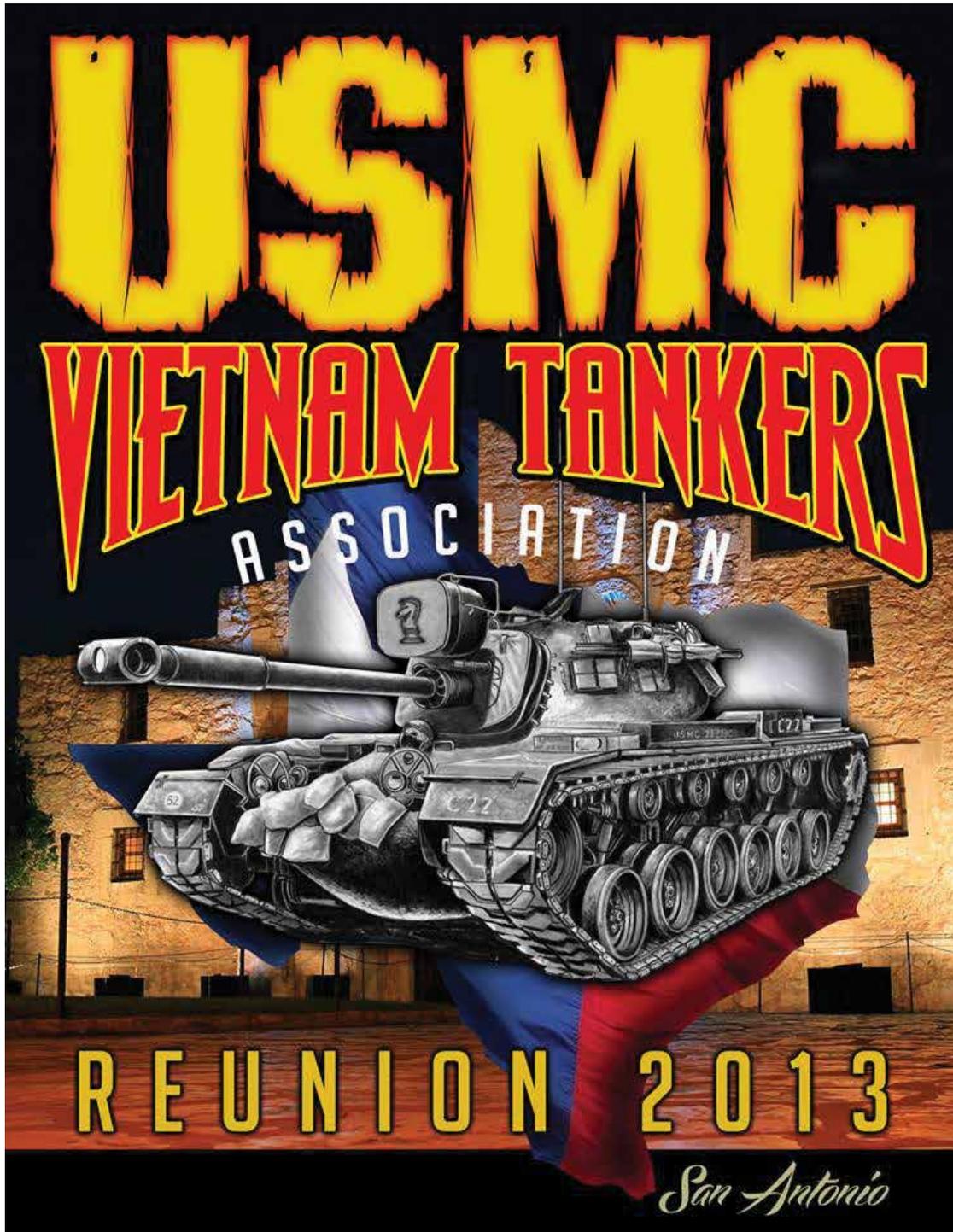




Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™





NEW VTA CHALLENGE COIN SELLS OUT IN SAN ANTONIO

We reorder another 100 coins!

As published in the last issue, the new challenge coin was designed with the Pentagon's official minting company who together we created and struck 150 coins. Making their debut at the San Antonio reunion... they sold out!

The front and back designs are totally custom and you will not see them on any other challenge coin – even the USMC side is unlike any other. We have reordered another 100 coins and can now make them available to all members.

This is not your average dull bronze challenge coin. It is not only larger by ¼ inch (1.75" diameter) but has a bright metallic-like gold and silver finish in 3-D relief on both sides. The tank is bright gold in appearance and holds the detail of our logo.

Each coin is \$20 plus a \$4 (each) postage & handling fee. There is no limit to the quantity you can purchase. Each comes in a clear plastic folder.

