



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

**Now  
Quarterly!**

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

# NO ex-Marines, no former Marines...



**New Commandant says  
*we are all called "Marines!"*** Pg. 32

# CUSTOMIZED VTA GOLF SHIRTS

Vietnam Tankers Association designed golf shirts from Sgt. Grit are here waiting for you to customize them. Please view the order form below, and use the corresponding numbers when ordering.



Red shirt with copy (all color shirts except black)



Black shirt logo colors (black shirt only)



Logo with Ribbons (all color shirts)

Shirt Size	Write in Your Size	Shirt Cost	Enter Shirt Color	Enter Text Option #*	Embroidery Code #	OR	Check Box for Ribbon Artwork	Ribbon Code #	Quantity Ordered
S,M,L,XL		\$34.99				OR			
XXL		\$39.99				OR			
XXXL		\$41.99				OR			
XXXXL		\$44.99				OR			
XXXXXL		\$49.99				OR			

*Text Options	Shirt Color Choices	Embroidery Code #	Ribbon Code #
1. First Tanks 2. Third Tanks 3. Fifth Tanks 4. First & Third Tanks 5. First & Fifth Tanks 6. Third & Fifth Tanks 7. 1st, 3rd & 5th Tanks 8. Marine Tanker 9. Tankless Wife 10. Treadhead Wife 11. USMC Vietnam Tankers	Red Blue Yellow Tan	GS36	GS38
	Black	GS37 ←	→ GS39

These codes are for black shirts only!

**To place an order: Call Sgt. Grit at 1-888-668-1775 OR go to our website, USMCVTA.org and click on the Company Store.**

**HOW TO USE ORDER FORM**  
Use the code numbers where asked on the order form for what you want on your shirt. Keep in mind you can only have a line of text OR the ribbons below the logo - NOT BOTH! Black shirts use different code numbers for the shirt and ribbon code; the text options remain the same for all shirts.

Women's Shirts Order Form	Shirt Size	Write in Your Size	Shirt Cost	Enter Shirt Color	Embroidery Code #	Enter Text Option #	Quantity Ordered
	S,M,L,XL		\$34.99	Shirt Color Choices: WHITE or NAVY	WGS4		
	XXL		\$39.99		WGS4		

## Letter from the President

I am happy to announce that The Sponson Box will now appear four times a year instead of three. This will make some of the information like VA news a little more current and you will get more stories than before. Just a reminder note that unless we continue to receive your personal sea stories about your time in Vietnam, we will not be able to keep the quality & the quantity of editions that you have come to expect.

It has been my fortune to be one of the members that attended our very first reunion in Washington D.C. back in July of 1999. And since that time I have sat on the Board of Directors in different roles, which has afforded me a ringside seat to the many changes within the organization. One recent change is the increased activity of our brother organization, the USMC Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation. I am seeing all sorts of e-mails asking our membership for their stories, photos and mementos of their time in Vietnam. I am delighted that the VTHF is renewing its efforts in garnering and documenting our history and the role of Marine tanks during the Vietnam War. With that said, I implore you to send duplicates of anything that you are submitting to both organizations, or at least that you send it to the USMC VTA first and we will pass it on to the VTHF afterwards. I ask you for this method of distribution most especially if you have any thoughts of your pictures or stories appearing in The Sponson Box and/or on the VTA website for our membership to enjoy.

QUESTION: Did you ever hear that eating apricots was bad luck? I believe this was a superstition shared only within the Third Marine Division during our war. I do not recall exactly where or when I first heard of this superstition and I wondered if any of you can share an "apricots" story with us? If you have a story about apricots, we would love to hear it.

There is no doubt that a "buzz" has started over our upcoming reunion. We have already received several checks and registration forms. Honors of being the very first go to Roger McVey; he sent us his registration materials in January. Roger is a fairly new member, having attended his first reunion in Charleston. He says that he can't wait for San Diego! The dates of the reunion are locked in stone since we have signed a contract with the hotel. You should be aware that you can extend your stay 3 days on either side of the reunion dates and still get the reunion room rate of \$109.00 per night. Just so you know, the first day (August 17) is a "Travel to The Reunion" date and the last date (August 21) is the "Return Home Date" and there are no sanctioned activities planned for those days. If you would like to make personal plans for the "open" days, you can contact the hotel's concierge service (1-800-772-8527) and they will be more than happy to help you with your activity plans. One word of caution: Travel to Mexico is not recommended. If you want to relive any of your past visits to "TJ", this is NOT the time to do it with the drug cartel troubles Mexico is having.

Please note on Page 18 that we are announcing a brand new Vietnam Tankers Association Scholarship Program!

Semper Fidelis,

John

"Liberty must at all hazards be supported...  
Liberty, once lost, is lost forever.  
Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives."

John Adams

## Letter to the Editor

John Wear,  
I just could not start this note with a "Dear John." I've heard of too many men complain about receiving one in the field and having bad thoughts (or worse!).

This note is in reference to my dues, my purchasing a VTA jacket patch and the article (one of many) in the 2010 - 2nd Sponson Box, written by Resa Kirkland, titled "Vindication of the Vietnam Veterans - You were Right, America was Wrong." As a member of the 5th Tank Battalion Special Landing Force (SLF) "Alfa," we (including my M-51 Heavy Tank Recovery Vehicle) had to punch our way out of many situations exactly as detailed in the article. Well done!!!

The 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment (2/3) and 5th Tanks had the same problem at the kick off of the Tet Offensive while exchanging duties with the 3rd Battalion, 1st Marines (3/1) at the Da Nang boat launch/beach area. Tanks, amtracs, and infantry of both battalions greeted "Mr. Charles" in the open and in town...but his efforts to overcome our Marines were to no avail. "Charlie" used his tricks at 9th MAB while attempting to capture the compound. Marine infantry, one tiger, and my M-51 arrived with strong suggestions as to the error of Charlie's decision to use locals (whether they were civilians or VC plants among the civilians) but none of them made their goal. That was the day the Commanding General was shot out of the air while attempting to leave the secured compound. During the time that I was in the hospital recovering from wounds, a fellow "Purple Bogey Wheel" recipient & I found out how bad we were and how hard the CG fought before dying. The story that I mentioned above that was in the last Sponson Box awakened my memories and my anger in direct correlation to what our Marines and soldiers are dealing with today. From incompetent DoD leadership, lousy news reporting and political stupidity. How

sad. As soon as I can, I'll send you photos form your review and possible use in the Sponson Box and on the new website.

Semper Fi

Anthony Rusnak  
Warren, MI  
(586) 268-8913

John,

Looking forward to getting together in San Diego. I hope to make the most of the activities - especially getting together with fellow Vietnam Tankers. It will be great to have a few "cool ones" with some of the Alfa Co, 3rd Tankers (July 65 - March 66). I transferred to Div HQ in March 66. I Got promoted out of the best job & experience of my Marine Corps career (as Skipper of a Marine tank company). See you in August.

Semper Fi,

Fid  
Fidelas Jarnot  
(760) 728-0992

Hello John.

I was recently doing some research for a friend of mine who lost a loved one in

the Tet offensive at Hue on February 23, 1968. I ran across your comment on the photo by John Olson that appeared in the March 8, 1968 issue of Life magazine of wounded Marines being hauled out of Hue on a tank. Have I got the right John Wear? If yes, I thought it might be possible that you knew the loved one of my friend. He was a Marine and a tanker. Please let me know if you are the John Wear who was in Hue during Tet 1968.

Thanks,

Jim Goins (father of a Marine)

John,

Thanks, John, and thanks for your service for our country. I was 16 in February of '68. My Mom subscribed to Life magazine. I will never forget when my Mom opened the Life magazine with the photo of the wounded on the tank. When she saw the young Marine in the foreground with the chest wound she gasped and said, "My God, that's Eugene Hodges!" My sisters looked at the photo and agreed that it was Eugene. We lived in a small town in East Texas and if anyone lost a loved one in the war, the whole town



Photo © John Olson

## New Members for 2011 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sponson Box

### Raymond S Berry

5914 Post Road  
Montauge, MI 49437  
Phone: (231) 893-6114  
A & C Cos, 3rd ATs, '66 – '67  
MOS: 0353  
DOB: 7/9/46  
Wife: M'Liss Ann  
Recruited by: Armando Moreno

### F. "Rusty" DeRoma

42 Norway Park  
Hyde Park, MA 02136  
Phone: (617) 361-3499  
Cell: (617) 799-5137  
H&S - A Co, 1st ATs, '67 – '68  
MOS: 2143  
DOB: 4/10/48  
Wife: Kathleen  
Recruited by: Website

### Benedict S Hanas

PO Box 224  
Amargosa Valley, NV 89020  
Phone: (775) 273-1331  
Cell: (775) 990-9858  
C Co, 3rd Tanks, '63  
MOS: 0353  
DOB: 7/26/42  
Wife: Lana  
Recruited by: Ken Zebal

### Brian T Jefferies

6022 Chrystell Lane  
Houston, TX 77092-3353  
Phone: (713) 686-8154  
Cell: (713) 249-0793  
C Co, 1st Tanks, '69 – '70  
MOS: 2531  
DOB: 11/14/47  
Wife: Jane  
Recruited by: Website

### Harry L Moore

81 Old Braddock Road  
Lemont Furnace, PA 15456-1104  
Phone: (724) 437-3667  
Cell: (724) 323-6137  
B Co, 3rd Tanks, '65  
B Co, 1st Tanks, '66  
MOS: ???  
DOB: ???  
Wife: Barbara Joyce  
Recruited by: Website

### Charles M Musser

11530 W Kalamansi Dr  
Marana, AZ 85653  
Phone: (520) 308-4548  
Cell: (314) 518-5319  
B Co, 3rd Tanks, '65 – '66  
MOS: 1811  
DOB: 7/17/45  
Wife: Deborah  
Recruited by: John Wear

### David J Scanlon

34 Homestead Circle  
Old Lyme, CT 06371  
Phone: (860) 434-8893  
B Co, 3rd Tanks, '65 – '66  
MOS: 1811  
DOB: 6/4/43  
Recruited by: John Wear

### John W Trower

3205 Inspiration Drive  
Colorado Springs, CO 80917  
Phone: (719) 573-5622  
Cell: (719) 641-8146  
Alfa Co, 5th ATs, '67 – '68  
MOS: 0353  
DOB: 5/1/49  
Recruited by: Mark Damschen

### William Richards

726 W Park  
Butte, MT 59701  
Phone: (406) 782-2111  
B Co, 5th Tanks, '68  
H&S Co, 3rd Tanks, '68 – '69  
MOS: 1811  
Recruited by: Gerry Hearne

## Board of Directors 2007–2009

### Executive Directors

#### John Wear, President

5537 Lower Mountain Road; New Hope, PA 18938  
(215) 794-9052 · E-mail: johnwear2@verizon.net

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

304 Abbey Court; Canton, GA 30115  
(770) 365-3711 · Email: repv@comcast.net

#### Jim Coan, Treasurer

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

#### Ronald C. Knight, Secretary

720 Quail Run Court; Alpharetta, GA 30005-8920  
(770) 623-9237 · E-mail: rckusmcvta@att.net

### Directors

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

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

#### Carl Fleischman

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

#### Dave "Doc" Forsyth

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

#### Fred Kellogg

15013 NE 16th St.; Vancouver, WA 98684-3605  
(360) 609-3404 E-mail: kellogg@comcast.net

#### Rick Lewis

5663 Balboa Ave. #366; San Diego, CA 92111-2795  
(858) 297-8909 E-mail: ricklent@aol.com

#### Lt Col Raymond Stewart, USMC (ret)

President, Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation  
707 SW 350th Court; Federal Way, WA 98023  
(253) 835-9083 · Email: usmcvthf@comcast.net

#### Robert H. Vaxter

45749 Prairiegrass Court; Belleville, MI 48111-6428  
(734) 385-6395 Email: RVaxter1@comcast.net

### Committees & Chairmen

#### Terry Bocchino

Chaplin's Assistant  
518-537-2509 EST

#### Mike Burnett

Awards & Medals  
209-383-2261 PST

#### SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carrol

Nominating Chair & Reunion Chair  
CRCS/CR Representative  
651-592-1121 CST

#### Jim Coan

Audit & Finance  
520-378-9659 PST

#### CWO4 Bob Embesi

CRCS/CR Representative  
406-821-3075 MS

#### OPEN

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund

#### Lt. Col. Harris Himes

Chaplain  
406-375-0097 MST

#### Ron Knight

Member Data Integrity  
770-623-9237 EST

#### 1st Sgt. Rick Lewis

VA Information  
858-297-8909 PST

#### Bob Peavey

Fallen Heroes & Sponson Box Editor  
770-365-3711 EST

#### "Robbie" Robinson

National Recruiter  
409-385-6399 CST

#### Jon Stuermer

Webmaster  
jstuermer@gmail.com

Web Site: [www.usmcvta.org](http://www.usmcvta.org)

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.**

Robert Peavey – Editor & Publisher – repv@comcast.net

Tuyen Pham – Layout and Design

Sandra Coan – Proofing

Printed in the USA

#### ON THE COVER:

New incoming Commandant General James F. Amos, the 35th CMC, takes the review at Marine Barracks on October 22, 2010.



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

new it immediately. When the magazine arrived we had not heard that Eugene had been killed. As I recall, my Mom contacted some of Eugene's relatives and asked if they had heard any news about Eugene. They had not. Mom told them about the photo in Life. Members of his family looked at the photo and agreed that it was Eugene...they had no doubt. Eugene's Mom died years later still believing that the wounded Marine in the foreground on the tank was her son.

I had not thought about this in years until recently. While delivering my mail route I ran across a lady who is married to a nephew of Eugene Hodges. He was 9 years old at the time Eugene died in Hue (February 23, 1968). Her husband wanted a copy of the March 8, '68 issue of Life to show to his children and grandchildren so that they would better appreciate the sacrifice that their uncle Eugene had made. I contacted an antique book collector and he has found a copy, which we are going to give to the family.

In the course of searching for a copy of the magazine I ran across the discussion about the photo on the Popasmoke (the USMC Helicopter Association) site in which the wounded soldier in the foreground is identified as James Blaine. I asked the lady whom I was getting the magazine for if she was aware of this and she said that her husband and the rest of the Hodges family were already aware that the Marine in the photo is identified as someone other than Eugene, but they still believe it IS him and you know.... that's all that really matters.

Wesley Eugene Hodges was a tank crewman with A Co, 1st Tank Bn, 1st MarDiv, III MAF. He died in Hue on February 23, 1968 at the age of 19. Cause of death is listed as artillery/rocket. Is it possible that you might have known him or maybe that you know someone who might have known him and fought with him in 'nam? Thanks for your time and again thanks for your service.

Jim Goins

*Editors Note: It turns out, Mr Goins is a mail carrier and delivers mail to VTA member Carl Lemon in Lufkin, Texas.*

John,

I would like to let you know that we totally enjoyed the reunion we attended in Charleston last year and we do look forward to attending the 2011 reunion in San Diego. We are already looking for Vietnam Tankers who are currently not affiliated with the group, in hopes to recruit them.

We are upset that we had to leave on Friday and miss the planned events, however, as I mentioned to you, our God Daughter was going through a very tragic event. Her Son, who while in the care of his Father, was burned over 60% of his body. As Nolan, the child, was only 20 months old, this was extremely traumatic, and very suspicious.

Nolan is still under care at the burn center at Loyola University Medical Center, where he is still under-going skin grafts. It is still uncertain whether he will need to have his entire feet amputated, or if it will just be his toes and half of the feet.

I do appreciate that you indicated a willingness to refund the money we paid for the events that we missed. We certainly appreciate this, as we are spending a lot of time in Illinois, and trying to assist in the rapidly rising medical costs, and daily expenditures of our niece, who is fortunate to stay in the Ronald McDonald House, but will be unable to resume her full-time position for quite awhile.

I look forward to seeing you again at the next reunion. If there is anything that we can do to assist, please let me know.

Tom Glisch

John,

I was just reading an article in the Reader's Digest about the Stolen Valor Act. As a Nam vet we know and have met plenty of people... (I really hate to call them men) ...who have lied about being in-country. I liked the line in the story where they said fewer than 500 Navy Seals ever served in Vietnam. The person in the article said, "I KNOW, I've met all 30,000 of them!!!!"

Just thought you might appreciate the line.

S/F

Todd Phillips

42 Years ago on 10 Nov 1968, my daughter was born while I was in the field with Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks. The Red Cross telegram didn't say whether it was a boy or girl so I had to wait several days until I received a letter from my family. The company First Shirt asked me, "Harper, isn't this taking the USMC Birthday a little too far?"

I just replied. "It's all under control, Top!"

John Harper

*President's Note: When Dan "Stump" Post's story appeared in the last issue of our magazine, he asked me for a copy for himself. He got the copy and commented below:*

Hi John,

Yes, thank you very much for the copy of the Sponson Box. My wife didn't know I had written the story and she was so shocked to read it. I very much appreciate how much your organization does for Marines!!!!

Semper Fi

"Stump"

Dan Post

16538 SW Two Wood Way  
Indiantown, FL 34956

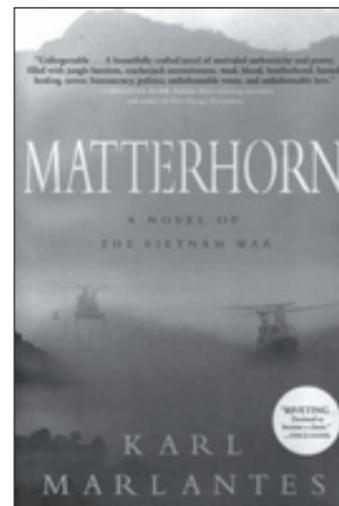
Hi John,

In the last Sponson Box, you-all did a very nice tribute to my buddy, Jerry Holly. I was very happy to see the article with Clyde's well-written story and the picture of Jerry in the driver's compartment. I just thought that maybe you would like to see Jerry's Bronze Star citation that he received for the night of our "rat patrol." They awarded three Purple Hearts & two Bronze Stars that night. Ronny Lyons received the other Bronze Star. Ronny was the TC of C-35, which was the tank that the crew, Jerry, Ronny & Jim Littman received the "Hearts." If you would like, you can forward this to Dick and the Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation.

S/F

Todd Phillips

(740) 676-7675



## LAST ISSUE'S BOOK REVIEW

Never has a story or article generated as much feedback as our review of the new Vietnam War novel, *Matterhorn*, by Karl Marlantes... and all of it positive. It seems most readers are passionate about the book and just had to add to the review. Attached are a few of the e-mails we received:

From Pete Rich,

I just finished *Matterhorn*. If that was fiction, it was the closest thing to reality that I've read in a long time.

