The rule, expected to be published soon, will make almost any veteran who set foot in Vietnam, and is diagnosed with Parkinson’s disease, B cell leukemia or ischemic heart disease (known also as coronary artery disease), eligible for disability compensation and VA medical care. The exception would be if credible evidence surfaces of a non-service cause for the ailment.

Katie Roberts, VA press secretary, said no estimates will be available on numbers of veterans impacted or the potential cost to VA until after the rule change takes effect sometime in 2010. But the National Association for Uniformed Services was told by a VA official that up to 185,000 veterans could become eligible for benefits and the projected cost to VA might reach \$50 billion, said Win Reither, a retired colonel on NAUS’ executive board.

NAUS also advised members that VA, to avoid aggravating its claims backlog, intends to “accept letters from family physicians supporting claims for Agent Orange-related conditions.” It said thousands of widows whose husbands died of Agent Orange disabilities also will be eligible for retroactive benefits and VA Dependency and Indemnity Compensation.

“This is huge,” said Ronald Abrams, co-director of the National Veterans Legal Services Program. NVLSP has represented veterans in Agent Orange lawsuits for the last 25 years. The non-profit law group publishes the “Veterans Benefits Manual,” a 1900-page guide for veterans’ advocates to navigate the maze for VA claims, appeals and key court decisions.

Abrams said he can’t guess at how many more thousands of veterans previously denied disability claims, or how many thousands more who haven’t filed claims yet, will be eligible for benefits. But numbers, particularly of those with heart disease, will be very large, he suggested.

All of the veterans “who have been trying to link their heart condition to a service-connected condition won’t have to do it now if they’re Vietnam vets,” Abrams said. For VA, it will mean “a significant amount of money -- and many, many, many people helped.”

The excitement over expansion of benefits for Vietnam veterans, and worry by some within the Obama administration over cost, flows from an announcement last October by VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki. He said three categories would be added to the list of diseases the VA presumes were caused by Agent Orange. Veterans with the presumptive Agent Orange ailments can get disability compensation if they can show they made even a brief visit to Vietnam from 1962 to 1975. With a presumptive illness, claim applicants don’t have to prove, as other claimants do, a direct association between their medical condition and military service.

Shinseki said he based his decision on work of the Institute of Medicine (IOM) of the National Academies. VA contracts

with IOM to gather veterans' health data and investigate links between diseases and toxic herbicide used in Vietnam to destroy vegetation and expose enemy positions.

In a speech last July, Shinseki, former Army chief of staff and a wounded veteran of Vietnam, expressed frustration that "40 years after Agent Orange was last used in Vietnam, this secretary is still adjudicating claims for presumption of service-connected disabilities tied to its toxic effects." VA and the Defense Department should had conducted conclusive studies earlier on presumptive disabilities from Agent Orange, he suggested.

"The scientific method and the failure to advocate for the veteran got in the way of our processes," Shinseki bluntly concluded.

In last October's announcement he said VA "must do better reviews of illnesses that may be connected to service, and we will. Veterans who endure health problems deserve timely decisions based on solid evidence."

When a disease is added to VA's list of ailments tied to Agent Orange, veterans with the disease can become eligible for retroactive disability payments, back to the date original claims were rejected, if after 1985.

Joe Violante, legislative director for Disabled American Veterans, praised Shinseki's decision. But he said VA faces a "logistical nightmare" in trying to find veterans turned down on earlier on claims. A VA official told Violante, he said, that cost of the search could be part of that nightmare.

Chairman of government affairs for Vietnam Veterans of America until last October was John Miterko. He said he wasn't surprised that Shinseki added ailments to the Agent Orange presumptive list including heart disease.

"If you look at the Vietnam veteran population, the diseases we've contracted and the mortality rate, the only group dying faster rate are the World War II veterans," Miterko said. "We're picking up diseases by our '60s that we shouldn't be getting until our late '70s, early '80s. So his adding other diseases, heart

disease in particular, isn't a surprise."

Both Shinseki and his predecessor, James Peake, former Army surgeon general, had long military careers and served in Vietnam. "That's a hell of a bonus for us," Miterko said. Both of them have shown "much more empathy, much more understanding. They would have seen many of their own peer group suffering from the effects of exposure to Agent Orange."

Miterko doesn't believe anyone can estimate how many veterans will benefit from the new presumptive diseases. VA will continue to process claims individually, he said, and likely won't be accepting Agent Orange as the cause of heart disease for someone "who has smoked for 40 years and is morbidly obese. Common sense is going to have to prevail as well."

VA BENEFITS ASSISTANCE "HOW TO GET STARTED"

If you need help learning about VA programs or with a VA application process, recommend you work with an approved Veterans Service Organization (VSO). It's their job to help you at no cost. To find a VSO go to VA's Directory of Veterans Service Organizations at <http://www1.va.gov/vso/index.cfm>.

You can also check with your state VA department and your state's network of county veteran service officers. Most are listed at www.va.gov/statedva.htm. If someone approaches you to help with a VA application, claim, or appeal, check to see if they are a VSO. Chances are they won't be because VSOs don't solicit for your business, you have to find them.