Also available is a velvet display box that can hold two coins allowing you to display both sides simultaneously. The cases are available for \$15 each plus \$4 (each) for postage & handling.

Indicate how many coins and display boxes you want to order, add postage and handling fee for each item and enclose your personal check made out to: USMC VTA and mail to:

USMC VTA
c/o Fred Kellogg
15013 NE 16th Street
Vancouver, WA 98684-3605
ORDER NOW!



Letter from the President

Our highly successful San Antonio reunion is now a fond memory. I truly feel that it was our best and most enjoyable get together ever! I am pretty sure that most (if not all) of the first time attendees have the same feeling as most first timers have had in the past. That is, they had such a great time that they will make all possible attempts to never miss another VTA reunion.

I want to thank Rick Lewis, Pete Ritch and Jim Coan for coordinating and executing our most successful and long overdue personal history recording program. Unfortunately, we have a lot of "catch up ball to play" with regards to collecting and recording our history... but we are well on our way. We also want to thank those of you who volunteered to be interviewed. We had a few volunteers who did not get recorded. We are going to work on this and maybe have a method of home recording. Please stay tuned for it. To me, one of the best results of this new and very successful history project is that we will now be able to publish the stories of the participating members in the Sponson Box for those who wish to see them in print. If nothing else, this will help to ensure that our legacy is available for our survivors and our successors.

A few months ago, Ron Knight, the VTA secretary, received the below reply to a dues reminder letter that he had sent to several delinquent members:

"Please drop me from the roll call. I think I joined the group too late. Through the years, bonds and friendships were made by long-time members. I felt like an outsider. But, maybe I didn't make enough effort. Semper Fi, Philip Buffalo."

When Ron sent the above note to me, I responded by sending Phil a note asking him to reconsider leaving the VTA and asking him for permission to use his letter of resignation in the Sponson Box. And Phil's response was:

"Yes John. Please use my letter. I respect you for asking me. Everyone's different. Some people don't need to be welcomed, they just work their way into things. Like I said, I probably joined too late. You are welcome to use the whole letter ... or it won't be read in the way I meant it to read. Maybe I'm speaking for the other members that have resigned in the past and who might not care or want to tell you why. I'm sure something good may come of this. If it betters the V.T.A. in any way, I'll be proud I spoke my mind, as I always do. Of course, this has nothing to do with my un-dying love for the Corps. (Just in case that thought may have passed your mind.) In conclusion, it would only be fare (sic) in saying, I was never a group ... or an association person but I did give it a go. Take Care of your self. See you in Marine Heaven. Semper Fi. Phil Buffalo"

It really troubles me that a member of our U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam veteran brotherhood feels like an "outsider." I don't know what I can do to remedy this situation. All that I can say is the VTA is your organization and what you get out of it is most probably going to be equal to what you put forth in effort as a member. We are all volunteers. We need your involvement

Semper Fidelis,

-John

*"The safest place in Korea was right behind a platoon of Marines.
Lord, how they could fight!"*

MG Frank E Lowe, US Army, 1952



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

1st Sgt. Richard “Rick” Lewis, *Vice President*

5663 Balboa Ave (#366), San Diego, CA 92111-2793
(858) 735-1772 Email: ricklent@aol.com

Jim Coan, *Treasurer*

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

Ronald C. Knight, *Secretary*

6665 Burnt Hickory Drive-Hoschton, GA 30548
(678) 828-7197 Email: 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: gffleisch@sinclair.net

Fred Kellogg

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

Robert H. Vaxter

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

Pete Ritch

833 E Gulf Beach Drive, St George Island, FL 32328-2915
(850) 734-0014 Email: goldendog@mchsi.com

Mike “Belmo” Belmessieri

279 Dundee Drive, South San Francisco, CA 94080-1028
(650) 756-2924 Email: zippoF-11@aol.com

Committees & Chairmen

Terry Bocchino

Chaplin's Assistant
518-537-2509 EST

Mike Burnett

Awards & Medals
209-383-2261 PST

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CW04 Bob Embesi

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Joe Liu

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund
801) 731-7591
Email: pjliu@hotmail.com

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
770-365-3711 EST

“Robbie” Robinson

National Recruiter
409-385-6399 CST

John Wear

Sponson Box Editor
215-794-9052 EST

Greg Martin

Webmaster
360-480-1206 PST
Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Web Site: www.usmcvta.org

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John Wear – Editor & Publisher – johnwear2@verizon.net

Tuyen Pham – Layout and Design

Sandra Coan – Proofing

Printed in the USA

NEW MEMBERS

Auclair, Gregory M

3183 Rotterdam Drive
Clio, MI 48420-2318
Phone: 810-516-1990
Email: usmc20GR@aol.com
B Co, 1st Tanks, '66 – '67
MOS: 1811, 9999
DOB: 8/31/46
Wife: Barbara
Recruited by: Rick Lewis