This is going to sound crazy, but as you know I spent my first 90 days in-country as a grunt platoon commander. I flew into Dong Ha just after a rocket attack and jumped into a jeep that was headed to Vandergrift (formally called Stud). I was assigned to an infantry company but do not remember the company or battalion designations. After two days of getting gear, meeting my platoon and being briefed, we boarded choppers and headed north and east to open a fire support base. We secured the mountaintop, cleared it for the arty, and spent the next month running patrols up and down the mountain slopes. It rained the entire time we were on the mountain. The guns could only fire west and south, so I think we were right on the border of Laos and possibly near the Matterhorn location described in the book. I had an incident with a squad leader and three grunts who did not want to walk point on one of our daylight patrols. They were African Americans, short timers, and felt that they had earned the right to not to walk point. After about ten minutes of discussion they agreed to walk point. I do not think that their change of heart was due to my persuasiveness or logic. They held fast until I said that I thought that we ought to get the Gunny involved in our discussion. They knew how the Gunny would handle it. They walked point and rotated home three weeks later.

After about a month, I went on emergency leave due to my Mother's passing and when I returned to the grunt outfit, we were providing perimeter security for Vandergrift. They said that shortly after I left on emergency leave, the grunts and arty abandoned the fire support base and returned to Vandergrift. Sounds very similar to the book. Then in January 1969, I was assigned to Bravo Co., 3rd Tanks and lived happily ever after.

Thanks for recommending the book.

From LtCol Everett Tunget  
USMC (Ret)

While I recommend this book to all who have not read it, I warn them that it is bound to recall memories possibly best left somewhere in the back recesses of one's own mind. While it is a work of fiction, the stark realism of what Marine "grunts" had to endure fighting against NVA troops in the DMZ area and certainly throughout the rest of I Corps during the latter years of the Vietnam War is poignantly described. The author may have taken a bit of literary license for dramatic effect in some of his writing, but overall I can accept his story as a factual account of Marines fighting a war we were not allowed to win. As I read this book, I was reminded of Charles Dickens' work, "A Tale of Two Cities". There was a statement in his book setting the stage for his story which said, "It was the best of times; it was the worst of times". If I may paraphrase Mr. Dickens' statement, the "Matterhorn" vividly portrays "the best of the Corps; the worst of the Corps", both in terms of combat efficiency and basic leadership from the top down in Marine Corps operations in Vietnam.

From acts of heroism to acts of cowardice; from acts of laudable humanitarianism to acts of sheer disregard for suffering; from commendable small unit leadership to arrogant, self-serving posturing of senior commanders; from acts attempting to tone down racial tensions to acts of blatant racism (both black and white members), this book touches all the bases. While Vietnam was not the most "popular war" in Marine Corps history, it was not unique in terms of the foregoing comparisons except, in my opinion, for the racism involved in combat units, especially the infantry.

During my tour of duty in Vietnam from early '66 to early '67 with the 3rd Tank Battalion, I did not encounter any racism. In the tank company I commanded, the black Marines were primarily career NCO's, well respected by their officers, peers and the tankers under their supervision. When I left the company and moved to Battalion Headquarters as the Operations Officer, again I saw no overt evidence of racial problems in our headquarters personnel. This begs the question, then, as to why the situation changed so drastically during the latter stages of the Vietnam War. Several factors come to mind to maybe explain this turnaround.

When full-scale U.S. military participation to assist South Vietnamese forces in combating the Viet Cong insurgency was

*(Continued on page 8)*

initiated in 1965, Selective Service draft quotas were increased accordingly. Until sometime in 1966, the Marine Corps was still an all-volunteer armed service. (I can attest to this as I served as a Recruiting Officer in Cleveland, OH for three years just prior to my assignment to Vietnam.) To support and maintain expanded troop levels, it was mandated that the Marine Corps start accepting draftees from then on to the conclusion of the Vietnam War, regardless of what had been previous standards and motivation, in particular, to serve in the Marine Corps. As a result, many young black draftees were involuntarily detailed to enter the Marine Corps for their two-year period of obligated active service. A high percentage of them were assigned infantry MOS's as that was the greatest replacement need due to increasing casualty rates.

The inclusion of black draftees came on the heels of the passage of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, a measure to end segregation and to ensure blacks were granted other basic rights in this country. "Black Power", a term used often by the black protagonists in the Matterhorn book, was originally coined as a call for blacks to take pride in themselves. The Black Panther Party, along with other groups, corrupted the intended meaning of "Black Power" and spurred more militant actions to represent their willingness to defend themselves and to encourage blacks to become more aware of their rights. The principle black character in the book, China, viewed himself as a Black Panther adherent and assumed a leadership role over the other blacks in his company to foment unrest and to call attention to real or imagined slights directed toward blacks in general and black Marines in particular. To place an exclamation point on China's efforts in this regard, the following is an excerpt of a conversation China had with a fellow black Marine.

"China, I don't want to be talkin' politics. I'm tired and I gotta go fight a war on an empty stomach."

China Relies: "That's right. A war against brown people. James Rado say the draft is white people sending black people to fight yellow people to protect the country they stole from red people. No black man should be forced to fight to defend a racist government. That be Article Six of the Black Panther Ten-Point Program."

I mentioned earlier that I had not witnessed acts of racism or examples of militant "Black Power" during my tour in Vietnam. It wasn't until I returned from Vietnam and commanded the Marine Barracks at NAS, Lemoore, CA that I found myself confronting at least the abuse of "Black Power." In 1968, the first group of Marine draftees was approaching the end of their two year commitment. Given the time spent in boot camp and a thirteen-month tour in Vietnam, this group had something like six to eight months yet to serve on active duty. Headquarters Marine Corps determined that the best use for many of these Marines was to use them to fill the T/O requirements of Marine Barracks. During that year I received about eight black draftee Marines as replacements. One of them was a "China" Marine quite similar to the character in the book, Matterhorn. This was new territory to officers, my NCO's and me. With the need to maintain good order and discipline, be sensitive to valid complaints versus recognizing just plain "bitching," and

fulfilling our mission to provide security for the Air Station, these challenges kept our plates pretty full.

The Marine Corps survived the impact of the cultural change brought about by the Civil Rights Act. Breaking down the barriers to maintain a truly integrated fighting force was not achieved without some severe "growing pains." The Marine Corps is facing another cultural change by virtue of the repeal of the "Don't ask, don't tell" policy regarding openly serving homosexuals. This action may very well result in more "growing pains" to fully implement the new policy. However, I am certain the "best of the Corps" will overcome the "worst of the Corps" once again.

Semper Fi,

From Robert Skeels,

Thanks for your excellent review of the recent novel, "Matterhorn" or maybe the title of the book should have FSB Argonne by Karl Marlantes to be more accurate. Your analysis of the story was spot-on correct as to it being a true depiction of what the Marine grunt went through in Vietnam, and, except for the racial conflict, I agree with him. I used to go on platoon size operations for three weeks at a time in Vietnam and saw the grunt in his daily situation. For example, I would quietly walk the lines at night with a red lens flashlight as normally we would be in platoon sized ambush posture and at times he'd be asleep in his hastily dug two man hole. I would put the K-bar to his neck to scare him into staying awake, but then I would realize that his body was just giving out on him from a day in the jungle trying his best to do his job. I would see the leech on his face and the rat's eating his leftover c-rations at the bottom of his hole. You were mad due to the security lapse, but you just knew you were seeing something that the American public should have been allowed to see by the media.... an American Marine doing his absolute best to protect his country in an unpopular war.

From John Wear,

I read with some dismay Lt Col Otto Lehrack's letter of condemnation (in the August 2010 *Leatherneck*) for one of the finest, most well written and yes, classic novels of the Vietnam War, Karl Marlantes' *Matterhorn*. I have nothing but the utmost respect and give the highest praise for any and all of Col Lehrack's books. I do not know when or where Col Lehrack experienced the Vietnam War, but my war (January 1968 to February 1969) had just about each and every event that Mr. Marlantes recalls in his brutally honest and extremely well written account of the war in Southeast Asia. My war was experienced as a 20-year old corporal, tank commander. I did not hump the bushes or scale the steep mountains as Marlantes' grunts did, but we ate the same dirt. All of us, from the lowest private to our platoon commanders (and maybe even a skipper or two) got knee-walking, snot-flinging drunk when we were in the rear area and when we were not expected to stand guard duty that night. I had one skipper who spent the majority of

(Continued on page 18)

# THE DAY IT BECAME THE LONGEST WAR

BY CHARLES COOPER

"The President will see you at two o'clock."

It was a beautiful fall day in November of 1965, early in the Vietnam War-too beautiful a day to be what many of us, anticipating it, had been calling the "day of reckoning." We didn't know how accurate that label would be.

The Pentagon is a busy place. Its workday starts early-especially if, as the expression goes, "there's a war on." By seven o'clock, the staff of Admiral David L. McDonald, the Navy's senior admiral and Chief of Naval Operations, had started to work. Shortly after seven, Admiral McDonald arrived and began making final preparations for a meeting with President Lyndon Baines Johnson.

The Vietnam War was in its first year, and its uncertain direction troubled Admiral McDonald and the other service chiefs. They'd had a number of disagreements with Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara about strategy, and had finally requested a private meeting with the Commander in Chief-a perfectly legitimate procedure. Now, after many delays, the Joint Chiefs were finally to have that meeting. They hoped it would determine whether the US military would continue its seemingly directionless buildup to fight a protracted ground war, or take bold measures that

would bring the war to an early and victorious end. The bold measures they would propose were to apply massive air power to the head of the enemy, Hanoi, and to close North Vietnam's harbors by mining them.

The situation was not a simple one, and for several reasons. The most important reason was that North Vietnam's neighbor to the north was Communist China. Only 12 years had passed since the Korean War had ended in stalemate. The aggressors in that war had been the North Koreans. When the North Koreans' defeat had appeared to be inevitable, communist China had sent hundreds of thousands of its Peoples' Liberation Army volunteers to the rescue.

Now, in this new war, the North Vietnamese aggressor had the logistic support of the Soviet Union and, more to the point, of neighboring Communist China. Although we had the air and naval forces with which to paralyze North Vietnam, we had to consider the possible reactions of the Chinese and the Russians.

Both China and the Soviet Union had pledged to support North Vietnam in the "war of national liberation" it was fighting to reunite the divided country, and both had the wherewithal to cause major problems. An important unknown was what the Russians would do if prevented

from delivering goods to their communist protégé in Hanoi. A more important question concerned Communist China, next-door neighbor to North Vietnam. How would the Chinese react to a massive pummeling of their ally? More specifically, would they enter the war as they had done in North Korea? Or would they let the Vietnamese, for centuries a traditional enemy, fend for themselves? The service chiefs had considered these and similar questions, and had also asked the Central Intelligence Agency for answers and estimates.

The CIA was of little help, though it produced reams of text, executive summaries of the texts, and briefs of the executive summaries-all top secret, all extremely sensitive, and all of little use. The principal conclusion was that it was impossible to predict with any accuracy what the Chinese or Russians might do.

Despite the lack of a clear-cut intelligence estimate, Admiral McDonald and the other Joint Chiefs did what they were paid to do and reached a conclusion. They decided unanimously that the risk of the Chinese or Soviets reacting to massive US measures taken in North Vietnam was acceptably low, but only if we acted without

(Continued on page 10)

## Looking For

Hello,

I am a Marine who was at the bridge at Hill 55 on 05-AUG-67 when it was overrun by NVA sappers. I am trying to find the Marine tankers who were on the tank that morning at 050215. I have

heard that a Marine named Jim Noyes was the tank commander, but I really do not know if this is true. I do know that the tank was from 1st Tanks, Company B. I need to talk to any Marine that was there or any Marine who heard the radio transmutations between the tank and our

C.O. of Delta 1/7 Marines. Thank you much for your help.

Semper Fi,

George Schneider  
(931) 739-3335

gjschneider2@earthlink.net

## The Day It Became...

(Continued from page 9)

delay. Unfortunately, the Secretary of Defense and his coterie of civilian “whiz kids” did not agree with the Joint Chiefs, and McNamara and his people were the ones who were actually steering military strategy. In the view of the Joint Chiefs, the United States was piling on forces in Vietnam without understanding the consequences. In the view of McNamara and his civilian team, we were doing the right thing. This was the fundamental dispute that had caused the Chiefs to request the seldom-used private audience with the Commander in Chief in order to present their military recommendations directly to him. McNamara had finally granted their request.

The 1965 Joint Chiefs of Staff had ample combat experience. Each was serving in his third war. The Chairman was General Earle Wheeler, US Army, highly regarded by the other members.

General Harold Johnson was the Army Chief of Staff. A World War II prisoner of the Japanese, he was a soft-spoken, even-tempered, deeply religious man.

General John P. McConnell, Air Force Chief of Staff, was a native of Arkansas and a 1932 graduate of West Point.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps was General Wallace M. Greene, Jr., a slim, short, all-business Marine. General Greene was a Naval Academy graduate and a zealous protector of the Marine Corps concept of controlling its own air resources as part of an integrated air-ground team.

Last and by no means least was Admiral McDonald, a Georgia minister's son, also a Naval Academy graduate, and a naval aviator. While Admiral McDonald was a most capable leader, he was also a reluctant warrior. He did not like what he saw emerging as a national commitment. He did not really want the US to get involved with land warfare, believing as he did that the Navy could apply sea power against North Vietnam very effectively by mining, blockading, and assisting in a bombing campaign, and in this way help to bring the war to a swift and satisfactory conclusion.

The Joint Chiefs intended that the prime topics of the meeting with the President would be naval matters--the mining and blockading of the port of Haiphong and naval support of a bombing campaign aimed at Hanoi. For that reason, the Navy was to furnish a briefing map, and that became my responsibility. We mounted a suitable map on a large piece of plywood, then coated it with clear acetate so that the chiefs could mark on it with grease pencils during the discussion. The whole thing weighed about 30 pounds.

The Military Office at the White House agreed to set up an easel in the Oval Office to hold the map. I would accompany Admiral McDonald to the White House with the map, put the map in place when the meeting started, then get out. There would be no strap-hangers at the military summit meeting with Lyndon Johnson.

The map and I joined Admiral McDonald in his staff car for the short drive to the White House, a drive that was memorable only because of the silence. My admiral was totally preoccupied.

The chiefs' appointment with the President was for two o'clock, and Admiral McDonald and I arrived about 20 minutes early. The chiefs were ushered into a fairly large room across the hall from the Oval Office. I propped the map board on the arms of a fancy chair where all could view it, left two of the grease pencils in the tray attached to the bottom of the board, and stepped out into the corridor. One of the chiefs shut the door, and they conferred in private until someone on the White House staff interrupted them about fifteen minutes later. As they came out, I retrieved the map, then joined them in the corridor outside the President's office.

Precisely at two o'clock President Johnson emerged from the Oval Office and greeted the chiefs. He was all charm. He was also big; at three or more inches over six feet tall and something on the order of 250 pounds, he was bigger than any of the chiefs. He personally ushered them into his office, all the while delivering gracious and solicitous comments with a Texas accent far more pronounced than the one that came through when he spoke on television. Holding the map board as the chiefs entered, I peered between them, trying to find the

easel. There was none. The President looked at me, grasped the situation at once, and invited me in, adding, “You can stand right over here.” I had become an easel--one with eyes and ears.

To the right of the door, not far inside the office, large windows framed evergreen bushes growing in a nearby garden. The President's desk and several chairs were farther in, diagonally across the room from the windows. The President positioned me near the windows, then arranged the chiefs in a semicircle in front of the map and its human easel. He did not offer them seats: they stood, with those who were to speak--Wheeler, McDonald, and McConnell--standing nearest the President. Paradoxically, the two whose services were most affected by a continuation of the ground buildup in Vietnam, Generals Johnson and Greene, stood farthest from the President. President Johnson stood nearest the door, about five feet from the map.

In retrospect, the setup--the failure to have an easel in place, the positioning of the chiefs on the outer fringe of the office, the lack of seating--did not augur well. The chiefs had expected the meeting to be a short one, and it met that expectation. They also expected it to be of momentous import, and it met that expectation, too. Unfortunately, it also proved to be a meeting that was critical to the proper pursuit of what was to become the longest, most divisive, and least conclusive war in our nation's history--a war that almost tore the nation apart.

As General Wheeler started talking, President Johnson peered at the map. In five minutes or so, the general summarized our entry into Vietnam, the current status of forces, and the purpose of the meeting. Then he thanked the President for having given his senior military advisers the opportunity to present their opinions and recommendations. Finally, he noted that although Secretary McNamara did not subscribe to their views, he did agree that a presidential-level decision was required. President Johnson, arms crossed, seemed to be listening carefully.

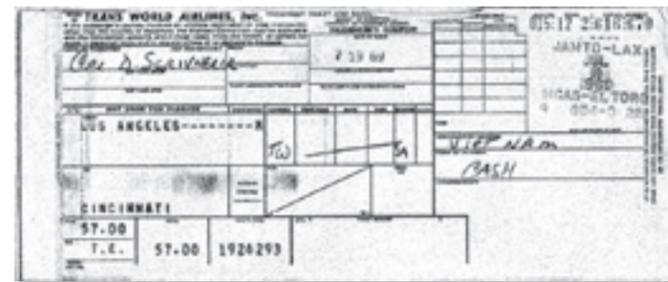
The essence of General Wheeler's presentation was that we had come to

(Continued on page 14)

# What Members are Doing

John,

While digging around in some old boxes from my Mom & Dad's place, I found this plane ticket stub. Notice the cost to fly from LA to Cincy!



\$57 from LA to Cincinnati on TWA

Hi John,

It was a pleasure speaking with you last night. It was an enlightening evening. Now being fully retired, I have the time to appreciate our organization. I attached a few photos from then and now. I met General Petraeus at a Purple Heart Ceremony held at the Purple Heart Hall of Honor, ([www.thepurpleheart.com](http://www.thepurpleheart.com)) which is located near me as well as the General's hometown.



General Petraeus and “JJ” Perillo

I can honestly say that even though I was with 1st Tank Bn. That it was only briefly. I came to Vietnam aboard the USS Thomaston in August of 1965 as a member of 7th Engineers. I spent time attached to 1/3, since things were hectic then and I'm not sure if anyone really knew what was going on, since we were actually attached to the 3rd Division in spite of the fact that we were really part of the First. In June of 1966, I was hospitalized on Okinawa and upon my return to Vietnam, I was assigned to

The postcard I sent to them when I stayed overnight in Tokyo on way back to Vietnam Jan 69... (for my 6 month extension)

I first left CONUS on Nov 3, 1967 and extended my tour for 6 months. I came home on Dec 5, 1968 for 35 days and then back to Vietnam for six months. The government paid for the Dec 68 tickets, which was part of the extension deal. The ticket that you see is from my final trip home on July 19, 1969. I got married on July 26, 1969. No one was sure I was going to make it home in time for the wedding.