There are a few organizations which use the front of helping with VA benefits as a way to meet prospective customers. These groups solicit for your business. They offer to get you money from the VA for long term care cost, assisted living, or survivor benefits. Tread lightly around these offers. On the surface, they appear legitimate but if not, it could wind up costing you time and money in the long run. Some things to look for are:

- Organizations having at their base, a financial services firm.
- Organizations that are not an official

Veteran Service Organization (VSO). VSOs are chartered by the VA to act as an official VA representative for members on VA matters.

- Organizations wanting to help in an area that is not their core business.
- Inability to get a satisfactory answer about how they make their money.
- The motive behind a financial service firm's interest in helping you with issues that get them nothing in return. The process, bureaucracy, and time involved in helping vets with VA programs is substantial. Also, helping with some VA programs provides access to a veteran's complete financial information.

[Source: *MOAA Financial Frontlines* Shane Ostrom article 9 Dec 09 ++]

John's note: These people who can help you are not employees of the Veterans Administration. They are normally state employees of your home state and have your best interests at heart.

VA FRAUD WARNING

I have received many reports that Veterans are being contacted by "Patient Care Group" representing that they are helping administer VA prescriptions and stating that the pharmacy billing procedures have changed and they are therefore requesting Veteran credit card numbers for prescription payments in advance of filling their prescriptions. This is false. VA does not call Veterans asking to disclose personal financial information over the phone. VA has not changed its processes for dispensing prescription medicines.

Kevin

Kevin Secor

Veterans Service Organizations Liaison

Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs

Washington, DC

202-273-4836

VETERANS NEWS & INFORMATION "AID AND ATTENDANCE"

Regardless of your personal status, consider passing this along to all veterans, families of veterans or individuals with veterans in their family.

"Aid and Attendance" is an underutilized special monthly pension benefit offered by the Veterans Administration for veterans and surviving

spouses who require in-home care or live in nursing homes.

To qualify, a veteran (includes the surviving spouse) must have served at least 90 days of active military service, one day of which is during a period of war, and must be discharged under conditions other than dishonorable.

The veteran's benefit is \$18,234 annually (paid monthly) and increases to \$21,615 if a veteran has one dependent. The surviving spouse alone is \$11,715 annually.

For more information,

call 1-800-827-1000

Visit <http://www.va.gov> (type "Aid and Attendance" in the search block), or contact your local VA office.

Apply on-line at

<http://vabenfits.vba.va.gov/vonapp/main.asp>

A LITTLE-KNOWN VETERANS' BENEFIT

By Paula Burkes

Published: February 8, 2009

A little-known veterans' benefit for long-term care expenses is available to wartime veterans and their spouses. But the benefit is being overlooked by thousands of families, industry observers say.

<http://www.seniorcareforveterans.com/?OVRAW=Veterans%20Aid%20and%20Attendance&OVKEY=veteran%20aid%20and%20attendance&OVMTIC=standard&OVADID=2159488521&OVKWID=196955357021>

<http://newsok.com:80/article/3344150>

The Special Pension for Veterans' Aid and Attendance pays up to \$1,644 a month, \$19,736 annually, toward assisted living, nursing homes or in-home care **for veterans 65 and older who served at least 90 days and one day during wartime — stateside or overseas**. Veterans and their spouses can receive up to \$23,396 annually and spouses of deceased veterans, \$12,681. Yet, an estimated \$22 billion a year goes unclaimed, said Don Soard, a volunteer with Operation Veteran Aid in Oklahoma City. In 2007, only 134,000 seniors nationwide received the benefit, which was established in 1952. "Literally hundreds of thousands don't even

know about it," Soard said. "Due to incomplete information, many disqualify themselves on income or assets or find the paperwork too burdensome."

STREAMLINED PROCESS -

Soard helps families complete the necessary forms, so that approval comes in four to six months. The process is streamlined for vets who are blind or have memory issues and widows with medical needs, he said. Most applicants qualify and payments are retroactive, Soard said. The few who are denied on excessive liquid assets can seek financial advice to qualify, he said. Soard started his volunteer mission two years ago, following the deaths of two family members who served in WWII. "If they'd known about this benefit, they'd have a much better quality of life in later years," he said. "Without it, many vets are forced to go on Medicaid."

Oklahoma is one of nine states where the welfare program doesn't cover assisted living costs. Assisted living often can be an alternative to a nursing home when 24-hour skilled care is not an absolute need, said Willie Ferguson, executive director of Legend at Rivendell in Oklahoma City ... "But if someone just has Social Security and a small pension, it's not enough to live here," Ferguson said. According to a 2008 MetLife survey, assisted living in Oklahoma averages \$2,346 a month, while nursing homes cost \$153 a day for a private room. Of 73 Legend residents, nine receive the veterans' special pension, including Tom Bowen, 77, of Moore .. Until I toured this operation, I had no idea the benefit was available," said Bowen, a retired engineer technician from the Federal Aviation Administration who served stateside during the Korean Conflict. Bowen recently moved into the Legend facility following several mini strokes and a diagnosis of short-term memory loss. "It's been pretty hard trying to handle expenses on my own and being able to replace savings," said Marie Bowen, his wife of 57 years. Finding a nearby facility and learning about the special veterans' pension has been a godsend, she said.