(Cpl) Doug Scrivner

[docascriv@live.com](mailto:docascriv@live.com)

USMC 67-71 RVN 68-69

“SAEPE EXPERTUS”, “SEMPER FIDELIS”, “FRATRES AETERNI”  
Often Tested Always Faithful Brothers Forever

H&S 1st Tanks because of my MOS 2161 (machinist). For the brief period that I was in 1st Tanks, I was temporarily attached to 5th Marines, since at that time we were sending people to various units for reinforcement purposes. I look forward to meeting you in San Diego.

Semper Fi

John “JJ” Perillo

Phone: 845-298-2569

Email: [j.j.perillo@att.net](mailto:j.j.perillo@att.net)



Me in 1965 – RVN



Hi John,  
 Here's me and my mail-order Ukrainian bride. Not bad, eh?  
 Actually she is my goddaughter & I at the "Fabulous Tucson Cotillion Ball."  
 "Andy" Anderson  
 (520) 275-9761

*Note: Andy's picture appeared on the cover of our last issue. He was the tall guy on the right.*

Hi John,

I recently took a tour of Iwo Jima with Military Historical Tours. They do tours of most of the WW II Pacific Campaign, which of course is close to the hearts of all Marines. The tour that I took was something I just had to do. They only allow visitors on the island one day a year, and they're not to happy about that one day. I am told that the Japanese military have all the shit birds and brig time men there. The Marine detachment that conducts the visit comes from Okinawa, and we had a chartered day flight from Guam. We stayed on Guam for four days. When we arrived on Iwo Jima, they took us all over the island on mini buses. Then the band goes up to Mt. Suribachi and plays "The National Anthem." That was great...but when they played "The Marine Corps Hymn," every Marine there just broke down with tears of pride, and I have to tell you that my heart was so full of being a Marine. There has never been a day in my entire life that I haven't been proud of being a Marine, but that day on Iwo Jima was my best day! Just seeing what those guys endured in the battle to capture the island was amazing. There was absolutely no cover. They were completely out in the open most of the time. There was a horrible smell of sulfur, just like rotten eggs. It was in my nose for a week. There was no water anywhere at all. The Jap engineers built concrete water cisterns on top of the high ground area and when it rained, the water would flow down a pipe system that they built. That's where the pole came from that they used to raise the flag that day during the battle. That is my little bit of factual info that I got during my visit. I could go on and on...and when I see you I will tell more that I learned on my trip.

On the subject of the Iwo Jima sand (or volcanic ash, which is actually what it really is) that I want to send to you for the San Diego reunion auction, I was thinking that the container should be clear so it can be seen.

Take care for now.

Phil Buffalo  
 (201) 835-2781



Phil Buffalo at Iwo Jima

*Editor's Note: We are planning on having an engraved acrylic display created to hold the sand that Phil is donating for the auction during the upcoming reunion. Bring your money for this is one of the most unique items we have ever offered.*

John & Bob,

Hey guys I just thought I'd send you a photo of someone I most



recently met, General Michael Regner USMC. Commanding General 1st Marine Division. I met him while attending a luncheon at the Marine Memorial Club in San Francisco last Thursday 1/16/11.

I mentioned that my youngest son was serving with a unit in his command (1st Intel. 1st Mar. Div 1st MEF fwd). I advised him that my wife and I would be going to Camp Pendleton for a welcome home event being held for our returning son/brothers (Monday 1/24/2011). He said to bring my son to meet him but I have a feeling that Dominic, after just getting off of an airplane from Afghanistan, would not want to sit and chat with his division commander. Ever since he attended our reunion in Las Vegas, he looks forward to the next. One other note, if you recall, it was Dominick who outbid

*(Continued on page 33)*

## GUESS WHO Contest

Can you guess who the person is in this photo? The first person to contact Bob Peavey with the right answer will receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.



## GUESS WHO Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner was John Grooms who identified Sgt. Gerry Hearn. John served with Gerry in Chu Lai during 1966 and sent in the below photo..

John Grooms,  
 Peterson, Hearne  
 & Chaney on their  
 way to a Grease  
 Gun convention.



*The Day It Became...*  
(Continued from page 10)

an early moment of truth in our ever-increasing Vietnam involvement. We had to start using our principal strengths-air and naval power-to punish the North Vietnamese, or we would risk becoming involved in another protracted Asian ground war with no prospects of a satisfactory solution. Speaking for the chiefs, General Wheeler offered a bold course of action that would avoid protracted land warfare. He proposed that we isolate the major port of Haiphong through naval mining, blockade the rest of the North Vietnamese coastline, and simultaneously start bombing Hanoi with B-52's.

General Wheeler then asked Admiral McDonald to describe how the Navy and Air Force would combine forces to mine the waters off Haiphong and establish a naval blockade. When Admiral McDonald finished, General McConnell added that speed of execution would be essential, and that we would have to make the North Vietnamese believe that we would increase the level of punishment if they did not sue for peace.

Normally, time dims our memories, but it hasn't dimmed this one. My memory of Lyndon Johnson on that day remains crystal clear. While General Wheeler, Admiral McDonald, and General McConnell spoke, he seemed to be listening closely, communicating only with an occasional nod. When General McConnell finished, General Wheeler asked the President if he had any questions. Johnson waited a moment or so, then turned to Generals Johnson and Greene, who had remained silent during the briefing, and asked, "Do you fully support these ideas?" He followed with the thought that it was they who were providing the ground troops, in effect acknowledging that the Army and the Marines were the services that had most to gain or lose as a result of this discussion. Both generals indicated their agreement with the proposal. Seemingly deep in thought, President Johnson turned his back on them for a minute or so, then suddenly discarding the calm, patient demeanor he had maintained throughout

the meeting, whirled to face them and exploded.

I almost dropped the map. He screamed obscenities, he cursed them personally, he ridiculed them for coming to his office with their "military advice." Noting that it was he who was carrying the weight of the free world on his shoulders, he called them filthy names (shitheads, dumb shits, pompous ass holes) and used the "F-word" as an adjective more freely than a Marine in boot camp would use it. He then accused them of trying to pass the buck for World War III to him. It was unnerving, degrading.

After the tantrum, he resumed the calm, relaxed manner he had displayed earlier and again folded his arms. It was as though he had punished them, cowed them, and would now control them. Using soft-spoken profanities, he said something to the effect that they all knew now that he did not care about their military advice. After disparaging their abilities, he added that he did expect their help.

He suggested that each one of them change places with him and assume that five incompetents had just made these "military recommendations." He told them that he was going to let them go through what he had to go through when idiots gave him stupid advice, adding that he had the whole damn world to worry about, and it was time to see "what kind of guts you have." He paused, as if to let it sink in. The silence was like a palpable solid, the tension like that in a drumhead. After thirty or forty seconds of this, he turned to General Wheeler and demanded that Wheeler say what he would do if he were the President of the United States.

General Wheeler took a deep breath before answering. He was not an easy man to shake: his calm response set the tone for the others. He had known coming in, as had the others, that Lyndon Johnson was an exceptionally strong personality, and a venal and vindictive man as well. He had known that the stakes were high, and now realized that McNamara had prepared Johnson carefully for this meeting, which had been a charade.

Looking President Johnson squarely in the eye, General Wheeler told him that he understood the tremendous pressure and

sense of responsibility Johnson felt. He added that probably no other President in history had had to make a decision of this importance, and further cushioned his remarks by saying that no matter how much about the presidency he did understand, there were many things about it that only one human being could ever understand. General Wheeler closed his remarks by saying something very close to this: "You, Mr. President, are that one human being. I cannot take your place, think your thoughts, know all you know, and tell you what I would do if I were you. I can't do it, Mr. President. No man can honestly do it. Respectfully, sir, it is your decision and yours alone."

Apparently unmoved, Johnson asked each of the other Chiefs the same question. One at a time, they supported General Wheeler and his rationale. By now, my arms felt as though they were about to break. The map seemed to weigh a ton, but the end appeared to be near. General Greene was the last to speak.

When General Greene finished, President Johnson, who was nothing if not a skilled actor, looked sad for a moment, then suddenly erupted again, yelling and cursing, again using language that even a Marine seldom hears. He told them he was disgusted with their naive approach, and that he was not going to let some military idiots talk him into World War III.

He ended the conference by shouting "Get the hell out of my office!"

The Joint Chiefs of Staff had done their duty. They knew that the nation was making a strategic military error, and despite the rebuffs of their civilian masters in the Pentagon, they had insisted on presenting the problem as they saw it to the highest authority and recommending solutions. They had done so, and they had been rebuffed. That authority had not only rejected their solutions, but had also insulted and demeaned them. As Admiral McDonald and I drove back to the Pentagon, he turned to me and said that he had known tough days in his life, and sad ones as well, but "... this has got to have been the worst experience I could ever imagine."

The U.S. involvement in Vietnam lasted another ten years. The irony is that it began to end only when President

Richard Nixon, after some backstage maneuvering on the international scene, did precisely what the Joint Chiefs of Staff had recommended to President Johnson in 1965. Why had Johnson not only dismissed their recommendations, but also ridiculed them? It must have been that Johnson had lacked something. Maybe it

was foresight or boldness. Maybe it was the sophistication and understanding it took to deal with complex international issues. Or, since he was clearly a bully, maybe what he lacked was courage. We will never know. But had General Wheeler and the others received a fair hearing, and had their recommendations

received serious study, the United States may well have saved the lives of most of its more than 58,000 sons who died in a war that its major architect, Robert Strange McNamara, now considers to have been a tragic mistake. ♦

*To the Great  
Tank Park  
in the Sky*



**Douglas Fisher**

November 10, 2011

No other information available.

What better day to be taken by our Lord.

**Membership Information Changes for 2011 – 1<sup>st</sup> Sponson Box**

**Bobby Joe Blythe**

4615 W Oriole Ave  
Visalia, CA 93291  
Phone: (559) 713-6481  
Cell: (559) 381-3617  
Fax: (559) 713-6482

**Charles V Cummings**

Nickname: "Corky"  
813 Sigsbee Road (PMB47)  
Key West, FL 33040  
Phone: (941) 276-0560

**Ron Davidson**

65 Beasley Drive  
Lexington, KY 38351  
Phone: (731) 249-5450

**Morton D Hurt**

14535 – 190th Ave NE  
Woodinville, WA 98072-9383

**John Juarez**

Nickname: "Beaner"  
Wife: Linda

**Mike Matzenbacher**

2401 Via Mariposa West (Unit #3D)  
Laguna Woods, CA 92637  
Home: (949) 587 1769  
Cell: (310) 597 9256

**Harry L Moore**

Nickname: "Skip"

**John Perillo**

Nickname: "JJ"  
1st Tanks, '65 – '66

**Jerry Ravino**

118 – 175th Terrace Drive East (Unit B)  
Readington Shores, FL 33708-1271  
Phone: (727) 290-8888

**Russell Walters (Australia)**

Phone: 61-02-6495-924

[A two-part story with Part II running in the next issue]

# Route 9

## The Road to Khe Sanh

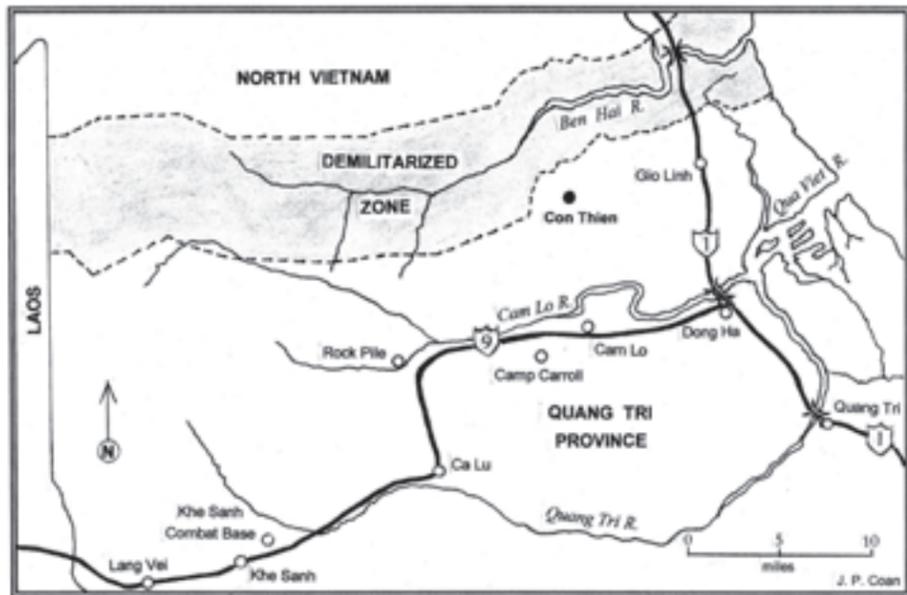
© JAMES P. COAN

### Part I: Storm Clouds Brewing

John Prados is the co-author with Chaplain Ray Stubbe of the highly acclaimed history of the siege of Khe Sanh, Valley of Decision. Prados wrote an article published in VVOA Magazine in 2007 titled, "Khe Sanh: The other side of the Hill." This article looks at numerous official histories of the NVA (Vietnam People's Army) and collections of Vietnam Workers Party documents. For the first time, it's possible to learn more about our NVA adversary's real intentions at Khe Sanh.

A major debate ensued among historians after the Vietnam War as to the reasons for laying siege to Khe Sanh. General Westmoreland and the White House were convinced that the NVA objective was the seizure of the two Northern provinces and to make Khe Sanh the American Dien Bien Phu. Vietnamese official histories clearly indicate that Khe Sanh was a diversion intended to "draw out and tie down American and puppet forces away from the more populated coastal areas." Further, another official monograph states: "Highway 9-Khe Sanh were the areas into which forces were to be drawn and tied down, eliminating American mobile units... so that the General Offensive and Popular Uprising could take place in other areas."

To accomplish its goals, the Vietnamese People's Army created a new headquarters on 6 December, 1967—The Route 9 Front. Troop and supply convoys on Route 9 ran from the 3rd Marine Division's Headquarters at Dong Ha all the way to Khe Sanh and beyond. That Main Supply Route (MSR) connected Cam Lo, Camp Carroll, The Rockpile, and Ca Lu. Stationed at Camp Carroll, Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, had a primary responsibility of countering



NVA attempts to sever that critical lifeline.

On 21 July, 1967, a "Rough Rider" convoy left Dong Ha one morning, headed down Route 9 for Khe Sanh. Several U. S. Army 175 mm guns and 85 other vehicles made up the convoy. An ambush was sprung prematurely just beyond Ca Lu, stopping the convoy and forcing it to return to Camp Carroll. Two days later, Marine tanks and Army "dusters" joined up with Kilo 3/3 and attacked Hill 216, overrunning it and finding enough fighting holes for a company overlooking the NVA ambush site. Lima 3/3 joined in and found 30 anti-personnel mines buried along 2,000 meters of the highway, all rigged with trip wires to catch the Marines and soldiers from the Rough Rider convoy as they sought cover.

With Route 9 cleared, the convoy completed the trip to Khe Sanh on the 25th, minus the 175mm guns. One more large convoy was dispatched to Khe Sanh in early August. That was the last one

until Operation Pegasus opened Route 9 to Khe Sanh in April, 1968.

Meanwhile, smaller convoys continued making daily runs. On 21 August, a battalion of NVA ambushed a small Marine convoy traveling Route 9 from the Rockpile to Ca Lu. Marine units supported by air strikes and artillery converged on the NVA from two directions, driving them off into the hills.

The NVA tried again on 7 September at almost the same location. That morning, a large convoy headed towards Ca Lu was caught in a major ambush. B-11, stationed at "Payable" on Route 9 south of the Rockpile, was part of the reaction force that responded. The new platoon leader, Lt. Steven Fitzgerald, was the tank commander on B-11. Lloyd "Pappy" Reynolds was the driver, Jesse Griffin loader, and John Macovich (sp?) the gunner.

Finding themselves caught in the ambush zone, Fitzgerald's tank opened up with one 90mm HE round. Then the

lieutenant called for a canister round. It split open when Griffin slammed it into the breach, jamming the main gun. "Pappy" Reynolds was told to back the tank into a ditch. The other crewmen dismounted their tank, connected a rammer staff, and ran it down the gun tube to clear it, all the while bullets were smacking the top of the turret.

As Reynolds pulled B-11 back on to the road, three RPGs passed across his bow. Lt. Fitzgerald stood up in the cupola to yell at a nearby grunt, and an NVA soldier popped up out of a nearby hole, firing a single shot that struck the lieutenant square in the back. The bullet exited the left side of his chest. A nearby corpsman shot the NVA and some grunts dragged him out of his hole, throwing him down on the road.

Jesse Griffin, the loader, applied plastic wrappers to the lieutenant's sucking chest and back wounds and did his best to secure them. This action by Griffin is credited with helping to save Lt. Fitzgerald's life. While maneuvering his tank to make a turnaround and head back to Payable, Reynolds' tank backed over the NVA lying in the road.

The monsoon came early that year. Just after midnight on 16 September, a soft rain began falling throughout the eastern DMZ area. By first light, rain was falling in torrents. The Cam Lo River paralleling Route 9 overflowed its banks. Roads washed out, and at firebases all along the DMZ, bunkers collapsed and perimeter trenches flooded. A rain gauge at Dong

Ha recorded 17.39 inches of rain in 24 hours. For the time being, Mother Nature was calling the shots along the road to Khe Sanh.

The focus shifted north to the besieged firebase at Con Thien. That battle would occupy the attention of both sides until the end of November. The North Vietnamese took full advantage of a Christmas Truce and poured supplies and troops across the DMZ. They were now poised to kick off their Khe Sanh-Route 9 Offensive. General Giap's Route 9 Front had its marching orders.

The Marines were worried about their relatively exposed position at Ca Lu. Navy Seabees and Marine engineers worked feverishly to complete the required Dyemarker bunkers as part of McNamara's Wall. Then, on 13 January, it happened. A 20-vehicle convoy bringing Dyemarker supplies and equipment to Ca Lu from the Rockpile was hit by an ambush only 10 minutes down the road. Two Bravo tanks were in the lead and two more were in the middle of the convoy. Several trucks carried Marines from India 3/9. Two Army "dusters" brought up the rear.

The well orchestrated ambush commenced with a command-detonated mine that set two trucks on fire. One was a "low boy" tractor trailer and one a six-by-six. Simultaneously, RPGs, mortars, and small-arms fire raked the convoy. A fusillade of bullets struck the India Company Marines riding in the trucks.

Wally Young, driver of the lead tank recalled, "Twenty men with full automatic

AK-47s just jumped up out of their spider holes and ate them up."

One truck carrying 81mm mortar ammunition exploded, blocking the road. Thomas Yax, flame tank commander, dismounted and hooked a tow table to the truck. Young recalled, "[Yax] moved that six-by off the road so the rest of the convoy could come on by. That saved a lot of lives."

As the Marines fought their way out of the ambush, several wounded were placed on the two lead tanks. They sped down the road to Ca Lu where the wounded could be medevaced. Casualties at the rear of the convoy were loaded on the other two tanks and carried back to the Rockpile. Lima 3/9 grunts from Ca Lu arrived at the ambush site and, along with air strikes and artillery, the Marines quickly gained the upper hand, securing Route 9 sufficiently so that the remainder of the convoy could continue on to Ca Lu. The cost was high. American casualties were 19 KIA and over 70 wounded, most occurring in the opening moments of the ambush.

This ambush, very similar to previous ones in August and September, was only the precursor of more action to follow in the coming weeks, as the Khe Sanh-Route 9 Front deployed the NVA 325-C Division in the vicinity of Ca Lu.

*Resources: Gilbert, Oscar, Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam, pp.126-27, 141-42; Telfer, Rogers, Fleming, U. S. Marines in Vietnam: Fighting the North Vietnamese 1967, pp. 129-30; Shulimson, et. al., U. S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year 1968, p. 55.*

#### Time to Pay Up or Else!

If you haven't sent in your dues for 2011 it is time to do so or you will **not** receive the next Sponson Box! Send your \$30 check made out to: USMC VTA

Mail it today to:  
John Wear, 5537 Lower Mountain Rd.,  
New Hope, PA 18938

# ANNOUNCING

## USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Scholarship Program

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

### Student Scholarship Criteria:

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

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

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

### Book Review

(Continued from page 8)

his time conniving how to win another medal for valor. Sadly this nameless gentleman is guarding the streets of Heaven so he cannot confirm my story... but suffice it to say that there were medal/rank grubbing Marines of all ranks during my brief time as an active duty, combat Marine. Thankfully, I did not have to serve under a liquor-sodden battalion commander but I have been told by very reliable sources of several other Marine tankers who had to endure one or two less-than-stellar Marine commanders. There may not have been a race riot the day that Martin Luther King was assassinated, but there were plenty of racially motivated incidents from around mid-1968 until I was released from active duty in 1969. With regard to the book,

## BEWARE: Veterans Affairs Services

Forwarded by Kevin Secor, VSO Liaison, Office of the Secretary of Veterans Affairs.

An organization called Veterans Affairs Services (VAS) is providing benefit and general information on VA and gathering personal information on veterans. This organization is not affiliated with VA in any way. <http://www.vaservices.org/us/index.html>

VAS may be gaining access to military personnel through their close resemblance to the VA name and seal. Our Legal Counsel has requested that we coordinate with DoD to inform military installations, particularly mobilization sites, of this group and their lack of affiliation or endorsement by VA to provide any services.

In addition, GC requests that if you have any examples of VAS acts that violate chapter 59 of Title 38 United States Code, such as VAS employees assisting veterans in the preparation and presentation of claims for benefits, please pass any additional information to Mr. Daugherty at the address below.

Michael G. Daugherty  
Staff Attorney  
Department of Veterans Affairs  
Office of General Counsel (022G2)w

*Matterhorn*, while reading it, I could not put it down. It is a true example of what is referred to as a "page turner." I have discussed this wonderful book with several of my Vietnam Marine veteran buddies and they are, to the man, in full agreement with me. We are sure that *Matterhorn* will live on with such classic novels of the Vietnam War with James Webb's *Fields of Fire* and John Laurance's *The Cat From Hue*.

Former Sgt John F Wear, II  
New Hope, PA 18938  
[johnwear@comcast.net](mailto:johnwear@comcast.net)

CLAUDE "CHRIS" VARGO HAS GENEROUSLY PERMITTED THE REPRINTING OF FOUR CHAPTERS FROM HIS NEW BOOK, *BEYOND MY HORIZON*. THESE CHAPTERS COVER HIS MARINE CORPS EXPERIENCE INCLUDING KHE SANH AS A TANKER.

You can purchase *Beyond My Horizon* at your nearest Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million stores or order it on-line through Amazon.com. The book's ISBN number is: 978-160844-565-3

### PART 1 CHAPTER FOUR

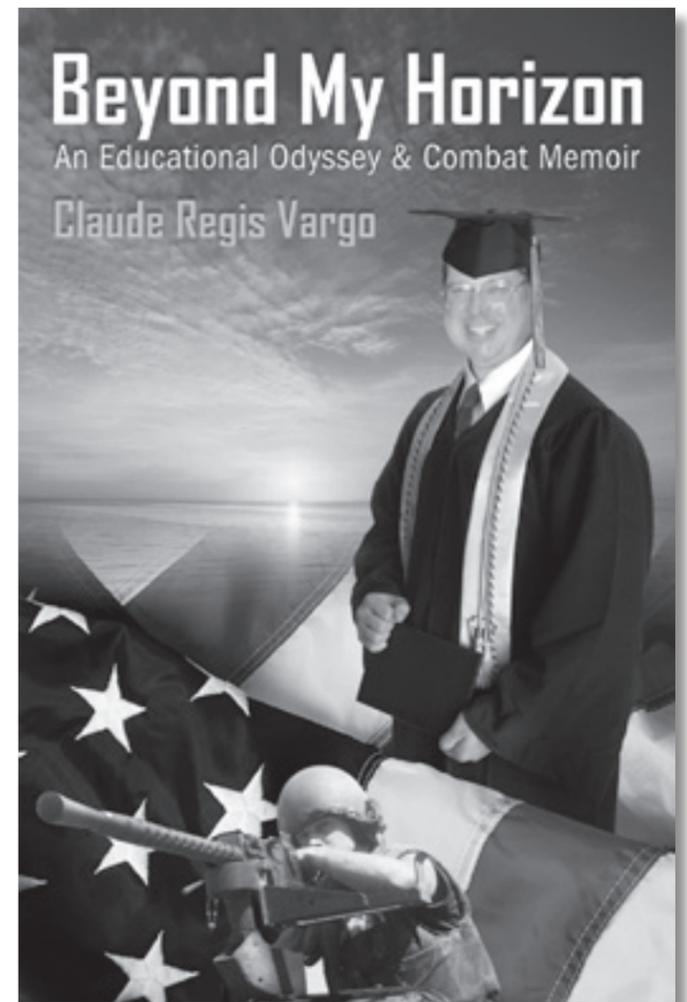
#### From Hippy Hair to a Baldini

My brother, Mark, and I were the best of friends until he left for the seminary in San Antonio in the tenth grade. Mark was eighteen months older than I, and my mother trusted him explicitly over me. Somewhere between Cub Scouts and Boy Scouts, we were old enough that we were permitted to strike out on our own for sheer adventure in our small township of Bay Village, Ohio. Mark was always the leader and always got blue clothes because of his blue eyes, where I always got what I thought were frumpy-looking brown clothes because of my hazel green eyes. Little did I know then that it would not be too long before I would finally have a completely green wardrobe to match my eyes.

Mark and I would go hiking to such exotic places as our church, the school, the public library, and the post office, where he would always pick up and bring home all kinds of applications that could



lead to all kinds of exciting careers all over the world. At church he always picked up the questionnaires for joining a seminary, and at the library I would look in the back of the magazines and copy the addresses of military academies such as Valley Forge and Virginia Military Institute to mail away for admission forms. It seems that



even at that young age my brother always saw himself in a priest's tunic and collar, while I saw myself as nothing other than the six-and-a-half-foot-tall cardboard Marine Corps sergeant on display in the local post office.

The cardboard-cutout sergeant was regally outfitted in the Corps traditional dress-blue uniform, with royal-blue trousers and a red stripe screaming down each side. He had a proud chest adorned with several medals, his massive jaw was square, and his eyes were transfixed with determination. Mark and I would go to the post office every Saturday morning—after chores, of course—and I can remember telling my brother, "That guy would look great in our bedroom."

We both agreed and concluded, "They'll probably throw him out anyway." True to my prediction, one Saturday afternoon, Mark and I went to the post office, and found the sergeant gone. When I asked a postman at the post office where they had put my Marine after I saw he was "missing in action," the postman looked at me like I had three green eyes.

Week after week, month after month, Mark and I filled out applications and requested information. But the more postcards we sent out, the more mail Mark received in return, including complete information packages loaded with pamphlets from the Jesuits, Maryknolls, and Oblates, which were all foreign

missionaries. I always thought it was amazing how the mailman or the registrars' offices evidently knew that my family could not afford a military academy boarding school and the recruiters always knew that I was too young to join the Marine Corps, because I never got a thing.

Mark and I would trek excitedly to the library each time a package came so we could locate and match up on the map the possible countries that we could go to. The year 1959 was a very exciting time compared to today, and the world was still a relatively young and simple place to us, with plenty of new adventures.

Looking back, I realize now that Mark was always destined to help the needy of the world. He succeeded in doing just that, as, in just a few short years after all of our library trips, he would be stationed in India, Bangladesh, and Thailand. I, on the other hand, never received any correspondence but still retained a burning desire to be that Marine Corps sergeant dressed in the royal-blue trousers with the red stripe down each side and a chest full of medals.

I do not feel very old, but I do remember, in the early days of black-and-white television, when the dancers I envied, such as Jean Murray and Fred Astaire, wore tuxedo slacks with elegant, shiny black-on-black stripes. I guess by then I already knew that I wanted to be a sergeant and a gentleman dressed in that beautiful uniform and respected. I could never imagine the gravity of the situation that would lead me to earn those stripes the hard way. As far as all those military academy applications I mailed in, it would be about twenty years later, in a mother's sordid confession, that I would learn the bittersweet but horrible truth: it hadn't been the postman, the registrars' offices, or the recruiters who had thwarted and ruined my goals of being a sergeant; it had been my mother, who had been my unknown personal gatekeeper. My goal of being an academy cadet and a tall, blue-uniformed Marine sergeant had been intentionally sabotaged. But despite this, my goal of being a Marine was realized sooner than my mother or I could ever have predicted.

### JOINING THE MARINES

"Some people live an entire lifetime and wonder if they have ever made a difference in the world, but the Marines don't have that problem."

Ronald Reagan

It was about a month after my graduation-less graduation ceremony that I decided to join the Marines. At that time, Gloria was barely a sophomore in an all-girl high school. I had decided that because we were still so young, we should just do what we both needed to do for now and, in two or three years, if we still felt we were meant for one another, we could get married. It didn't hurt that both our fathers had got together and mutually decided that we needed to separate and that I should go into the Army and far away to Germany.

But no one tells Claude Vargo what to do, so it was the Marines, and I proudly, but admittedly nervously, left for boot camp on June 23, 1967. I was barely nineteen years old.

After surviving the Incarnate Word sisters, the Basilian

brothers, and the Oblate priests browbeating me for years, I was pretty relaxed with my drill instructors at boot camp, and I felt at least a little ahead of my peers in dealing with the initial shock of boot camp. My drill instructors did not do anything to me psychologically that the nuns, brothers, and priests had not inflicted on me and others.

I stood more than a bald headed foot taller than my head drill instructor (platoon commander), Staff Sergeant Lowery, but I looked up to him. He was a great teacher to me. He ruled with an iron fist but was fair-minded, if that was possible under the circumstances of boot camp. I really liked this man; he trained us well, and everything he showed me would eventually help to keep me and my platoon alive. The only thing he ever did to me that I really resented was for some indiscretion on my part one day, when he grabbed me by my collar, crushed my Adam's apple and climbed on my kneecaps, screaming bloody murder down at me while bending me like a longbow. I got over the resentment, though, and I couldn't know it at the time, but just a few years later, he and I would cross paths under more positive circumstances. We would have a very warm and wonderful reunion...because we were both still alive.

During Christmas of 1967, I was at Camp Pendleton, California, and was given five precious days off by my employer, the United States Marine Corps. I had just joined that June, but with six months' worth of the infamous and grueling boot camp, Infantry Training Regiment (ITR), and tank school at Del Mar, I was ready to defend my country. Before our brief Christmas release, we had each signed our last wills and testaments and actual death warrants that said we would not exceed a 500-mile-radius travel limit. A couple hundred miles extra to go home to Houston was no big deal, I figured. Well, maybe it was closer to 700 miles out of jurisdiction, but as just a nineteen-year-old pimpled and lanky teenager with the prospect of going to war



looming, who really cared?

I had a great time home on leave, never sleeping but instead walking around like a proud peacock, as most Marines do on their first leave home. After leave, on the way back to camp, my luck being what it was, when my flight landed on the evening before I was due back on base, it was not in Los Angeles as scheduled. We

had to make an unexpected landing in Las Vegas due to a very bad fog. The stewardess cheerfully told all the passengers that we were lucky that the airline was putting us up at a multi-star hotel until the fog lifted. This was to be a seminal moment in my life, because we had been told that Marines missing from their outfits that were shipping out to war zones would be shot the next day at sunrise, per the aforementioned death warrants we had signed. In Marine jargon, it was called "missing a movement." There were absolutely no excuses and it was taken deadly seriously.

I desperately tried everything to get back to Camp Pendleton: bus, train, even a private helicopter. Finally, I started hitchhiking the 300-odd miles left to the deployment center for processing. Naturally, I was a dollar short and an hour late. My outfit had already left. I was condemned and resigned to my fate with a personal firing squad in less than twenty-four hours. I was sure glad they had made us make out our wills before the Christmas break to save time.

I checked in and was immediately put in shackles; my status was now changed to deserter in a time of war. This was a severe military matter, but I had convinced myself that some other unlucky turd had got my seat on the plane over to Viet Nam and I would go on the next available space, no problem. I did not think that the Marines really wanted to make an example out of little ol' me for being a couple hours late. I was wrong, again. This was really serious stuff.

While I was chained to a brick wall in wrist and ankle shackles, I conversed with the officer of the day, who was sitting at a desk, rubber-stamping a stack of papers. The new "brown bar" second lieutenant wasn't too crazy about his assignment and was about as excited as I was about me being latched to the wall. He initiated the conversation by jokingly asking me who I had murdered and was relieved to find out I was just another tardy pimpled teenager. We continued small talk, I think mostly because he felt my captivity looked like overkill for my crime against humanity. After a few more exchanges, I found out he was from Cleveland, Ohio, and had actually distantly known my cousin while at Case Western Reserve College and that they had become closer while in Officer Candidate School (OCS) in Quantico, Virginia. Thankfully, it wasn't long before my dossier was rubber-stamped and I was on an olive-drab dark green school bus headed to 'Nam.

### CHAPTER FIVE

#### Semper Fi or Die—Khe Sanh

Our flight from San Francisco to Anchorage actually slid in sideways on the runway upon landing. I had thought that was the worst flight of my life, until the flight that landed in DaNang. We flew right over the world's busiest airport and just dove straight down in a corkscrew to miss the enemy flak. I never knew, or even considered, that a commercial Boeing 707 could dive so steeply, like a dive bomber, straight into DaNang, then the world's busiest airport...with my stomach just ahead of the plane. That pilot was amazing, but I guess we were also just lucky that we were not hit by any flak or

surface-to-air missiles.

It wasn't long before I was processed in and reported in to our tank battalion headquarters in Phu Bai, South Viet Nam, about halfway to the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) from DaNang. Once we were in the DMZ, life was all about filling sandbags with monsoon mud, battling constipation and diarrhea, and getting used to being in a war zone. Nothing actually happened for a couple of weeks, until the Tet New Year Offensive started and all hell broke loose all over the country. Then I was quickly headed to the front line in the proverbial Year of the Snake.

Everyone could tell I was a Freaking New Guy (FNG) because my utilities were still vibrant camouflage-green, my boots were still black, and I was limping and dragging one of my legs because of an anti-Hepatitis A gamma globulin horse shot painfully received between my hip and my butt. I think Nurse Hefty had used both fists to cram that spike into my hip. I had heard her grunt just to inject the extra-thick serum, which had the consistency of napalm and Dep hair gel, but I had known better than to cry out.

When I arrived in Hue City, which had been overrun and was under siege, one of the first things I noticed was the incredibly smelly "Perfume River," which ran through the city. It reminded me of the solid waste treatment plants back home, only a lot stronger and more toxic. The locals all had clothes lines in their backyards, but instead of freshly washed clothes hanging there, dried and rotting fish and shrimp were waving in the gentle breeze.

As I was in Hue without a tank assignment yet, I was swiftly drafted into the infantry. I found myself assigned to a hastily formed provisional infantry unit, running behind a tank and carrying a brand-new M-16 with cosmoline still glued to the weapon, and two hand grenades hung from a just-out-of-the-box flak jacket. It was a cold, almost-freezing January on the other side of the world, and I now had my nose stuck up the dragon's ass. It was a fifty-two-ton, thirteen foot-high monster whose exhaust of 750-horsepower belched out diesel fumes at an enormous rate, while it intermittently hurled 3'6" rounds onto a stubbornly entrenched opponent. I finally evaded the tank's ear-blistering, unannounced explosions and constant machine-gun chattering when a group of us switched dragons for the back of a "zippo" flame tank, which also added the smell of napalm and burning flesh to the stench covering the area. I ran over pools of blood and wondered whose body parts had been scattered around us as we made street-by-street advances.

The central business district of Hue City had been recently overtaken by the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) in the first major Tet Offensive of January, 1968 and the first siege of the war. We could see the enemy flags fluttering in the wind but could not rout the embedded troops in the citadel because we were not permitted to carpet bomb or fire indiscriminately on the ancient city, for political reasons, so we just went from street to street, firing point-blank at targets. But politics surely did not stop the enemy from shelling and sniping at us anywhere and everywhere. As we recovered precious military real estate in the middle of the antiquated metropolis, major enemy offensives broke out all

over South Viet Nam. Tanks became hot-ticket targets in which crewmen were dropping like flies, but I immediately volunteered for a tank for the protection I thought it would afford me. I would soon find out that, once again, I was wrong.

For my next thrilling military flight with my stomach shoved up into my Adam's apple, I was choppered into Khe Sanh, next



to the DMZ, via a couple days at Camp J.J. Carroll. About twenty-five of us were packed in like cattle aboard a CH-46 Sea Knight chopper, or "Phrog." We hovered in the cloudy fog that hung over the plateau for what seemed like an eternity. Finally, the back loading ramp magically opened and a mist drifted in and out, much like our guarded and shallow breathing. There were slowly blinking red lights behind the crew cabin, warning us of the impending danger at hand.