REMEMBER WHEN THEY SAID THIS

WAS NOT GOING TO HURT US AND EVEN DENIED CHEMICAL USE NEVER HAPPENED!!!!!!!

Bob "Bomber" Gibson

Australian Vietnam Veteran.

Rifleman D&E Platoon 1 ATF

1967 - Oct 1968 TET.

DUTY FIRST

We won some additional AO associations for Veterans and Widows!

Secretary of the VA announces they will add Parkinson's, Ischemic Heart Disease, and Hairy-Cell Leukemia.

See story at: http://www.nytimes.com/2009/10/13/us/politics/13vets.html?_r=1&hpw

There is still much more to get covered such as the additional cancers bill as well as the autoimmune disorders in the immune system, endocrine, COPD, as well as the blood disorders and the gastrointestinal issues that even the Ford Foundation report referred.

I figure with this addition we now have 28 of the 35 diseases and disorders that are at least in my opinion associated excluding birth defects.

Congratulations to all who have fought the good fight with honor, optimism, data and the real facts, and a never ending effort not to give up in these issues fighting against the most overwhelming and most powerful enemy we have ever faced; our own government.

VA PRESUMPTIVE VIETNAM VET DISEASES

Relying on an independent study by the Institute of Medicine (IOM), Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki decided to establish a service-connection for Vietnam Veterans with three specific illnesses based on the latest evidence of an association with the herbicides referred to Agent Orange. The illnesses affected by the recent decision are B cell leukemias, such as hairy cell leukemia; Parkinson's disease; and ischemic heart disease. Used in Vietnam to defoliate trees and remove concealment for the enemy, Agent Orange left a legacy of suffering and disability that continues to the present. Between JAN 65 and APR 70, an estimated 2.6 million military

personnel who served in Vietnam were potentially exposed to sprayed Agent Orange. In practical terms, Veterans who served in Vietnam during the war and who have a “presumed” illness don’t have to prove an association between their illnesses and their military service. This “presumption” simplifies and speeds up the application process for benefits.

The Secretary’s decision brings to 15 the number of presumed illnesses recognized by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). “We must do better reviews of illnesses that may be connected to service, and we will,” Shinseki added. “Veterans who endure health problems deserve timely decisions based on solid evidence.” Following is the new list of 15 illnesses now recognized under VA’s presumption rule. For more information on each illness, refer to <http://www1.va.gov/opa/pressrel/pressrelease.cfm?id=1796>:

- Acute and Subacute Transient Peripheral Neuropathy

(Note: Must become manifest to a degree of 10% or more within a year after the last date on which the veteran was exposed to an herbicide agent during active military service and the condition is transient (temporary) and resolves within two weeks. Chronic peripheral neuropathy is not presumed by VA to be caused by exposure to Agent Orange.)

- AL Amyloidosis (ALS)
- Chloracne or other acneform disease similar to chloracne (Note: Must become manifest to a degree of 10% or more within a year after the last date on which the veteran was exposed to an herbicide agent during active military service)

- Chronic Lymphocytic Leukemia
- Diabetes Mellitus (Type 2)
- Hairy Cell Leukemia
- Hodgkin’s Disease
- Ischemic Heart Disease
- Multiple Myeloma
- Non-Hodgkin’s Lymphoma
- Parkinson’s Disease
- Porphyria Cutanea Tarda

(Note: Must become manifest to a degree of 10% or more within a year after the last date on which the veteran was exposed to an herbicide agent during active military service.)

- Prostate Cancer

- Respiratory Cancers (lung, bronchus, larynx, trachea)
- Soft Tissue Sarcoma (other than Osteosarcoma, Chondrosarcoma, Kaposi’s sarcoma, or Mesothelioma)

[Source: VA News Release 13 Oct 09 ++]

VA Clinic Openings Update 12
On 8 OCT S.1717, a bill to authorize major medical facility leases for the Department of Veterans Affairs for fiscal year 2010, passed the House and was cleared for submission to the President. It authorizes appropriations of \$196,227,000 for the Secretary of Veterans Affairs to use in fiscal year 2010 for opening new facilities at the following locations:

(1) Anderson, South Carolina, Outpatient Clinic, in an amount not to exceed \$4,774,000.

(2) Atlanta, Georgia, Specialty Care Clinic, in an amount not to exceed \$5,172,000.

(3) Bakersfield, California, Community Based Outpatient Clinic, in an amount not to exceed \$3,464,000.

(4) Birmingham, Alabama, Annex Clinic and Parking Garage, in an amount not to exceed \$6,279,000.

(5) Butler, Pennsylvania, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$16,482,000.

(6) Charlotte, North Carolina, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$30,457,000.