The pilot shut off the engines, and there wasn't a sound except the wind whistling through the cabin and our hearts pounding. We hit the ground and did a dead-cat bounce, and the jet engine turbines on the CH-46 screamed back to life louder than the mortars, artillery, and rockets that were pouring in underneath us and all around us. Adding to the confusion was a blaring bullhorn yelling for everyone to depart orderly but quickly. Was he freaking kidding? It was now every man (and boy) for himself. After the initial recoil from the jets being restarted, the chopper's front end lifted, and all of us newbies fell out on top of one another, like Yahtzee dice on a table. The chopper hit its afterburners and was gone in an instant, leaving us to fend for ourselves.

I left my duffel bag, along with my lunch, right there on the tarmac, somewhere a couple of miles from North Viet Nam. I didn't ask questions, instinctively diving into the first trench and bunker I could find. The walls were corrugated metal, damp from constant moisture; the lights inside flickered as the gas generators strained to keep up with the electrical demands of war. The odor reminded me of a cross between my high school biology lab and the French Quarter in New Orleans—very noxious and damp, with 99% humidity.

The two punch-drunk ghouls inside the bunker were dressed in half civilian attire, with no visible rank, insignia, or identifying service patch but were calm as cucumbers and passing a joint between them. I smoked cigarettes just like all Marines but had never smoked marijuana. If those ghouls had passed it to me, I would have sucked that whole joint down in one drag to calm my totally shattered nerves. Once the shelling abated and I had started to collect my wits, one of them chucked a packet of C-ration (C-rat) toilet paper at me, ostensibly to clean myself up, then starting laughing profusely. The other said, "Welcome to hell!"

As I hastily left the bunker, I turned and saw a sign that read:

**Graves Registration Please take a number.  
You might be next!**

Already moving into action, several men were dragging the most recent screaming wounded and the dead, either to graves or Charlie Med, the hospital in another dirt bunker. Some of the guys I had just been on the chopper with were, just that quickly, casualties of war. This was the first time I had ever heard human beings screaming in agony, and it all seemed like a surrealistic dream, far from the life-sized Marine posters in the post office at home.

On or near the tarmac were Corpsmen and Army medics dragging bodies onto stretchers and carrying them toward Charlie Med. Behind them were another group of troops quickly repairing the rocket-laden blast holes in the twisted metal tarmac. It all looked methodical, choreographed, and rehearsed. These were the Navy "Seabees" (Construction Battalion, or CBs), and these were absolutely some of the bravest men I have ever seen. They never knew when one rocket or artillery attack would end and another would start but would do their jobs, riding forklifts and Caterpillars with their unit's flags proudly flying aloft, like it was an ordinary day at the job site back home.

One guy I saw had a red target painted on the back of his flak jacket and was running around, yelling at the adjacent mountain peaks. As I looked out from my hiding place in a trench alongside the runway, standing in ankle-deep water with baby rats paddling, bobbing, and floating all around me, I heard the NVA snipers ping at the scurrying and zigzagging Seabees. My bladder was full, and my urinary tract was burning. There was no sign for a "head" or anywhere else to piss, and I didn't know whether to let it go in the trench, find a nonexistent tree, or run around to try to find a damn head somewhere. This was definitely something they had not taught us in boot camp, infantry training, or my specialized training, tank school.

Khe Sanh, like all military encampments, was divided into different colored sections so dumb-asses and FNGs like me would know where they were going: North was blue, gray was east, and red was west. But I didn't know where I was going. If someone back at Camp Carroll had told me where to go when I got here, I sure as hell could not remember at this point. I just ran perpendicular to the arc of those freaking missiles, and I didn't give a damn which Mothers. Before I was assigned a tank, I was

shown an underground bunker and an elevated shelf nearest the ceiling that was my intended sleeping spot.

I thought my day had already been a nightmare, but didn't know the nightmare had only just started. These were bunker's hours, not banker's hours. I was lying on my back with my nose a little less than an inch from a wood beam that I could barely see. The only light was a flickering diesel lamp set up in the middle of a dozen guys coming and going 24/7 from duty on the perimeter of the base. As there were only three tanks to guard an airstrip and an entire command post (CP), they were always busy in direct-fire support of a very aggressive opponent always watching, always probing.

I clutched the three cardboard boxes of C-rations next to me while the night's barrage of screeching missiles landed over and under our position, when the acid burning in my stomach kicked in. In between the offensive and defensive volleys of artillery, the only sound we heard was of the squealing rats scurrying on the beams above us, when someone in the dark told me to keep my .45 ready. "Ready for what?" I wondered.

Then all was quiet...I thought everybody including the rats had left the bunker, but as I felt a hundred eyes looking at me, I decided this was no Disney movie. In the next instant, I heard a pistol shot and saw a muzzle flash not but a few feet from me, and a dead rat the size of a large cat and his offals landed on my chest and face. I was so close to the flash that I got face and neck burns from the gunpowder. Whatever I felt that was wet, I did not want to know. My first tank commander (TC) had just shot at point-blank range the platoon mascot that had been eyeballing both my C-rats and me. When the sergeant stepped out of his umbrage, he thought he was cute by blowing the smoke off the barrel of his .45. He jerked his head quickly to the right and said in his drill-instructor-imitation voice, "Topside, Private," for guard duty on the perimeter, I ascertained.

I must have missed the class back in basic training when they had discussed the rockets, missiles, artillery, and mortars now raining down on me. Or when they had described the divisions of tens of thousands of battle-trained and hard-core equipped enemy called the NVA regulars assembling as close as one hundred meters outside our perimeter, ready to close-in and lock horns with us.

Later in the siege, it would be confirmed that several Russian tanks and aircraft had been spotted adjacent to the base. That's when the scuttlebutt began that President Johnson was arguing with some of the Joint Chiefs of Staff about having the nuclear option, just in case. I just never thought of myself as an option or a just in- case.

But on my first day in Khe Sanh, I was sprinting blindly, clutching my duffel bag in front of me, when suddenly I felt something hit the duffel bag...hard. I felt like I was Jerry Ellis holding a punching bag when Mohammad Ali let loose with his best punch to my solar plexus. There was an explosion that I never heard, and amazingly, it probably had my name written on it by some gook on a Co Roc mountainside just inside Laos. The round hit so close in front of me that I ran right into the hole in the ground that it had just created. Thankfully, the only wound I

had was to my pride. When I dropped my duffel bag, I saw it was shredded like a gutted stuffed animal, and everything was falling out of it, including my skivvies. I picked all my stuff up out of the mud with both arms and ran away as fast as I could, cradling the remains of my bag like a thirty-pound unwanted tumor. There would be no Red Badge of Courage, no Purple Heart, and no body bag for me on this day... but the war wasn't over yet. For me, it had just begun.

*"They are in front of us, behind us, and we are flanked on both sides by an enemy that outnumbers us 29:1.  
They can't get away from us now!"*

Lieutenant General Lewis B. "Chesty" Puller, USMC

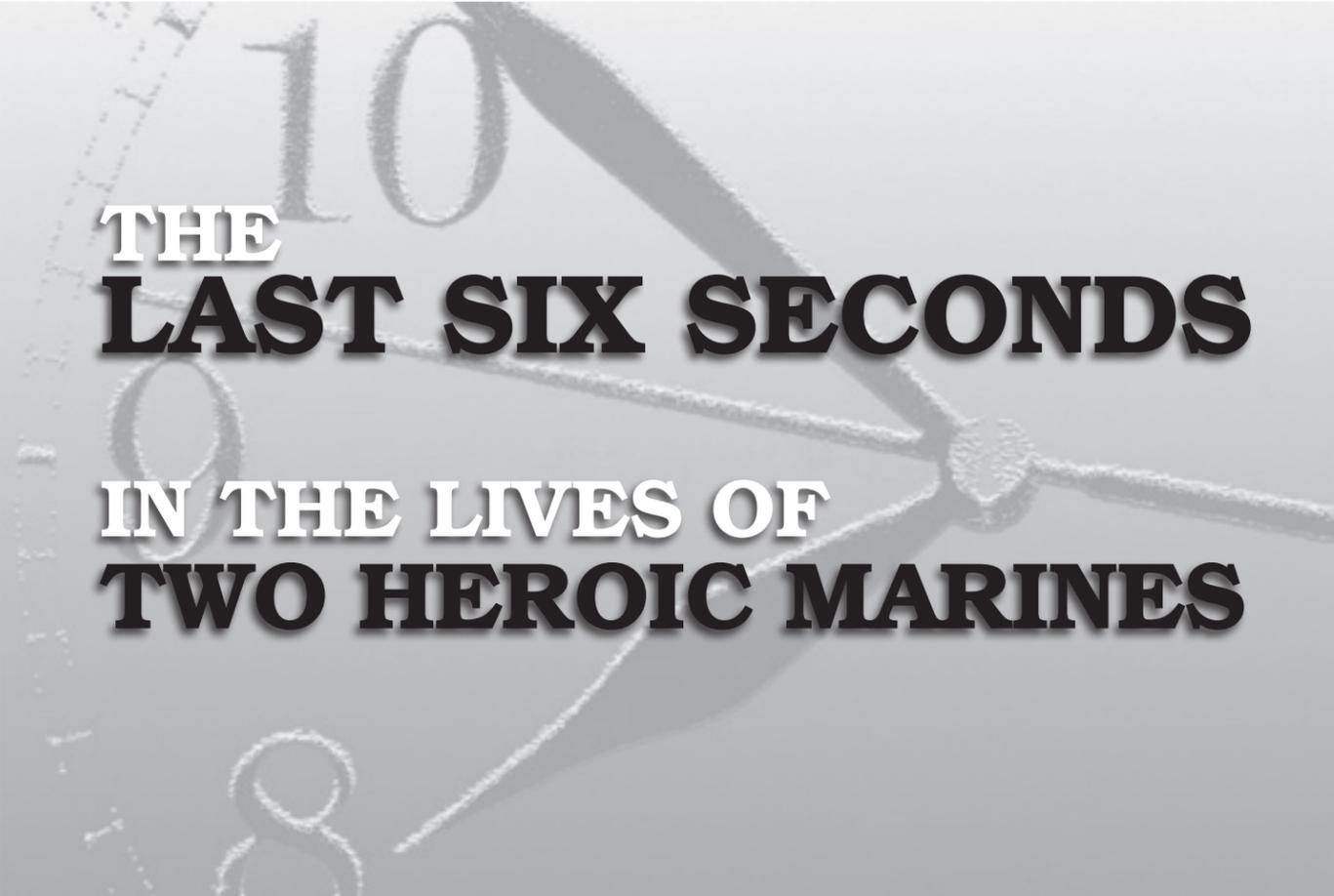
The Khe Sanh Combat Base (KSCB) was about the size of one of the new super regional malls that were springing up back home from coast to coast, which usually had four national anchor tenants. I figured I ran past Foley's, Sears, Montgomery Ward, and J.C. Penney, then all the way out to the last car in the parking lot before I asked directions while the rocket attack abated and my bladder trouble began again. But I decided it was all just burning fear and just another short squirt away.

I ambled all the way back to the west end of the base, the gray sector, where the tank park was located. I got there just as another barrage started up again, and I ran to the tank command post, which was designated by three large, empty ammo boxes covered with a poncho. A haphazardly etched sign read "Bravo Company, 3rd Platoon, Third Tank Battalion." The first thing I noticed was that the tanks were right in the line of fire to those screaming and screeching rounds flying through the air, and the dirt and metal each explosion produced. I was in a mountainside monsoon of light rain and heavy artillery fire with a large red-and-white bulls-eye suspended over our position.

I had arrived on a Sunday, without going to church, and wondered if I was going to hell or if I was already standing in it. A Gunnery Sergeant (Gunny) took my orders and in return gave me three boxes of C-rats. Instead of the delectable Spaghetti and Meatballs or Beans and Wieners, I got Ham and Mothers (lima beans), Ham and Mothers, and one more Ham and . . .

When I saw Gunny Martin again a day or so later, my stomach was growling, with each rumble greater than the previous pang, blaring for some meager degree of nutrition. I asked him when he was going to pass out another round of boxes. I also told him I wasn't too keen on the chef's special of ham and lima beans but would take them if he didn't have anything else. He looked miffed, laughed, and asked me if I had already eaten them all. I told him, "Yes, yesterday, Gunny—breakfast, lunch, and dinner."

He shot back, "Yeah, but they were for Monday, Wednesday, and Friday," and with a shit-eating grin, he said, "Check back with me next Sunday, Private!" It was a very long and very hungry week. ♦



# THE LAST SIX SECONDS

## IN THE LIVES OF TWO HEROIC MARINES

On Nov 13, 2010 Lt General John Kelly, USMC, gave a speech to the Semper Fi Society of St. Louis, MO. This was four days after his son, Lt Robert Kelly, USMC, was killed by an IED while on his 3rd Combat tour. During his speech, General Kelly spoke about the dedication and valor of the young men and women who step forward each and every day to protect us. During the speech, he never mentioned the loss of his own son. He closed the speech with the moving account of the last six seconds in the lives of two young Marines who died with rifles blazing to protect their brother Marines.

"I will leave you with a story about the kind of people they are, about the quality of the steel in their backs, about the kind of dedication they bring to our country while they serve in uniform and forever after as veterans.

Two years ago when I was the Commander of all U.S. and Iraqi forces, in fact, the 22nd of April 2008, two Marine infantry battalions, 1/9 "The

Walking Dead" and 2/8 were switching out in Ramadi. One battalion was in the closing days of their deployment and going home very soon; the other was just starting its seven-month combat tour. Two Marines, Corporal Jonathan Yale and Lance Corporal Jordan Haerter, 22 and 20 years old respectively, one from each battalion, were assuming the watch together at the entrance gate of an outpost that contained a makeshift barracks housing 50 Marines. The same broken-down, ramshackle building was also home to 100 Iraqi police, my men and our allies in the fight against the terrorists in Ramadi, a city, until recently, known to be the most dangerous city on earth and owned by Al Qaeda.

Yale was a dirt poor mixed-race kid from Virginia with a wife and daughter, as well as a mother and sister who lived with him and whom he supported as well. He did this on a yearly salary of less than \$23,000. Haerter, on the other hand, was a middle class white kid from Long Island. They were from two completely different

worlds. Had they not joined the Marines, they would never have met each other or understood that multiple Americans exist simultaneously, depending on one's race, education level, economic status and where you might have been born. But they were Marines, combat Marines, forged in the same crucible of Marine training and, because of this bond, they were brothers as close, or closer, than if they were born of the same woman.

The mission orders they received from the sergeant squad leader, I am sure, went something like: "Okay you two clowns, stand this post and let no unauthorized personnel or vehicles pass." "You clear?" I am also sure Yale and Haerter then rolled their eyes and said in unison something like:

"Yes, Sergeant," with just enough attitude that made the point without saying the words, "No kidding sweetheart, we know what we're doing." They then relieved two other Marines on watch and took up their post at the entry control point of Joint Security Station

Nasser in the Sophia section of Ramadi, Al Anbar, Iraq.

A few minutes later a large blue truck turned down the alleyway--perhaps 60-70 yards in length--and sped its way through the serpentine of concrete jersey walls. The truck stopped just short of where the two were posted and detonated, killing them both catastrophically. Twenty-four brick masonry houses were damaged or destroyed. A mosque 100 yards away collapsed. The truck's engine came to rest two hundred yards away, knocking most of a house down before it stopped. Our explosive experts reckoned the blast was made of 2,000 pounds of explosives. Two died and, because these two young infantrymen didn't have it in their DNA to run from danger, they saved 150 of their Iraqi and American brothers-in-arms.

When I read the situation report about the incident a few hours after it happened, I called the regimental commander for details, as something about this struck me as different. Marines dying or being seriously wounded is commonplace in combat. We expect Marines, regardless of rank or MOS, to stand their ground and do their duty and even die in the process, if that is what the mission takes. But this just seemed different. The regimental commander had just returned from the site and he agreed, but reported that there were no American witnesses to the event--just Iraqi police. I figured, if there was any chance of finding out what actually happened and then to decorate the two Marines to acknowledge their bravery, I'd have to do it as a combat award that requires two eye-witnesses, and we figured the bureaucrats back in Washington would never buy Iraqi statements. If it had any chance at all, it had to come under the signature of a general officer.

I traveled to Ramadi the next day and spoke individually to a half-dozen Iraqi police, all of whom told the same story. The blue truck turned down into the alley and immediately sped up as it made its way through the serpentine. They all said, "We knew immediately what was going on as soon as the two Marines began firing." The Iraqi police then related that some of them also fired and then ran for safety just prior

to the explosion. All survived. Many were injured, some seriously. One of the Iraqis elaborated, with tears welling up, "They'd run like any normal man would to save his life. What I didn't know until then," he said, "and what I learned that very instant, was that Marines are not normal." Choking past the emotion, he said, "Sir, in the name of God, no sane man would have stood there and done what they did. No sane man. They saved us all."

What we didn't know at the time and only learned a couple of days later, after I wrote a summary and submitted both Yale and Haerter for posthumous Navy Crosses, was that one of our security cameras, damaged initially in the blast, recorded some of the suicide attack. It happened exactly as the Iraqis had described it. It took exactly six seconds from when the truck entered the alley until it detonated.

You can watch the last six seconds of their young lives. Putting myself in their heads, I supposed it took about a second for the two Marines to separately come to the same conclusion about what was going on once the truck came into their view at the far end of the alley--exactly no time to talk it over or call the sergeant to ask what they should do. They had only enough time to take half an instant and think about what the sergeant told them to do only a few minutes before: "Let no unauthorized personnel or vehicles pass." The two Marines had about five seconds left to live.

It took maybe another two seconds for them to present their weapons, take aim, and open up. By this time the truck was half-way through the barriers and gaining speed the whole time. Here the recording shows a number of Iraqi police, some of whom had fired their AKs, now scattering like the normal and rational men they were--some running right past the Marines. They had three seconds left to live.

For about two seconds more, the recording shows the Marines' weapons firing non-stop, the truck's windshield exploding into shards of glass as their rounds take it apart and tear into the body of the SOB who is trying to get past

them to kill their brothers--American and Iraqi--bedded down in the barracks, totally unaware of the fact that their lives at that moment depended entirely on two Marines standing their ground. If they had been aware, they would have known they were safe, because two Marines stood between them and a crazed suicide bomber. The recording shows the truck careening to a stop immediately in front of the two Marines. In all the instantaneous violence, Yale and Haerter never hesitated. By all reports and by the recording, they never stepped back. They never even started to step aside. They never even shifted their weight. With their feet spread shoulder width apart, they leaned into the danger, firing as fast as they could work their weapons. They had only one second left to live.