(7) Fayetteville, North Carolina, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$23,487,000.

(8) Huntsville, Alabama, Outpatient Clinic Expansion, in an amount not to exceed \$4,374,000.

(9) Kansas City, Kansas, Community Based Outpatient Clinic, in an amount not to exceed \$4,418,000.

(10) Loma Linda, California, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$31,154,000.

(11) McAllen, Texas, Outpatient Clinic, in an amount not to exceed \$4,444,000.

(12) Monterey, California, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$11,628,000.

(13) Montgomery, Alabama, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$9,943,000.

(14) Tallahassee, Florida, Outpatient

Clinic, in an amount not to exceed \$13,165,000.

(15) Winston-Salem, North Carolina, Health Care Center, in an amount not to exceed \$26,986,000.

[Source: HVAC Bob Filner Press Release 8 Oct 09 ++]

VETERANS WITH PTSD TWICE AS LIKELY TO DIE AFTER SURGERY

PTSD CAN AFFECT SURGERY OUTCOMES

Health Editor’s comment: Information to discuss with you healthcare provider. Carol Ware Duff, MSN, BA, RN

Article written by Janis Kelly

The first study to examine the effects of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) on mortality after surgery shows that veterans with PTSD are twice as likely to die following surgery as their counterparts without PTSD. The researchers found a startling 25% increase in 1-year mortality, even if surgery occurred years after the patients completed military service.

The study was presented October 17 at the American Society of Anesthesiologists 2009 Annual Meeting by lead author Marek Brzezinski, MD, PhD, from the San Francisco Veterans Affairs Medical Center and the University of California–San Francisco.

“We were stunned by the findings regarding the 1-year mortality. They are groundbreaking. This is the first time that PTSD, a psychiatric diagnosis, has been shown as a risk factor for increased mortality after surgery,” Dr. Brzezinski told Medscape Psychiatry.

“PTSD is not only a marker for coexisting diseases but also an independent risk factor for 1-year [postoperative] mortality. One-year mortality was 8.5% in veterans with PTSD vs 6.8% in veterans without PTSD,” he added.

According to Dr. Brzezinski, the most important finding from the study is that **veterans with PTSD have a lower survival rate postsurgery than their veteran peers at 1 year, even if the surgery is done years after completion of service.**

“PTSD remained a significant and independent risk factor for increased

mortality even after taking into consideration the patient’s age and other preexisting medical conditions such as heart disease, high blood pressure, diabetes, high cholesterol, smoking, and depression,” he said.

Even after adjusting for coexisting disorders and age, the odds of a veteran with PTSD dying within 1 year were 2.2 times greater than the odds for a veteran without the diagnosis, Dr. Brzezinski said. He pointed out that the PTSD odds ratio was 36.25 for 1-year mortality, which was larger than the effect of diabetes mellitus (odds ratio, 1.76).

INCREASED PREVALENCE OF CARDIAC RISK FACTORS

The retrospective study focused on 1-year mortality because of sample size limitations and limited the data set to the time period between 1998 and 2008. The database included 1792 male veterans who underwent elective surgery requiring admission at the San Francisco Veterans Affairs hospital during the study period, 129 of whom had an established PTSD diagnosis on the day of surgery (7.8%).

“It is important to note that the patients with a diagnosis of PTSD at the time of the surgical procedure were on average 7 years younger than patients without the diagnosis (59.2 vs 66.3 [years of age], respectively; $P < .001$),” Dr. Brzezinski said.

PTSD was associated with significantly higher 1-year and 5-year mortality and with significantly increased prevalence of postoperative complications, particularly delirium and acute respiratory failure.

In addition, a diagnosis of PTSD at the time of surgery was associated with significantly increased prevalence of cardiac risk factors.

“Patients with PTSD present for their surgery at a significantly younger age, are much sicker, and have increased mortality compared to patients without PTSD. We believe that these are quite remarkable findings.”

“Finally, as important as these findings are for veterans, they are potentially even more significant for the Veterans Affairs Health System. Our study suggests that

chronic medical conditions developed years after active duty could be related to the long-term effects of PTSD,” Dr. Brzezinski said.

NEW PERIOPERATIVE RISK FACTOR

This “mind–body connection” in itself is big news to many, Dr. Brzezinski said. As a consequence, he added, PTSD should be viewed not only as a marker for coexisting diseases but also as a new independent perioperative risk factor.

“As patients with PTSD present for surgery at a significantly younger age and have a significantly increased prevalence of cardiac risk factors, we started to treat them as if they would be 10 years older for perioperative risk stratification.”

Finally, Dr. Brzezinski said, the study suggests that **chronic medical conditions developed years after active duty could be related to the long-term effects of PTSD.**

“Physicians who take care of patients with PTSD should be aware of that and pay closer attention to other coexisting diseases,” he said.

The study exposes the need to consider potential treatments to help reduce risk in the veteran PTSD population, according to Dr. Brzezinski. “The number of veterans returning from our current conflicts with PTSD who require surgical treatment is expected to increase in the future. We need to do more research on the topic.”