The truck explodes. The camera goes blank. Two young men go to their God. Six seconds. Not enough time to think about their families, their country, their flag, or about their lives or their deaths, but more than enough time for two very brave young men to do their duty into eternity. That is the kind of people who are on watch all over the world tonight for you.

We Marines believe that God gave America the greatest gift he could bestow to man while he lived on this earth--freedom. We also believe he gave us another gift nearly as precious, our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Coast Guardsmen, and Marines, to safeguard that gift and guarantee no force on this earth can ever steal it away. It has been my distinct honor to have been with you here today. This experiment in democracy started over two centuries ago. Rest assured, our America will forever remain the "land of the free and home of the brave," so long as we never run out of tough young Americans who are willing to look beyond their own self-interest and comfortable lives and go into the darkest and most dangerous places on earth to hunt down and kill those who would do us harm.

God Bless America and SEMPER FIDELIS! ♦

# NIGHT OF THE TIGERS

BY MAJ WILLARD F. LOCHRIDGE  
IV OIC NYNM Naval Forces Attached

27th BDE, New York Army National Guard "Tiger" was the code name for a Marine M48A3 Patton tank that was used in transmissions over radio nets during the early years of the Vietnam War by 3rd Tank Battalion (3rd TK BN), Third Marine Division (3rd MARDIV). Categorized as a medium tank, the M48A3 was a diesel-powered version of the earlier M48A2C tank, which used gasoline for fuel, an explosive component when hitting vehicle land mines or being struck by anti-tank weapons.

From a historical perspective, the M48A3's origins dated back to the M47 "General Patton" tank, which replaced the Army's M26/46 Pershing series. The first production of the M48 rolled off the Chrysler line in 1952. This version of the M48 was produced primarily for combat in Europe against Soviet tanks. Through many design changes, the M48A3 became the mainstay of armored tanks for the Marines and U. S. Army in Vietnam. (1) Later, after a bewildering number of versions, the M48 would eventually lead the way to the successful M60 Patton tank.(2)

The Marines were the first American Forces to bring tanks to Vietnam. On 9 March 1965, Marine Corps Staff Sergeant John Downey drove his M48A3 tank off of a landing craft on to Red Beach 2 at Da Nang, and was shortly followed by the rest of the 3RD Platoon, Company B, and 3RD TK BN.(3) They were immediately deployed to bolster the defenses around

the Da Nang airfield. Upon learning that "USMC tanks were in country", our Government and Central Command -- the U. S. Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV) -- in Saigon thought such heavy armor was an overkill and "not appropriate for Counter-insurgency operations."(4) Certainly they would not be able to negotiate the combination of soggy terrain and poor weather conditions, particularly during the monsoon season of South Vietnam. Nonetheless, we had them--as part of our initial landing force--and they were there. Over the coming years, MACV's reasoning would fade as the M48A3 gained a solid reputation as a worthy weapon to be used against enemy troops.

As in wars before, the Marines in Vietnam also developed fighting tactics and techniques to overcome constraints and conditions found on the battlefield. Such creativity was about to be employed in The Night of the Tigers during the summer of 1966.

By 1966, 3rd TK BN and 1st TK BN were both in country. 3rd Tanks was headquartered near Da Nang on Hill 34, and 1st Tanks was supporting defensive and offensive operations around the Chu Lai Air Base. Both of these Battalions were experiencing ever-increasing confrontations with the Viet Cong (VC) within their respective Tactical Areas of Operation (TAOR) as their platoons were assigned to support various infantry components that were out in the field.

In the late spring of 1966, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines (3/9) was collectively operating out of An Hoa about 25 miles southwest from Da Nang. Their responsibility was to defend the small airfield and village, which supported the only active coal mining operation in South Vietnam. An Hoa also had a hydroelectric power plant and a fertilizer plant operating there. In addition to protecting An Hoa, their mission included interdicting and stopping Viet Cong Main Force elements-- particularly the notorious R-20th VC (Doc Lap) Main Force Bn.--from advancing northward to attack the Da Nang Air Base. Prior to 3/9's arrival, many of these enemy forces (including the R-20th Bn.) freely moved within the region, which also embraced the well-known "Arizona Territory," an area given the name for its wild west characteristics and danger.(5)

At that time, the only way into An Hoa was by air or by driving through the Song Thu Bon River, preferably during the dry season. Later the following year, a bridge -- "Liberty Bridge"-- would be constructed to allow convoy type resupply from Hill 55, which lay several miles to the north of An Hoa. During the French Indochina war, it was said that the French lost an entire battalion in a battle during the 1950's on Hill 55.(6) During my time "in country," the area surrounding Hill 55 was still a hotly contested neighborhood.

3/9 requested tanks from 3rd MARDIV to primarily support and

augment the defenses of the airfield and, also, to conduct offensive operations with their infantry line companies. 3rd TK BN got the mission and redirected my platoon, 2nd Platoon, Company B, which was just completing Operation Liberty while attached to 1st Bn., 1st Marines who were operating in and around the vicinity of Hoa An on the coast of the South China Sea. Our tanks were literally worn out from continuous use in the sandy terrain, which ran from Marble Mountain south through the "Horse Shoe" to Hoa An. So, before deployment to An Hoa, we were directed to return to BN HQ to refit out with five brand new M48A3 Tanks, each equipped with a new and improved Infrared (IR) Xenon searchlight bore-sighted with the main 90mm gun. The Xenon searchlight, producing

over one million candlepower, could "reach out" to over 2,000 yards. Close in, should someone look directly into the light, particularly when it was in "spotlight" position, it could cause severe eye injury or the individual would suffer temporary flash-blindness. Weighing in at 52-tons under a full load (the turret alone weighed 18 tons), it could reach top speed of 40 mph. Performance-wise, it burned one gallon per road mile and two gallons per mile off-road. Total fuel capacity was a little over 300 gallons, which gave it a range of approximately 258 miles that varied, of course, by terrain characteristics. The transmission had three gear positions: high, low and reverse. Low gear was used primarily when crossing wet paddies, streams and rivers or high grades. It also had, at that time, a state-of-the-art fire control system that utilized a stereoscopic range finder, a mechanical ballistic computer (nothing like today's truly computerized/laser firing systems that allow you to fire on-the-go and are much more accurate), and a M20 periscope sight that the gunner used to set on his target before firing a main gun round. This system would take range data, merge it with the muzzle velocity of the type round to be fired and elevate the 90mm main gun sufficiently for the round to overcome the downward pull of gravity while on its way to the target. Typically, we carried 64 90mm rounds

that consisted of HE (High Explosive), WP (White Phosphorus), Canister that contained 1,200 pellets to be used against enemy troops in the open, and a few HEAT (High Explosive Anti-Tank). It

was said a good crew could put the first round on target 90% of the time. In Vietnam, we were probably closer to 98%, because the distance to targets was typically less than 500 yards. In addition, we had a coax .30 caliber machine gun and a cupola-mounted Browning .50 caliber machine gun. Secured around the floor of the turret, we carried 10,000 rounds of .30 cal. and 3,000 rounds of .50 cal. ammunition. Each crewman carried a .45 cal. pistol and, for close-in protection, we had an old .45 cal. "grease gun" in each tank. We also had an assortment of non-assigned weapons such as M2 carbines, Thompson sub-machine guns, captured AK47's and an M79 grenade launcher that allowed us to inexpensively "dust the bushes" when moving into unknown territory or while setting up for night bivouacs. Clearly, we were ready for bear and could light up the night or go IR with our new Xenon searchlights.

Departing BN HQ, we drove south to Hill 55 to spend the night at our Company HQ. While there, we discussed the river crossing with our company commander that would have to be made the following day. Small fording stacks were strapped to the engine armor plate of each vehicle in case we needed them to negotiate the water crossing. Aerial maps were studied and several crossing points were noted. Our first choice was at the end of a bend in the river that flattened out with sandy beaches on either side. It was about 200 yards across, but would require a diagonal upstream approach in order to successfully reach the opposite beach.

The M48A3 had a crew of four: the driver sat up front under the main gun; the gunner was situated below the Tank Commander (TC) to the right of the main gun breech; the loader stood to the left of the breech, but normally rode outside on top of the loader hatch; and, the TC held position in the cupola -- a small turret that housed a .50 cal. machine gun that, out of frustration of

not working well in such tight quarters, was eventually sky-mounted to the top of the cupola with a semi-circle of sand bags for added protection.

Arriving at the Song Thu Bong River in the early morning hours, myself and my Company Commander, Capt Ev Tunget, scouted out our primary crossing by actually wading across. We checked the consistency of the bottom and water depth. Signal flags were posted on the opposite shore as guide-ons. On our way back, the VC opened fire on us. With rounds zinging all around us, we made like turtles with just our helmets showing above the water.

It was determined that the fording stacks would not have to be used, but the drivers would have to "button-up" their hatches and be directed by the TCs who stood waist high out of the cupola. The TCs would eyeball the signal flags, monitor the water flowing over the front slope plates and down along the tank sides to make certain they were on course and remained in reasonable safe freeboard condition from water depth. The gunners and loaders were assigned to topside positions in the event the TCs had to announce "abandon ship". Should that condition happen, the TC and his topside crew would quickly move to aid the driver in escaping.

Before going across, we called in 105mm artillery from An Hoa to prep the enemy side of the river and also to stop them from shooting at us. After several salvos of 105's the VC left the area.

As lead vehicle, we splashed into the river and, running under low gear, began crossing. Our driver complained about leaking seals on his hatch, but claimed he could see fish through his periscopes. Within an hour, all tanks were across and we began our drive to An Hoa to celebrate a happy reunion with 3/9, whom we had served with earlier in the year in and around the "Horse Shoe" before 1/1 took over.

The first couple of weeks at An Hoa were spent getting the lay of the land. It was still the dry season so we could maneuver just about anywhere. We spent many a day and night operating in the field with Kilo, Lima or Mike companies.

As usual, mines and booby traps were ever present in our TAOR. One morning a jeep coming back from Phu Loc Hill, which overlooked the confluences of Song Thu Bon and Song Vu Gia Rivers, hit a land mine; all occupants were seriously wounded and one was killed. Supposedly, the road had been swept that morning; but, somehow, the engineers had missed the mine. The area where the incident occurred was particularly subject to mining. The road, made of dirt, traversed a series of stepped rice paddies that were about a mile wide and extended two to three miles on both sides in either direction.

For some unknown reason, the next day I decided to join the engineers who were assigned to sweep the road. Beginning in the earlier hours, they began their work with me following a good fifty yards or more behind. As they passed the crater from the mine explosion the day before, we came to a culvert which ran under the road. I noticed dozens of footprints coming out of the paddy, crossing the road and down into the other side. I asked the engineers about these tracks, but no one had an answer, except to say that they had not noticed them the day before.

Returning to BN HQ, I asked the S3 (Operations Officer) if we had had any patrols out in that area the night before? He said, "No." I said, "Then some large body of troops must have crossed that road last night and marched right down the center of those rice paddies."

An idea was forming in my mind about using our tanks to night-ambush the area, but a few technical and tactical issues had to be worked out before presenting the plan to the Bn. Commander and his staff. Those issues were: (1) How to deploy tanks into a night-ambush site without the enemy discovering us-- tanks make a lot of noise when operating in the field; (2) How many tanks should be deployed; (3) What primary sites should be selected with appropriate alternate locations, if needed; (4) How long could we operate our new Xenon searchlights on battery power before having to start our engines; (5) How could we minimize tank-to-tank radio communications, which would also cause battery drain; (6) How many

infantrymen would we need for security; and, (7) size-wise, what would we require for a reaction force to come to our assistance if we made contact? The Night of the Tigers was about to unfold.

First, we determined that three tanks or our heavy section, when spread out in a forward facing fan of fire over the targeted zone, would be sufficient. The tanks would be spaced approximately 25 yards apart with my tank in the center. To protect our rear, two four-man fire teams would go out with us. To reduce battery draw from our radios, we simply would tie pieces of string attached to the wrists of each tank commander. Since I was in the center, I had one string on each wrist. The string had enough play in it to allow us to move our arms while using night-vision binoculars. The idea was, if anyone saw something in their respective area of observation, the strings would be pulled to signal radios up. Our rear tank phone lines tied in the infantry.

Next, and perhaps most critical, came testing our Xenon searchlights without engines running. How long could we operate them from battery power only? From the tests, we calculated that each tank could operate for a little over three hours without having to power up engines. So, once in position, a selected flanking tank would use its IR light while the other two tanks simply observed their areas with night vision binoculars.

We had an amtrac platoon attached to 3/9, so it was easy to visit them and ask for their support. We needed them to cover the noise of moving our tanks at night. The idea was not only to use them for that purpose, but also to have them carry a reaction force out if needed. The plan called for four amtracs and a platoon of infantry (the reaction force) to deploy with us – three amtracs up front followed by three tanks and the fourth amtrac taking up the rear. Once underway as the sun was setting, at a designated time when darkness was complete, this convoy of vehicles would drive past by our primary turn-off point to the ambush site. The tanks would quickly peel off the road, take positions and cut their engines off.

Without raising suspicion, several of us went out on foot patrols over the course

of two to three days to select potential ambush positions. Having completed our homework, we presented our plan to the Battalion CO and his staff. He eagerly approved it. Next morning preparations were made. All was ready for the coming night events.

At approximately 2030 hours, the amtracs, tanks and infantry left An Hoa and headed north towards Phu Loc Hill. By 2130, the tanks were off the road and set in at the primary ambush site. Strings were attached to the tank commander's wrists. The left flank vehicle powered up its Xenon searchlight under IR and night-vision binoculars were put into use. The infantry took up a protective position behind us. Now the wait came as we began scanning the rice paddies to our front.

Time passed when, suddenly, my left wrist felt a solid tug. It was a little past 2300 hours. Radios came up. The left flanking tank commander reported a large enemy force of troops moving in our direction at 10 o'clock out about 500 yards. Quickly turning my night-vision binoculars in that direction, I could clearly make out a mass of troops coming our way. Since they were moving toward our front, I ordered all tanks to wait until they were closer and, when told, they were to switch to the Xenon white flood-light and begin taking them under fire with coax .30 cal. machine gun fire. Within several minutes, the enemy formation was directly to our front about 100 to 150 yards out. It was time to spring the ambush. The order went out; white searing light penetrated the night and three .30 cal. machine guns opened up with devastating interlocking fire. The infantry behind us opened

up, too. It was a turkey shoot. When we switched from floodlight position on the searchlights to spotlight position, the enemy dropped to the ground. Curiously, when moving back to floodlight, they would stand up and get shot. Since they were so close, I ordered 90mm canister rounds to be fired; it only took a few. The field was littered with enemy bodies and supplies.

As the ambush was kicked off, the reaction force was called; they came out to help us police the site. By 0100, the ambush position was cleared and we

started our return to An Hoa. As we gained the road, I informed the reaction force commander that I wanted to move to our alternate site. Somewhat surprised, he agreed; we pulled off and set up again.

Within an hour, we had contact. We watched as six enemy troops advanced toward our position. They were probing the rice paddies for either survivors or lost supplies. When they were out about 50 to 75 yards, we switched on our white searchlights and, to our surprise, they simply put their hands up in surrender. We brought them in, tied them up and gave them some water. One of them was a female, who we were to later learn was a VC cadre officer. At dawn the next morning, we mounted up and returned to An Hoa with our prisoners. However, that was not the last Night of the Tigers. We went out three more times and had two more nights of solid contact.

Later on, not to be outdone, our light section, consisting of two tanks, used similar tactics at night on the Song Thu

Bon River and knocked out 16 enemy troop-laden sampans.

By the middle of September 1966, our platoon of twenty-two Marines had recorded 244 confirmed enemy KIAs, 58 Possible KIAs, 19 WIAs, 5 Possible WIAs, and captured 56 enemy troops. Additionally, we destroyed four ammunition bunkers; captured one bunker that contained 271 Chicom (Chinese Communist) hand grenades and 19 Russian claymore-type mines; and destroyed two enemy 57mm recoilless rifles. (7) We also disposed of a two-man sniper team with three quick rounds of 90mm WP, who unfortunately had attempted to disrupt our beer party (a party that was held on Phu Loc Hill) after we had completed an operation and our two beer per day per person ration had been airlifted in to us by helicopter. Also, early one morning, we knocked out an entire sniper platoon that was caught on a small island hamlet as they prepared their breakfast meals. One of the enemy who

was killed was a Caucasian later believed to be an East German advisor attached to the unit.

Fortunately, the platoon suffered no personnel lost and no one had been seriously wounded during our entire time while on operations. However, earlier in our beginning days, we did lose one tank by land mine detonation. Individually, our platoon members received three Silver Star Medals, one Bronze Star Medal, and three Purple Heart Medals.

*Notes (1): AFV INTERIORS, Web Magazine 2001, "US M48 90mm Gun Tank, "Patton," Part I, p. 1. (2): AFV INTERIORS, Part I, p. 1. (3): Starry, General Donn A., "Armored Combat in Vietnam," The Ayer Company, 1982, pp. 52-53. (4): Starry, pp. 54-55. (5): Kelly, Michael P., "Where We Were In Vietnam," Hellgate Press, 2002, p. 5-20. (6): Kelly, p. 5-223. (7): Lochridge, IV, Maj Willard F., "Combat Diary of 2Lt Willard F. Lochridge, IV," 1966, p. 253.*

## Retired Master Gunny



The family of a retired Marine Master Gunnery Sergeant with 37 years in the Corps reluctantly decided that at age 92, he needed more care than they could provide. The only decent place close to their home was a nursing home for retired Army soldiers. They approached the facility and were told that, while Army vets got first choice, they would take vets of the other services if there happened to be an opening; which, by good fortune, there was. A week after placing the retired Marine there, his sons came to visit.

"How do you like it here, Pop?" they asked.

"It's wonderful," said the old Jarhead. "Great chow, lots to do, and they treat everyone with great respect."

"How so, Pop?"

"Well, take Harry, across the hall, 88 and was in the Air Force. He hasn't worn the uniform in 30 years, but they still call him 'General.' Then George, down the hall, used to lead the Army band. Hasn't conducted a note in 40 years, but they still call him 'Maestro!' And Bob used to be a surgeon in the Navy, has not operated on anyone in 20 years, but they still call him 'Doctor'"

"Well that's fine for the other guys, Pop, but how do they treat you?"

"Me? They treat me with even more respect. I'm 92, haven't had sex in 20 years, and they still call me 'That Fucking Marine!'"

## Got a Sky Mount Story?

The Sponson Box is looking for any stories, comments or pictures about sky-mounted guns on your tank's cupola or any other weapons that were added to a tank. We also are looking for information on some tanks that purportedly co-axed their .50 cal. MG. Please send e-mails or letters to:

**Bob Peavey, 304 Abbey Ct.,  
Canton GA 30115  
or repv@comcast.net**

# Project Eldest Son

## WREAKING HAVOC ONE ROUND AT A TIME.

BY MAJOR JOHN L. PLASTER, USAR (RET.).

During the Vietnam War, the Studies and Observations Group (SOG) created an ingenious top-secret program called Project Eldest Son to wreak general mayhem and cause the Viet Cong and NVA to doubt the safety of their guns and ammunition.

Amid a firefight near the Cambodian border on June 6, 1968, a North Vietnamese Army soldier spotted an American G.I. raising his rifle, and the NVA infantryman pulled his trigger, anticipating a muzzle blast. He got a blast, all right, but not quite what he'd expected.

United States 1st Infantry Division troops later found the enemy soldier, sprawled beside his Chinese Type 56 AK, quite dead - - but not from small-arms fire. Peculiarly, they could see, his rifle had exploded, its shattered receiver killing him instantly. It seemed a great mystery that his AK had blown up, since nothing was blocking the bore. Bad metallurgy, the G.I.s concluded, or possibly defective ammo. It was neither.

In reality, this actual incident was the calculated handiwork of one the Vietnam War's most secret and least understood covert operations: Project Eldest Son. So secret was this sabotage effort that few G.I.s in Southeast Asia ever heard of it or the organization behind it, the innocuously named Studies and Observations Group. As the Vietnam War's top-secret special ops task force, SOG's operators - - Army Special Forces, Air Force Air Commandos and Navy SEALs - - worked directly for the Joint Chiefs, executing highly classified, deniable missions in the enemy's backyard of Laos, Cambodia and North Vietnam.

The genesis of Eldest Son was the fertile mind of SOG's commander, 1966-68, Colonel John K. Singlaub, a World War II veteran of covert actions with the Office of Strategic Services.

"I was frustrated by the fact that I couldn't airlift the ammunition we were discovering on the [Ho Chi Minh] Trail" in Laos, Singlaub explained. It was not unusual for SOG's small recon teams - - composed of two or three American Green Berets and four to six native soldiers - - to find tons of ammunition in enemy base camps and caches along the Laotian highway system. But SOG teams lacked the manpower to secure the sites or carry the ordnance away.

Further, it could not be burned up, and demolition would only scatter small-arms ammunition, not destroy it.

"Initially I thought of just boobytrapping it so that, when they'd pick up a case, it would blow up," Singlaub recalled.

Then it hit him - - boobytrap the ammunition itself!!

Though obscure, this trick was not new. In the 1930s, to combat rebellious tribesmen in northwest India's Waziristan - - the same lawless region where Taliban and al Qaeda terrorists hide today - - the British army planted sabotaged .303 rifle ammunition. Even before that, during the Second Metabele War (1896-97) in today's Zimbabwe, British scouts (led by the American adventurer Frederick Russell Burnham) had slipped explosive-packed rifle cartridges into hostile stockpiles, to deadly effect. SOG would do likewise, the Joint Chiefs decided on August 30, 1967, but first Col. Singlaub

arranged for CIA ordnance experts to conduct a quick feasibility study.

A few weeks later, at Camp Chinen, Okinawa, Singlaub watched a CIA technician load a sabotaged 7.62x39 mm cartridge into a bench-mounted AK rifle.

"It completely blew up the receiver and the bolt was projected backwards," Singlaub observed, "I would imagine into the head of the firer."

After that success began a month of tedious bullet pulling to manually disassemble thousands of 7.62 mm cartridges, made more difficult because Chinese ammo had a tough lacquer seal where the bullet seated into the case. In this process, some bullets suffered tiny scrapes, but when reloaded these marks seated out of sight below the case mouth. Rounds were inspected to ensure they showed no signs of tampering.

When the job was done, 11,565 AK rounds had been sabotaged, along with 556 rounds for the Communist Bloc's heavy 12.7 mm machine gun, a major anti-helicopter weapon.

Eldest Son cartridges originally were reloaded with a powder similar to PETN high explosive, but sufficiently shock-sensitive that an ordinary rifle primer would detonate it. This white powder, however, did not even faintly resemble gunpowder. SOG's technical wizard, Ben Baker - - our answer to James Bond's "Q" - - decided this powder might compromise the program if ever an enemy soldier pulled apart an Eldest Son round. He obtained a substitute explosive that so closely resembled gunpowder that it would pass inspection by anyone but an ordnance expert.

While the AKM and Type 56 AKs and the RPD light machine gun could accommodate a chamber pressure of 45,000 p.s.i., Baker's deadly powder generated a whopping 250,000 p.s.i.

Sabotaging the ammunition proved the easiest challenge. The CIA's Okinawa lab also did a very professional job of prying open ammo crates, unsealing the interior metal cans and then repacking them, so there was no sign of tampering. In addition to SOG sabotaging 7.62 mm and 12.7 mm rounds, these CIA ordnance experts perfected a special fuse for the Communist 82 mm mortar round that would detonate the hand-dropped projectile while inside the mortar tube, for especially devastating effect. Exactly 1,968 of these mortar rounds were sabotaged, too.

Project Eldest Son's greatest challenge was "placement" - - getting the infernal devices into the enemy logistical system without detection. That's where SOG's Green Beret-led recon teams came in.

Since the fall of 1965, our small teams had been running deniable missions into Laos to gather intelligence, wiretap enemy communications, kidnap key enemy personnel, ambush convoys, raid supply dumps, plant mines and generally make life as difficult as possible in enemy rear areas. As an additional mission, each team carried along a few Eldest Son rounds - - usually as a single round in an otherwise full AK magazine or one round in an RPD machine gun belt or a sealed ammo can - - to plant whenever an opportunity arose.

When a SOG team discovered an ammo dump, they planted Eldest Son; when a SOG team ambushed an enemy patrol, they switched magazines in a dead soldier's AK. It was critically important never to plant more than one round per magazine, belt or ammo can, so no amount of searching after a gun exploded would uncover a second round, to preclude the enemy from determining this was sabotage.

Planting sabotaged 82 mm mortar ammo proved more cumbersome, because these were not transported as loose rounds, but in three-round, wooden cases. Thus, you had to tote a whole case, which must have weighed more than 25

lbs. Twice I recall carrying such crates for insertion in enemy rear areas and, to our surprise, my team once witnessed a platoon of NVA soldiers carry one away.

SOG's most clever insertion was accomplished by SOG SEALs operating in the Mekong Delta, where they filled a captured sampan with tainted cases of ammunition, shot it tastefully full of bullet holes, then spilled chicken blood over it and set it adrift upstream from a known Viet Cong village. Of course, the VC assumed the boat's Communist crew had fallen overboard during an ambush. The Viet Cong took the ammunition, hook, line and sinker.

In Laos, American B-52s constantly targeted enemy logistical areas, which churned up sizeable pieces of terrain. SOG exploited this opportunity by organizing a special team that landed just after B-52 strikes to construct false bunkers in such devastated tracts, then "salt" these stockpiles with Eldest Son ammunition.

However, on November 30, 1968, the helicopter carrying SOG's secret Eldest Son team, flying some 20 miles west of the Khe Sanh Marine base, was hit by an enemy 37 mm anti-aircraft round, setting off a tremendous mid-air explosion. Seven cases of tainted 82 mm mortar ammunition detonated, killing everyone on board, including Maj. Samuel Toomey and seven U.S. Army Green Berets. Their remains were not recovered for 20 years.

But as a result of these cross-border efforts, Eldest Son rounds began to turn up inside South Vietnam. In a northern province, 101st Airborne Division paratroopers found a dead Communist soldier grasping his exploded rifle, while an officer at SOG's Saigon headquarters, Captain Ed Lesesne, received the photo of a dead enemy soldier with his bolt blown out the back of his AK.

"It had gone right through his eye socket," Lesesne reported.

Chad Spawr, an intelligence specialist with the 1st Infantry Division, heard of such a case but, "didn't believe it until they walked me over and opened up the body bag, and there he was, with the weapon, in the bag." Unaware of SOG's covert program, Spawr attributed the incident to inferior weapons and ammo.

Booby trapped mortar rounds took their toll, too. Twenty-Fifth Infantry Division soldiers came upon an entire enemy mortar battery destroyed - - four peeled-back tubes with dead gunners.

In another incident, a 101st Airborne firebase was taking mortar fire when there was an odd-sounding, "boom-pff!!" A patrol later found two enemy bodies beside a split mortar tube and blood trails going off into the jungle.

On July 3, 1968, after an enemy mortar attack on Ban Me Thuot airstrip, nine Communist soldiers were found dead in one firing position, their tube so badly shattered that it had vanished but for two small fragments.

Booby trapped ammunition clearly was getting into enemy hands, so it was time to initiate SOG's insidious "black psy-op" exploitation.

Our interest was not in killing the soldier that was using the weapon," explained Colonel Steve Cavanaugh, who replaced Singlaub in 1968. "We were trying to leave, in the minds of the North Vietnamese, that the ammunition they were getting from China was bad ammunition."

Hopefully, this would aggravate Hanoi's leadership - - which traditionally distrusted the Chinese - - and cause individual soldiers to question the reliability (and safety) of their Chinese-supplied arms and ordnance.

One Viet Cong document - - forged by SOG and insinuated into enemy channels through a double-agent - - made light of exploding weapons, claiming, "We know that it is rumored some of the ammunition has exploded in the AK-47. This report is greatly exaggerated. It is a very, very small percentage of the ammunition that has exploded."

Another forged document announced, "Only a few thousand such cases have been found thus far," and concluded, "The People's Republic of China may have been having some quality control problems [but] these are being worked out and we think that in the future there will be very little chance of this happening."

*(Continued on page 32)*

**“A Marine is a Marine. I set that policy two weeks ago - there’s no such thing as a former Marine. You’re a Marine, just in a different uniform and you’re in a different phase of your life. But you’ll always be a Marine because you went to Parris Island, San Diego or the hills of Quantico. There’s no such thing as a former Marine.”**

**The Commandant of the Marine Corps, General James F. Amos**

**Project Eldest Son**

*(Continued from page 31)*

That, “in the future,” hook was especially devious, because an enemy soldier looking at lot numbers could see that virtually all his ammo had been loaded years earlier. No fresh ammo could possibly reach soldiers fighting in the South for many years.

Next came an overt “safety” campaign, with Military Assistance Command Vietnam (MACV) publishing Technical Intelligence Brief No. 2-68, “Analysis of Damaged Weapons.”

Openly circulated to U.S. and South Vietnamese units, this SOG-inspired study examined several exploded AKs, concluding they were destroyed by “defective metallurgy resulting in fatigue cracks” or “faulty ammunition, which produced excessive chamber pressure.”

An SOG operative left a copy at a Saigon bar whose owners were suspected enemy agents.

Under the guise of cautioning G.I.s against using enemy weapons, warnings were sent to Armed Forces Radio and TV. The civilian Stateside tabloid Army Times warned, “Numerous incidents have caused injury and sometimes death to the operators of enemy weapons,” the cause of which was, “defective metallurgy” or “faulty ammo.”

The 25th Infantry Division newspaper

similarly warned soldiers on July 14, 1969, that, “because of poor quality control procedures in Communist Bloc factories, many AKs with even a slight malfunction will blow up when fired.”

Despite such warnings, some G.I.s fired captured arms and, inevitably, one American’s souvenir AK exploded, inflicting serious (but not fatal) injuries.

That incident spurred SOG itself to stop using captured ammunition in our own AKs and RPD machine guns. SOG purchased commercial 7.62 mm ammunition through a Finnish middleman - - and, ironically, this ammo, which SOG’s covert operators fired at their Communist foes - - had been manufactured in a Soviet arsenal in Petrograd.

By mid-1969, word about Eldest Son began leaking out, with articles in the New York Times and Time, compelling SOG to change the codename to Italian Green and, later, to Pole Bean.

As of July 1, 1969, a declassified report discloses, SOG operatives had inserted 3,638 rounds of sabotaged 7.62 mm, plus 167 rounds of 12.7 mm and 821 rounds of 82 mm mortar ammunition.

That fall, the Joint Chiefs directed SOG to dispose of its remaining stockpile and end the program. In November,

my team was specially tasked to insert as much Eldest Son as possible, making multiple landings on the Laotian border to get rid of the stuff before authority expired.

Lacking the earlier finesse, such insertions had to have confirmed to the enemy that we were sabotaging his ammunition - - but even this, SOG believed, was psychologically useful, creating a big shell game in which the enemy had to question endlessly which ammunition was polluted and which was not.

The enemy came to fear any cache where there was evidence that SOG recon teams got near it and, thanks to radio intercepts, SOG headquarters learned that the enemy’s highest levels of command had expressed concerns about exploding arms, Chinese quality control and sabotage.

In that sense, Project Eldest Son was a total success - - but as with any such covert deception program, you can never quite be sure.

*Reprinted from American Rifleman, 2008*

# The Old Seabag

BY WM. “DOC” COTTRELL



I was at my veterinarian about a year ago and on the wall in the waiting room was an old picture of a young Marine along with an ensemble of ribbons and medals. I asked my vet who that was and he told me it was his father, William Kuhl.

He began to tell me a couple of stories about his father in the Corps and I found them interesting, among the most interesting was a couple things, the fact

his father served on the USS Yorktown when it was sunk and a story of his father’s long lost sea bag.

A couple weeks later, I stopped back in and he said he brought some things from his house to show me. He had an old foot locker and an old worn, tattered cardboard box. He said his aunt (his father’s sister), had kept newspaper clippings of things that had concerned his father and articles in which his father was mentioned. Dr. Kuhl started to show me pictures and newspaper articles that indeed verified his father was on the USS Yorktown. One newspaper article had even mentioned how he had shot down a J-p zero.

To make a long story somewhat shorter. Dr. Kuhl told me he had no idea as to what to do with all these articles as there was no one left in his family that was much concerned with them. I told him I had

## Warrenton Boys Get Jap Flyer

Wm. Kuhl and Calvin Simpson, Former Local High School Students, Down Jap Thumbing Nose

The story of how two U. S. Marines aboard the Yorktown shot down a low flying Japanese pilot, who made them angry by thumbing his nose at them, was told Monday by the Marine Public Relations Department in an account of the fighting devil dog’s experiences during the aircraft carrier’s last fight.

They are Private William Kuhl, who was reared in Central Wesley, an Orphan Home at Warrenton, and Corp. Calvin E. Simpson, both of St. Louis, but formerly of Warrenton. They were stationed at one of the ship’s anti-aircraft batteries when Japanese airplanes began dropping bombs on it.

“A Japanese pilot flew in low and thumbed his nose at us,” Corporal Simpson related. “That made us mad. So Bill (Private Kuhl) got the range and zoom, we cut that Japanese in half and tore his plane to pieces.”

an idea and I would get back with him in a couple of days. I went home and contacted the Marine Corps Museum in Virginia and they in turn immediately contacted Dr. Kuhl. He sent them some pictures of some of the items, and their response was if everything he said he had was verified, that these items would make a one of a kind display at the museum.

So Dr. Kuhl signed the property over to the museum and hopefully soon they will have a special place there. I mentioned earlier a newspaper article about his father’s lost sea bag, so I have included here a copy of that article and a picture of his father with his sea bag. They are pretty self

explanatory, so I will leave you now to enjoy. But in closing, I would like to say that as a thank you to me from Dr. Kuhl, he gave me his father’s K- bar that had seen action at Guadalcanal, Iwo, and several other places along with his father’s brass EGA belt buckle.

Wm. “Doc” Cottrell

FMF Doc

## What Members Are Doing

*(Continued from page 12)*

everyone for the .50 Cal headspace and timing tool. He took it with him to Afghanistan and used it in-country.

Semper Fidelis

Belmo

VTA member Joe Tyson with Medal of Honor recipient Barney Barnum at the Travis Manion Foundation fundraiser in Center City Philadelphia on Feb 1, 2011.

Mr. Barnum, the fourth Marine to be awarded the nation’s highest honor, the Medal of Honor, for valor in Vietnam, retired as a colonel from the Marine Corps on August 1, 1989, with more than 27 and one-half years active service. He is a former President of the Congressional Medal of Honor Society.

Travis Manion is an Operation Iraqi Freedom US Marine KIA whose father is a retired Marine colonel and whose parents head a foundation to support Wounded Warriors.

Joe Tyson



# On The Second of July, 1967

Alfa and Bravo companies of the First Battalion, Ninth Marines were on patrol just a few hundred meters south of the DMZ in Vietnam. Bravo blundered into a well set ambush at The Marketplace. Soon Alpha, too, was in the thick of it. The enemy consisted of a regiment of the North Vietnamese Army supported by artillery, heavy mortars, rockets, anti-aircraft guns, and surface to air missiles.

Charlie and Delta Companies were rushed to the field in support, but the outcome had been decided. The Marines were overwhelmingly outnumbered. But, worse than that, they were equipped with Colt M-16 rifles. Their M-14 rifles, which had proven so effective and reliable, were stored in warehouses somewhere in the rear.

The M-16s would fire once or twice - maybe more -- then jam. The extractor would rip the rim off the casing. Then the only way to clear the chamber and resume firing was to lock open the bolt, run a cleaning rod down the barrel, and knock the casing loose. Soon it would jam again.

This was the rifle supplied to her troops by the richest nation on earth. The enemy was not so encumbered. They carried rifles

which were designed in the Soviet Union and manufactured in one of the poorest nations on earth -- the so-called People's Republic of China. Their rifles fired and fired every time. They ran amongst the Marines, firing at will.

Sixty-four men in Bravo were killed that afternoon. Altogether the Battalion lost around a hundred of the Nation's finest men. The next morning, we bagged them like groceries. We consigned their bodies to their families and commended their souls to God. May He be as merciful as they were courageous.

Today, people are still debating the issue: Was it the fault of the ammo or the fault of the rifle? Neither. It was the fault of the politicians and contractors and generals. People in high places knew the rifles and ammo wouldn't work together. The military did not want to buy the rifle when Armalite was manufacturing it. But when Colt was licensed as the manufacturer, they suddenly discovered it was a marvelous example of Yankee ingenuity.

Sgt. Brown told them it was garbage. Col. Hackworth told them it was garbage. And every real Grunt new it was garbage.

It was unsuited for combat.

There was no congressional investigation. No contractor was ever fined for supplying defective material. No one uncovered the bribes paid to government officials. No one went to jail. And the mothers of dead Marines were never told that their sons went into combat unarmed.

To all outward appearances those Marines died of gun shot and fragmentation wounds. But a closer examination reveals that they were first stabbed in the back by their countrymen back home.

The politicians, contractors and generals have retired to comfortable estates now. Their ranks have been filled by their cloned greedy invertebrates, every one. They should hope that God is more forgiving than I.