The San Francisco research group is currently conducting a prospective epidemiological study looking at the effects of PTSD on perioperative outcomes that builds on the current study. They are also preparing a study to examine the potential protective effects of medical therapy in patients with PTSD undergoing surgery in an attempt to identify a potential solution. Coauthors include Charles Marmar, MD, a leading expert in PTSD; Brian Cason, MD; Selwyn Au, MS; and senior author Arthur Wallace, MD, PhD, a leading expert in perioperative risk reduction. The authors have disclosed no relevant financial relationships.

American Society of Anesthesiologists

2009 Annual Meeting: Abstract A294. Presented October 17, 2009.

Carol Duff graduated from Nursing School at Riverside White Cross in Columbus, Ohio.

She has a BA from Bowling Green University in History and Literature and a Masters of Science in Nursing as a Nurse Educator from the University of Toledo School of Nursing.

She has traveled extensively and has written on military history, veterans health issues and related subjects. She is the mother of several children and 10 cats and 1 guinea pig.

She can be reached via email at: Thehertz@aol.com

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*Posted on October 19, 2009 by Carol Ware Duff
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VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION UPDATE 05:

Approximately 3 million veterans—about 2 million of whom are under age 65—receive compensation from the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) for their service connected disabilities. The amount is based on a rating of an impairment’s effect on a veteran’s earnings capacity, on average; disability ratings range from zero to 100%. Additional allowances are paid to veterans whose disabilities are rated 30% or higher and who have dependent spouses, children, or parents. Veterans with disabilities may also qualify for cash payments from other sources, including workers’ compensation; private disability insurance; means-tested program benefits, such as Supplemental Security Income; and, for veterans under 65, the Social Security Disability Insurance (DI) program. About 146,000 veterans who receive disability compensation from VA also receive DI payments. When Social Security beneficiaries are eligible for disability benefits from more than one source, ceilings usually limit combined disability benefits from public sources to 80% of a recipient’s average pre-disability earnings. Those DI payments—after any reduction—are adjusted periodically to reflect changes in the cost

of living and in national average wages. Veterans' compensation payments for disabilities are not considered for that purpose, however, and thus do not apply toward limits. That same exclusion applies to means-tested benefits and to some benefits that are based on public employment.

The Congressional Budget Office (CBO) has provided to Congress an option to reduce government spending that would limit disability compensation for veterans who receive VA disability benefits and DI payments. The option would reduce VA's disability compensation by the amount of the DI benefit. Applying that change to current and future recipients of veterans' compensation would affect an estimated 153,000 recipients in 2010, saving almost \$1.8 billion that year and approximately \$9.6 billion between 2010 and 2014. Applying the change only to veterans who are newly awarded compensation payments or DI payments would affect an estimated 3,000 recipients in 2010, saving about \$40 million in outlays that year and about \$1.1 billion through 2014. A rationale in favor of this option is that it would eliminate duplicate public compensation for a single disability. An argument against it is that the change would subject veterans' disability benefits to a form of means-testing (VA benefits are considered entitlements). Moreover, to the extent that this option applied to current DI recipients, some disabled veterans would have their income reduced.

[Source: CBO Budget Options Vol 2 Aug 09 ++]

VA DISABILITY COMPENSATION UPDATE 06:

The Senate VA Committee held a hearing 17 SEP, their third such hearing this session, on calculation of compensation for service-caused disabilities. Senator Daniel Akaka (D-HI), Committee Chairman, said recent studies suggest some vets are undercompensated while others may be overcompensated, and that a "deliberate approach" is needed in reforming the system. Sen. Richard Burr (R-NC) pointed out that the Veterans Disability Benefits Commission (2007) and the Dole - Shalala

Commission both concluded that the rehabilitation aim of the VA disability program was not being met. Those studies also recommended that veterans should be compensated not only for lost earnings capacity but for lost quality of life. Government witnesses, researchers and advocacy groups offered different perspectives:

- Dr. George Kettner, PhD, President of Economic Systems, Inc. testified that veterans with PTSD experience greater earnings loss than veterans with physical disabilities. For example, veterans with a 100% rating for PTSD earn 92% less than their physically disabled counterparts. For other mental disorders, earning loss can be even more significant.

- LTG Terry Scott, USA-Ret., who chaired the VA Advisory Committee on Disability Compensation, testified that his committee has informally recommended to VA Secretary Shinseki that the Deputy Secretary [Scott Gould] should be tasked to oversee a "systematic review and update process" for the VA Schedule of Rating Disabilities (VASRD) and a permanent staff to accomplish that "high priority" task. Scott also said that quality of life compensation should be limited to "clearly defined and very serious disability." Scott noted that it takes about one year to do a complete review of one of the 15 body systems in the VASRD. He urged that work get started to review and update three or four body systems per year and that the work should be done internally by the VA.

- Lt Col John Wilson, USAF-Ret., testifying for the Disabled American Veterans, pointed out that the VA's strategic plan doesn't address revising the VASRD, so tactical execution of the task could be questionable.