Brave men should never be commanded by cowards.

First Lieutenant Harvey G. Wiser,  
USMCR  
First Battalion, Ninth Marines

## Tanks & Medals of Valor

This is a new feature that will provide the citation for medals of valor that involved tanks -- both tankers and or grunts where tanks are mentioned. If you were present during any of the actions let us know and add to the story for us.

### John Edward Hazelwood

K.I.A. May 28, 1968

Home of record: Gypsum, Kansas

#### Awards and Citations

Silver Star The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Corporal John Edward Hazelwood (MCSN: 2268715), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Squad Leader with Company I, Third Battalion, Twenty-Seventh Marines, FIRST Marine Division in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On the morning of 28 May 1968 during Operation ALLEN BROOK, Corporal Hazelwood's platoon was advancing across an open area

toward a tree line near the village of Cu Ban (4), when the Marines came under heavy automatic weapons, small arms and rocket fire and were pinned down by a well entrenched enemy force. **As supporting tanks moved into the area to aid the besieged unit, one vehicle was immediately disabled by an enemy rocket propelled grenade. Alertly detecting the source of the enemy fire, Corporal Hazelwood fearlessly exposed himself to hostile fire as he ran thirty-five meters to the nearest tank and utilizing the vehicle's tank-infantry phone, directed accurate 90-mm. fire into the enemy position, destroying it.** Returning across the fire-swept area to his squad and realizing the importance of gaining fire superiority, Corporal Hazelwood again exposed himself to hostile fire as he organized his men and led an aggressive assault against the enemy-held tree line. Throughout the ensuing battle, he moved from one man to another, offering words of encouragement and directing accurate fire at enemy positions until he was mortally wounded. His dynamic leadership and determined actions inspired all who observed him and were instrumental in the accomplishment of his unit's mission. By his extraordinary courage, bold initiative and selfless devotion to duty, Corporal Hazelwood upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country. ■ **Action Date:** 28-May-68 ■ **Service:** Marine Corps ■ **Rank:** Corporal ■ **Company:** Company I ■ **Battalion:** 3rd Battalion **Regiment:** 27th Marines ■ **Division:** 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF.



### Thurlo J. Siva

Home of record:

Warner Springs, California

#### Awards and Citations

Silver Star The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Staff Sergeant Thurlo J. Siva (MCSN: 1139175), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a **Platoon Sergeant with Company B, First Tank Battalion, FIRST Marine Division (Rein.), FMF**, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 12 May 1968, during Operation ALLEN BROOK, Staff Sergeant Siva's platoon was supporting Company E, Second Battalion, Seventh Marines, when

they were ambushed near Xuan Dai Village in Quang Nam Province, by a large North Vietnamese Army force. During the ensuing fire fight one of the tanks was struck by enemy rocket fire which mortally wounded the driver and injured the crew members, forcing them to abandon the vehicle. Skillfully deploying his remaining tanks, Staff Sergeant Siva ably directed effective fire upon the hostile force, then maneuvered his own tank to a position between the enemy and the disabled vehicle. Disregarding his own safety, he fearlessly left his vehicle and assisted in the evacuation of the injured crewmen. As the Marines withdrew, one of the tanks accidentally maneuvered into a bomb crater and was immobilized. Again moving his vehicle into a protective position, Staff Sergeant Siva unhesitatingly exposed himself to intense hostile fire, and connecting a cable between his tank and the one in the crater, he directed the removal of the immobile vehicle. Resolutely continuing his determined efforts, he ignored the hostile rounds impacting near him and, entering the abandoned tank, maneuvered it to friendly lines. By his courage, bold initiative and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger, Staff Sergeant Siva contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■ **Action Date:** May 12, 1968 ■ **Service:** Marine Corps ■ **Rank:** Staff Sergeant ■ **Company:** Company B ■ **Battalion:** 1st Tank Battalion ■ **Division:** 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF. ♦



## the NYA Chicken

BY HENRY HICKS

We were out on Operation Hastings, and on the second day some grunts gave our tank this scrawny undersized chicken. They must have stolen it from one of the villages or just found it in the bush. The little bird was alive, but just barely. One

evening we would give him a shot of really cheap rotgut gook whisky and that flea bitten bird wound up getting drunk. He'd take one drink and try to crow... but just a peep would come out of his mouth. He'd take another drink and fall backwards

onto the ground. Later that night he crapped all over our bedding and by the next morning he was dead. The gook whisky killed him. I think that the bottle of gook whisky had a fox on the label. It was really bad stuff." ♦

# V. A. News & Updates

Go to our website for more health related info.  
[www.USMCVTA.org](http://www.USMCVTA.org)

## FIVE MYTHS ABOUT VA HEALTH CARE

**VA Health Care Myths:** Rumor mills are permanent fixtures in schools, offices and wherever people congregate, and most of the time they're pretty innocuous. But myths and rumors that deal with health—in this case Veterans health—are a serious matter that can prevent qualified Vets from seeking the care they both need and deserve. Many have come up in the comments section at <http://www.blogs.va.gov/VAntage/?p=586>, and others I hear from the guys in my old unit. The myths won't die unless they are addressed publicly and clearly, so we present you with the most common we hear, and the straightforward answers they need.

**Myth Number One - I wasn't injured in the service, so I'm not eligible for VA health care.**

Status: False -

One of the most common myths revolves around eligibility for health care at VA. Many think that you have to first establish a disability rating before you can start to make appointments, see doctors and receive medication. That is not the case. If you served in the military, even during peace time, and were honorably discharged, you likely qualify for VA care. Even if you don't meet those requirements, special circumstances might apply, like Vietnam service, exposure to Agent Orange and household income. The best way to find out if you qualify is to submit an application for health benefits. You can fill one out online or at a VA Medical Center. If you are an Iraq or Afghanistan Veteran, there are special combat veteran benefits from VA, like temporary access to dental care and guaranteed access to Priority 6 for five years (unless you are eligible for a higher priority group). See the priority enrollment groups here. Also, if new regulations are established regarding health benefits, VA will automatically reassess your case if it's on file.

**Myth Number Two — I can only receive care for service-connected injuries.**

Status: False -

You can receive VA hospital and outpatient care for any ailment, service connected or not if you are enrolled in the VA healthcare system, but you may have to pay a co-payment. For example, if a Veteran is service-connected for a bad knee, any VA hospital and outpatient care and medication for the knee is free of charge. However, if the same Vet goes into surgery to remove an appendix and it's not service

connected, he may be subject to a co-pay depending on the amount of his disability rating and other factors. Familiarize yourself with co-pay guidelines and rates. A small number of Veterans, such as those with bad conduct discharges that VA has determined were issued under conditions other than honorable and who are not subject to certain statutory bars to benefits, can only be treated for their service connected disabilities and nothing else. If one of those Vets is service connected for their left foot, they can only use VA health care for their left foot and nothing else.

**Myth Number Three — I make too much money to qualify for VA health care.**

Status: It depends - If you do not have a service-connected disability, you may want to use VA's financial calculator to see if you qualify for free VA care, medication and travel benefits. If your income is too high (over a maximum income level set every year), you may have to pick up the tab for traveling and receive your care and medication by paying a co-pay. Recently, the rules have been changed for Priority 8 Veterans to permit more of them to enroll for VA health care. Go here for more information and an income calculator to see if you qualify under the new rules.

**Myth Number Four — I can't use VA health care if I have private health insurance.**

Status: False -

From VA's Health Eligibility Center Director Tony Guagliardo: We strongly encourage Veterans to receive all your health care through VA. However, if you choose to receive treatment from private doctors, VA will work with them to meet your health care needs and coordinate effective treatment. We call this Co-managed Care or Dual Care — which means that your VA and private doctors will work together to provide safe, appropriate, and ethical medical care.

**Myth Number Five — If I'm 100 percent disabled, that means I'm permanently disabled.**

Status: False -

You could have a 100 percent disability rating as a temporary status while you undergo surgery, and have it reduced to its previous rating after you heal. 100 percent doesn't necessarily stay with you.

[Source: VAntage Point Alex Horton article 18 Nov 2010 ++]



## "THE FALLEN"

"They shall grow not old  
As we that are left grow old,  
Age shall not weary them . .  
Nor the years condemn.  
At the going down of the sun,  
And in the morning,  
We will remember them!"

Lawrence Binyon



## COMBAT WOUNDED

I stood up and stepped forward.  
I raised my hand and swore an oath.  
I stood in the gap and walked in the fire.  
There were wounds,  
There was pain,  
There were scars.  
I have no need to explain.  
Those who matter know.  
Those who don't, never will."

Submitted by Ed Tungent  
from Purple Heart magazine



It's the Soldier, not the reporter  
Who has given us the freedom of the press.

It's the Soldier, not the poet,  
Who has given us the freedom of speech.

It's the Soldier, not the politicians  
That ensures our right to Life, Liberty and the  
Pursuit of Happiness...

It's the Soldier who salutes the flag,  
Who serves beneath the flag,  
And whose coffin is draped by the flag.

Author Unknown

# How to get a **FREE** 2011 REUNION **SHIRT!**



Custom printed Vapor Apparel brand moisture-wicking t-shirt from Digital Imaging Services.

10% of all member purchases donated to USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

Sizes: Adult XS - 3XL  
4XL - 5XL (available in White or Heather Ash Only)

Colors: Bright White, November White, Sand, Steel,  
Heather Ash, Alpine Spruce

Cost: \$20 - XS - XL  
\$23.50 - 2XL - 3XL  
\$25.00 - 4XL - 5XL

To Order Online: [www.digitalimagingstvcs.com](http://www.digitalimagingstvcs.com)  
Go to the "ONTOS/TANK RELATED ITEMS" section.

To Order by Phone: 281-239-9495 / Daniel Benczédi  
281-460-2011 / Réka Benczédi

To Order via Email: [reka@digitalimagingstvcs.com](mailto:reka@digitalimagingstvcs.com)



Front



Back

***Yes! We know, we know! The reunion is still 6 months away, but . . .***

...we wanted to start planting the seed now for those on a fixed income and give time to begin planning. And for this reunion we need the registration forms turned in early so we can plan for bus transportation and other coordinated activities. Consequently, we are offering an incentive to get your registration forms in 60 days early—a free reunion shirt with a retail value of \$25.00!

You should have heard by now that our next reunion is being held in San Diego on August 17 – 21, 2011. We are excited because it should be our largest ever! The hotel is the finest we have ever used and they are renowned for catering to military veteran organizations. There will be a 3,000 square foot ballroom just for the "Slop Chute" hospitality room that will have plenty of seating to share our stories and our Vietnam photo albums. It is twice as large as the room we had in Charleston! We will have another special room for the fun-filled auction where we will also be offering a few items specifically for the ladies for the first time.

Another First: We are offering an alternative side trip for those who wish not to go to MCRD since we did Parris Island at the last reunion.

To be able to offer all these choices requires us to get your registration turned in early. -

To provide an early register incentive, we are giving away the official reunion T-shirt to each registered person (including all registered spouses, friends or family members) whose **order and registration check is received before June 17, 2011 (...which is 60 days prior to the reunion start date)**. This cut off date will not be extended. Your envelope must be postmarked no later than June 17, 2011. The reunion t-shirt, (shown above), will be another first as it is a two-sided, full color design! We think that it will be the coolest shirt we have ever done and it will have a **retail value of \$25.00!** Your shirt will be inside your reunion check-in bag for those meeting the June 17 deadline. Use the official reunion registration form at the back of this issue and submit your registration form along with a check on or before June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Please make certain you choose the activity choices that you and or your guest(s) want as well as each individual's men's T-shirt size. Please note that ladies need to order in Men's sizes and that men's Small is the smallest size offered.



# 2011 San Diego Reunion Tentative Schedule

WEDNESDAY AUGUST 17	0900-2330	Arrival Day – Town & Country Hotel Pick up reunion welcome packet at the VTA Reunion Registration Desk
	1300-1600	The “Company Office” will be open in “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room for problem resolution and questions answered.
THURSDAY AUGUST 18	0900-2330	“The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open <b>Lunch &amp; Dinner on your own</b>
	0800-1030	Reunion Kick-off Meeting and VTA Business Meeting <b>Win a FREE stay!</b>
	0800-1030	Ladies Coffee (Hospitality Room)
	1100-1115	TBD - Board buses to visit 4th Tanks tank park or... Possible tour of Camp Pendleton if they are doing some active training...like live fire exercises.
	1230-1330	Lunch to be announced
	1600-1615	Board buses for return to hotel
FRIDAY AUGUST 19	1700-2330	“The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open
	1800-2000	<b>VTA Sponsored Poolside BBQ, Group Photo and Live Auction</b>
	<b>Choose One of two morning trips</b>	
	<b>TRIP 1 MCRD San Diego</b>	
	0800-0815	Board Buses for MCRD San Diego
0830-0845	Arrive - MCRD Parris Island	
0900-1000	Recruit Graduation	
1030-1130	Guided Tour MCRD	
1145-1230	Noon Chow – MCRD Mess Hall (lunch provided)	
1230-1245	Board buses for hotel	
1300	Arrive at hotel	
<b>TRIP 2 San Diego Harbor Tour</b>		
1315-1335	Board Buses for San Diego Harbor Boat tours conducted (lunch not provided)	
1400-1600	Board Buses for hotel	
1630-1645	Arrive at hotel	
1700-1730	<b>Dinner on your own</b>	
1800-2330	“The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open	

SATURDAY AUGUST 20	0900-1730	Free Time – See the City Golf, Deep Sea Fishing, Sea World Tour, San Diego Zoo, or shopping.
	0900-1700	“The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open
	1730-1815	<b>Reunion Banquet</b> – Cash Bar
	1830-1845	Presentation of Colors & Remarks
SUNDAY AUGUST 21	1845-1930	Farewell Dinner  <b>Please note:</b> Dress for the Farewell Dinner will be a shirt with a collar, dress slacks and shoes. Coats and ties are optional.
		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 10 minutes Break</li> <li>• 5 minutes Charleston Reunion Review</li> <li>• 10 minutes Awards Presentation</li> <li>• 30 Minutes Guest Speaker</li> <li>• 30 minutes Fallen Heroes Presentation</li> </ul>
	2200-2330	“The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open
	0900-1200	Departure Day “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open  <i>*Anyone who would like to volunteer to help clean up, it would be greatly appreciated.</i>

**HOW TO WIN A FREE HOTEL ROOM!**

You can win a free hotel stay for this year's reunion when you bring this coupon to Thursday's Opening Meeting no later than 07:59 PST

Rules: This coupon is your raffle ticket to be given at the door of the meeting room before 07:59 PST for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic room rate (\$109 + tax).  
**Prize value: 436.00 + tax.**

Drawing will be held at the conclusion of the same meeting. Tickets will be awarded **only** to people who are in the meeting room prior to 07:59 PST. No latecomers will be permitted in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President's watch set to atomic clock standards.

Doors will close at exactly 08:00 PST to determine who is in the room on time. Winner **MUST** be in the room when the bell rings. If someone is almost at the door when the bell rings and he is not physically in the meeting room, he is **NOT** eligible for the drawing. No exceptions will be made. Only one (1) entry per person allowed.

Name: \_\_\_\_\_  
Room # \_\_\_\_\_



# OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM FOR THE San Diego 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Reunion

Towne & Country Resort & Convention Center  
August 17-21, 2011

**GET A FREE REUNION T-SHIRT WORTH \$25.00!**  
When you prepay your registration fee by **June 17, 2011**

Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ This is how your name will appear on your name tag \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

Guest's Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_ and relationship \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

\_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

\_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Unit#: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Vietnam Tank or AT Bn: \_\_\_\_\_ Co: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in-country: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Circle one of the above) 1<sup>st</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Example: 65-66

Is this your first USMC VTA Reunion? Circle One YES NO

You must be a **current** 2011 USMC Vietnam Tankers Association member to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent please mail your dues with this registration or the dues will be collected at the sign-in desk. No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions, transportation & lunch, meeting facilities, hospitality room & beverages and other expenses associated with the cost of hosting the reunion. Registration fee does not include your sleeping room and taxes.

**See Free Shirt offer on back inside cover**

# OPTIONAL ACTIVITY LIST for Friday, August 19<sup>th</sup>

Please circle the trip number you want and indicate how many people will be taking that trip (including yourself) if you have guests. Your guests can choose a different trip if they wish.

**Trip #1** MCRD Graduation & Tour with lunch provided in chow hall  
Buses depart hotel at 0815 and return to hotel by 1300.  
How many? \_\_\_\_\_

**Trip #2** San Diego Harbor Tour (lunch not provided).  
Buses depart at 0915 & return to hotel by 1300.  
How many? \_\_\_\_\_

## Your total reunion fees

My Registration Fee: ..... \$ **140.00**

Number of guests \_\_\_\_\_ X \$ 140.00 = ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee is required for each guest including children if they are attending ANY of the scheduled events.

**Grand Total** = ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional:** Would you like to donate a few dollars to help with the beer & soda fund? ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
Thank You!

**GROSS AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel reservations by **July 17th** to get the low room rate!  
Call: 1-800-772-8527 ask for the "2011 USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion" for the special room rate of \$109.00 per night or make reservations online by going to:

[https://resweb.passkey.com/Resweb.do?mode=welcome\\_ei\\_new&eventID=3091941](https://resweb.passkey.com/Resweb.do?mode=welcome_ei_new&eventID=3091941)

**CAUTION:** Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration free T-shirt offer which has a **June 17th** deadline. These are two different offers.

Submit this form along with your payment by June 15th to get a free Reunion T-shirt worth \$30.

Send check or money order made out to: **USMC VTA**

Then send form and payment to:

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



### NVA Propaganda Leaflets

A patrol from 2/9 came under artillery fire just north of Con Thien in December of 1967. The shells, instead of exploding around them, popped overhead and rained these leaflets down on them.



### Marine Tanks Trucked into Afghanistan

Sixteen of the 68-ton tanks are headed for use by the US Marines in southwest Afghanistan and will considerably boost the firepower and range of guns against insurgents. This is the first time U.S. tanks have been introduced into Afghanistan.



Marines bring mobility, firepower and shock effect to Afghanistan.

## **USMC Vietnam Tankers Association**

5537 Lower Mountain Road • New Hope, PA 18938

**Please get your 2011 dues paid up! Send \$30 to:  
John Wear, USMC VTA, 5537 Lower Mountain Road, New Hope, PA 18938**

Chris Christie, who was an 1802, took this dramatic photograph of a tank racing to the front of a column in May of 1967 at the start of Operation Hickory. Chris was assigned as the Com Officer with 2/12. The photo was taken on the road between Con Thien and Dong Ha. Can anyone ID this tank crew?