MOAA believes strongly that the VA rating system needs to be modernized, with priority emphasis on improving rating criteria for TBI, PTSD and other behavioral wounds that occur in military service. For more information or to watch the webcast of the hearing, go to the Senate VA website at <http://veterans.senate.gov/>.

[Source: VFW Washington Weekly & MOAA Leg Up 18 Sep 09 ++]

VA DISABLED VET BENEFITS:

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) provides a range of benefits for veterans. However, certain benefits have specifically been created to assist disabled veterans:

- Disability compensation provides a monthly cash benefit to veterans whose disabilities resulted from injury or disease contracted in or aggravated by military service. The amount is based on the level disability.

- The Vocational Rehabilitation and Employment (VR&E) program is designed to help veterans with service-connected disabilities prepare for, find, and keep suitable jobs. Assistance is also available to help veterans with living skills.

- Automobile and special adaptive equipment grants are available to certain disabled veterans and servicemembers to purchase new or used automobiles (or other conveyances) to accommodate a disability.

- Clothing allowances are designed for certain veterans entitled to receive compensation for a service-connected disability for which he or she uses a prosthetic or orthopedic device.

- Housing grants are provided for constructing an adapted home or modifying an existing home to meet the adaptive needs of certain veterans and servicemembers. There are three grant programs available for permanent residences, and two of the three grant programs are also available for temporary residences.

- Service Disabled Veterans' Insurance (S-DVI) is life insurance for veterans who have received a service-connected disability rating by the VA.

The Congressional Research Service has published a report on these benefits which covers eligibility, legislative history, and the application process. The report titled "Veterans' Benefits: Benefits Available for Disabled Veterans" is available for review at http://209.85.48.22/9056/110/0/p1012284/CQcrs_VetsBens4DisabledVets.pdf. A copy of the report can also be seen as an attachment to this Bulletin. This report will be updated as new information becomes available.

[Source: CRS Christine Scott/ Carol Davis report 31 Jul 09 ++]

VA COMBAT VET REFUNDS:

Many veterans are eligible for a retroactive refund of co-payments they made for medical services and prescriptions associated with treatments related to their combat experience. The Veterans Health Administration (VHA) is currently reviewing medical records to determine which veterans are eligible for the refunds. The National Defense Authorization Act of 2008 (Public Law 110-108) extended the period of enhanced enrollment eligibility and cost-free care for conditions that may be related to combat operations. The law allows any combat veteran, discharged from active duty on or after 28 JAN 03, to be eligible for Priority Group 6 enrollment up to five years after they leave the service. Combat veterans discharged before that date – who did not previously enroll in the VA health-care system – are also eligible for Priority

Group 6 enrollment through 27 JAN 11. VHA plans on mailing letters in NOV 09 to veterans affected by the extended eligibility period, informing them they will receive refunds by the end of December. Combat veterans are encouraged to call VA's Health Resources Center toll-free with any questions at (800) 983-0932.

[Source: The American Legion Online Update 24 Sep 09 ++]

VA BURIAL BENEFIT UPDATE 08:

VA offers the following benefits and services to honor our Nation's deceased Veterans. For detailed information about all VA benefits and services, refer to www.va.gov:

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

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

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

- Reimbursement of Burial Expenses: Generally, VA can pay a burial allowance of \$2,000 for Veterans who die of service-related causes. For certain other Veterans, VA can pay \$300 for burial and funeral expenses and \$300 for a burial plot.

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

- Time Limits: There is no time limit to claim reimbursement of burial expenses for a service related death. In other cases, claims must be filed within two years of the Veteran's burial.

- * Free copies of your death certificate (your survivors may need several copies to document your death).

[Source: VA Pamphlet 21-00-1 JUL 09 ++]

VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL UPDATE 03:

Established in 1979, the Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) is dedicated to preserving the legacy of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial in Washington, D.C., promoting healing and educating about the impact of the Vietnam War. Authorized by Congress, its most recent initiative is building The Education Center at The Wall, an underground facility near the Memorial that is designed to help visitors discover the stories of those named on The Wall and celebrate the values embodied by all service members who served in all of America's wars. The VVMF is seeking photographs of the more than 58,000 fallen service members whose names are inscribed on its black granite wall.

The organization plans to incorporate the pictures in the memorial's planned underground Education Center. Persons with photos they wish to share can contact any FedEx Office store. FedEx Office will provide scanning services in its over 1,600 FedEx Office Print and Ship Centers. The images will be scanned and eventually displayed in The Education Center at The Wall. The Education Center is an underground facility that will be built near the Vietnam Veterans and Lincoln Memorials. The pictures being collected will form its centerpiece: a larger-than-life wall of photos that will showcase pictures of those we lost during the Vietnam War on their birthdays. When having a photo scanned at a FedEx Office location, contributors will be asked to fill out a form on which they will identify the person whose photo they are providing and share a remembrance of that person. The form and photo will then be scanned and uploaded to a special site where all of the photos will be housed. For more information on the project refer to the fund's Web site at <http://www.vvmf.org/>. [Source: VVMF Press Release 17 Sep 09 ++]

VIETNAM MEMORIAL WALL UPDATE 04:

Repair work was under way 21 OCT 2009 at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial on the National Mall as a private memorial fund took over landscaping and maintenance of 13 acres from the National Park Service. Over the next two weeks, workers are restoring the flagpole's bronze finish and its decorative base with five military branch insignias. They will also restore the bronze finish for five stands that hold directories that help people find names on famous V-shaped memorial wall, which draws millions of visitors each year. The Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund, which built the memorial, also has repaired an irrigation system and is reseeding and sodding the grass. Last month, the group announced plans to pay for maintenance at the site because of scarce funding from the federal government. They plan to raise more than \$1 million to care for the memorial and grounds, including \$500,000 to buy replacement granite if sections of the wall need to be replaced in the future. "Everybody has the same goal: We want it to look good," said fund spokeswoman Lisa Gough. "We want it to shine." The memorial's bronze fixtures — including the flagpole and a statue of three soldiers — will be restored for the first time since they were installed more than 25 years ago, said James Cummings, who was part of the memorial's original architecture team the project. The fund is working to raise \$100,000 to restore the statue in the next year. The bronze is worn down and has turned green on the soldiers' noses and arms, Cummings said. The weather caused some of the damage, along with the hands of many visitors. "No one expected the memorial itself would have such an impact with the culture," said Cummings. "There's a plan now to take care of it." [Source: MarineCorpsTimes Brett Zongker article 21 Oct -09 ++]

New USMC VTA Financial Disclosure Policy

The by laws of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association state that our financial records must be made available to any member who requests them. The Board of Directors has decided it wants to be transparent to the membership and has decided to publish the financial records in the first Sponson Box after each reunion.

Stating the financials at our reunion Business Meeting is about the worst time to get a handle on the health of the VTA. The reason is that the actual finances are grossly overstated prior to each reunion. Our books are artificially swelled by the large amount of registration fees taken in prior to the reunion. We also generate a lot of revenue during the reunion itself which would go unrealized if we looked at the finances during a business meeting at a reunion. At the same time we have large reunion expenses like hotel, food, busses and tickets that come in after the reunion which would also make the numbers very misleading.

The best way to understand our true financial picture is to look at the organization in two year increments once the reunion bills are settled. So too, the off-year always looks ominous due to the expenses we incur for publishing the Sponson Box and other related business expenses. Therefore the Board of Directors has decided to publish the financial reports in the Sponson Box, which is a first for the VTA. We want to be upfront with our membership with our standings. We will do this every two years after a reunion due to the inherent problems I just outlined. The books are still open

to anyone who wants to make an appointment with me and go through each and every bill... that has always been in the bylaws and remains unchanged.

Thanks to the generosity of a large group of our members who donate above & beyond, we are in good financial standings and we plan on continuing the same. There are some projects currently in the works that will impact 2010 significantly, one of which is something I can't share with you quite yet. Bob Peavey has been working with an outside agency for several months now that will really showcase our organization and will help us with our future recruiting efforts – but that's all I can say about this project for now. It will probably be the most exciting thing for most of us that we have done since I became president.

Another decision by the Board of Directors is to set aside limited funds (as long as they are available) for the historical research and for garnering our personal stories during our time in Vietnam. The Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation will be granted funds for future projects when they apply for them.

As always I thank you for your support. The current solid financial standing of the VTA will allow us to run larger issues of the Sponson Box, like this one, with more color when it is warranted. I think you'll find this issue's fascinating story from Bill Davis is the type of story that justifies the expense of a color run.

The following financial reports cover two full years (2008 & 2009).
John Wear

Legendary Marines: 1st Lieutenant Jared M. Landaker

BY JIM SAUSOMAN

Jared Landaker was born to Joe and Laura Landaker in Rolling Hills Estate, Madera, California on 3 May 1981. During his early years Jared was not a big youngster but made up for it with his determination. His parents moved to Big Bear City, when his father was transferred with the California Highway Patrol. Jared attended school at Big Bear and played sports. He was on the baseball and football team. He played varsity baseball and excelled in football at Big Bear High School. He was all CIF defensive back in 1998. Upon graduation from high school, Jared enrolled in the University of La Verne in California and studied physics. When 911 struck America, Jared felt the call to duty. During his college, Jared began to take Platoon leaders courses during the summer. In 2003 he graduated from college and wanted to fly in the Marine Corps. He at once was

instructors. Their time was about up and had about a week left in Iraq. The call came that three Marines were wounded and needed a medevac. Captain Harris was ready and asks Lt Landaker to fly with her as her co-pilot. It was another honor for him to be chosen. With their flight crew and Corpsman they picked up the wounded and delivered them to the aid station. Upon the return flight they were side tracked to pick up some blood and return it to the hospital in Fallujah. During that flight they received machine gun fire and rocket fire. Their chopper was hit bad and caught fire. The helicopter spun into the ground and landed on its side, killing all seven crew members, Captain Jennifer Harris, 1st Lt Jared Landaker, Sgt Travis D. Pfister, Cpl. Thomas E. Saba, Sgt. James R. Tijerina, Navy Hospital Corpsman 1st Class Gilbert Minjares Jr. and Navy Hospital Corpsman 3rd Class



sent to Quantico Virginia for Officer Training School. Upon completion of TBS, Jared was transferred to Pensacola, Florida for flight school. He excelled in flight school and graduated at the top of his class but he wanted to fly helicopters. He was listed in the top 5% of all students and made the Commodore's list. Jared received orders to Camp Pendleton, California to learn about the CH46 medium helicopter. After completion of his training he reported into HMM 364 the "Purple Foxes" and took over the secondary duty as S2 officer. In August 2006, 2nd Lt Landaker with the squadron would be ordered to Iraq in support of the ground forces. Lt. Landaker would fly many rescue missions and would call home and let his parents know things were well. He got to the point that he couldn't look back into the chopper at the wounded, it would bother him. He was so dedicated to his duty that he completed his hours early and at 496 hours he received the honor of "hack" from his squadron commander. In the Marines "hack" is helicopter aircraft commander. What an honor for Lt Landaker. If the call came for help Lt Landaker would be there. Lt Landaker and Captain Jennifer Harris were selected to be sent back to the states for training and to become

Manuel A. Ruiz. His parents heard that a helicopter was shot and when they had not heard from Jared via email they became concerned. Then the knock on the door and three Marines were there. The grief would start for the Landaker home. The officers of the highway patrol would provide an escort for Lt Landaker's last trip. They raced from the airport to Big Bear in record time for the funeral service. Then down to Riverside Veterans Cemetery for the Burial. Marines from all over attended with the Camp Pendleton Honor guard. As Jared had stated "Anyone who has put their life on the line serving this country" Is a hero! His Mother and Father with his Uncle created the Seven Stars Foundation for the express duty of helping the Wounded Warriors program. They have held fund raisers and had two marathons to raise money for service families. The foundation now has a web site at www.sevenstarsfoundation.com. His father, Joe, a Vietnam Marine stated "He did more in 25 years than most of us will do in 75 years." Lt. Jared Landaker was killed in action with the crew members on 7 February 2007. He truly joined many legendary Marines that day.

Semper Fi!

USMCVTA FINANCIAL REPORT

2008				2009			
INCOME		EXPENSES		INCOME		EXPENSES	
Dues/Donations	\$16,323	Tankers in Iraq Expense	\$513	Dues/Donations	\$17,931	Buddy Fund	\$ 761
Jacket Program		Less Donations	(250)	Reunion Income		Recruiting	556
Sales	\$2,503	Total	\$263	Registration Fees	\$26,800	Web Site	516
Less CosT	<u>2,075</u>	Board of Directors Meeting Expense	\$3,345	[Less Cancellations]	(1,468)	*Misc. Expense	<u>751</u>
Profit	\$428	Less Donations	<u>(1,718)</u>	Donations	\$ 4,014	Sponson Box	\$2,584
		Total	\$1,627	Auction	4,092	Printing/Postage	\$5,621
		Sponson Box		Merchandise Sales	4,405	Layout/Design	<u>1,700</u>
		Printing/Postage	\$5,770	Sgt Grit [% of Profit]	741		\$7,321
		Layout/Design	<u>1,450</u>	Reunion Total	\$38,584	Reunion Expenses	
		Total	\$7,220			Sheraton Hotel	\$ 9,565
Total Income	\$16,751	Recruiting	123	Total Income	\$56,515	Pre-reunion Mailing	944
Total Expenses	\$12,660	Web Site Service	1,409	Total Expenses	\$45,828	Parris Island Lunch	1,778
Balance	\$ 4,091	Donation to MCL	100	Balance	\$10,687	Patriot's Point	2,160
Carryover from 2007	\$19,579	Buddy Fund	650	Carryover from 2008	\$23,670	Bus to Events	5,100
2008 Ending Balance	\$23,670	VTA Logo Redesign	250	2009 Ending Balance	\$34,357	Sgt Grit	2,190
		**Miscellaneous	<u>1,018</u>			Mug Order	1,035
		Total Expenses	\$12,660			Free Room Drawing	446
						Guest Speaker	473
						Beer/Soda	1,464
						Mailing/Shipping	1,486
						**Misc. Expense	<u>9,282</u>
						Reunion Total	\$35,923

* In memory of John Osborne
**Membership Cards, Bumper Stickers, Envelopes, Postage, etc.

*Postage, mailings, envelopes, etc.
**Reunion art, decals, name badges, totebags, table cloths, easels, patches, signs, pizza night, Fallen Heroes, etc.

Respectfully Submitted,
James P. Coan, Treasurer

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

If you haven't already, please send your 2010 dues (\$30) to:
John Wear, USMC VTA, 5537 Lower Mountain Road, New Hope, PA 18938