Brock, Walter F

2414 – 7th Street
Ingleside, TX 78362-6000
Phone: 713-249-3061
Email: walterbrock@yahoo.com
A Co, 1st AT, '68
MOS: 0353
DOB: 2/2/49
Recruited by: Website

Ellis, Richard H “Rick”

2100 General Collins Ave
New Orleans, LA 70114
Phone: 504-366-1609
Email: rickellis1964@gmail.com
A Co, 1st Tanks, 1967
MOS: 1802
DOB: 2/16/45
Wife: Joyce
Recruited by: Semper Fidelis magazine

Ford, Robert L

77 W Encanto Blvd
Phoenix, AZ 85003
Phone: 602-252-4316
Email: fordshhead@yahoo.com
B Co, 5th Tanks, 1968
MOS: 2142
DOB: 2/29/48
Wife: Michele
Recruited by: Bob Embesi

Lewis, Jodie

609 Elaine Ave
Oceanside, CA 92057-3538
Phone: 760-439-1851
Email: augustelain@hotmail.com
B Co, 1st Tanks, '65 – '66
MOS: 1811
DOB: 10/12/38
Wife: Cynthia
Recruited by: Bob Embesi

Allen Cohen

1505 Seagull Drive South
St. Petersburg, FL 33707

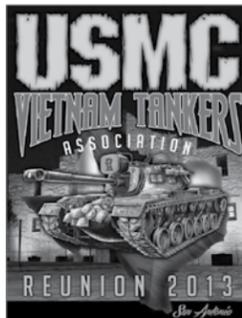
Ronald Davidson

65 Beasley Drive
Lexington TN, 38351
Phone Number: 731-225-3098
or
731-249-5450

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.

ON THE COVER:

This never-before-seen poster for the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association 2013 reunion in San Antonio is being considered to be offered for sale. Contact John Wear if you are interested.



Lorance, Richard A

6427 Gaywood Ave
Portage, IN 46368-2209
Phone: 219-762-2009
Email: ddlorance@yahoo.com
H&C and C Cos, 1st Tanks, '67 – '68
MOS: 2141
DOB: 12/27/46
Wife: Dona
Recruited by: John Wear

McGillivray, David S

230 Flowers Lane
Jacksonville, NC 28540
Phone:
No Email
A Co, 1st ATs, '63 and '69
MOS: 0353
DOB: 9/1/29
Recruited by: Rick Walters

Munoz, David E

12137 Courser Ave
La Mirada, CA 90638
Phone: 562-943-6514
Email: tikitanker@gmail.com
C Co, 1st Tanks, '68
MOS: 1811
DOB: 01/22/45
Wife: Celia
Recruited by: Roger Kropke

Nappier, Grady E

245 Bear Creek Terrace
Hampton, GA 30228
Phone: 404-538-2847
Email: gradynape@hotmail.com
C Co, 3rd Tanks, '68 – '69
MOS: 1811
DOB: 2/19/47
Recruited by: “Turtle” Wendling

Neubauer, Michael J

1201 Elm Street
Mission, TX 78572
Phone: 956-585-8056
Email: michael_neubauer@yahoo.com
C Co, 3rd Tanks, '68
MOS: 1811
DOB: 7/31/48
Wife: Lorraine
Recruited by: Don McMillan

Riehl, Charles T

3201 Fox Hollow Drive
Pepper Pike, OH 44124
Phone: 216-360-0976
Email: criehl@walterhav.com
C Co, 3rd Tanks, '67 – '68
MOS: 1801
DOB: 11/14/44
Wife: Kersti
Recruited by: John Hancock

MEMBER INFO CHANGES

Fred Medley

Phone: 407-877-7041

James Roberts

235 – 17th Ave S
Cranbrook, BC, V1c 4H9, Canada
Email: 2jsrobers@gmail.com

Claude “Chris” Vargo

204 Wagon Way
Bastrop, Texas 78602

Sparks, Earl E

404 S Meridian Street
Toledo, IL 62468
Phone: 217-218-3320
No Email
A & C Cos, 3rd Tanks, '65 – '66
MOS: 1811
Recruited by: Leatherneck magazine

Thompson, Ky L

3101 – 1st Ave West
Brandenton, FL 34205-3447
Phone: 941-708-5015
Email: kylyle@gmail.com
A Co, 3rd Tanks, '65
MOS: 1802, 1803, 0430
DOB: 3/25/43
Wife: Margaret E Melun
Recruited by: Ken Zebal

Trevail, Albert D

55 Chumassero Drive (Apt 12H)
San Francisco, CA 94132-2332
Phone: 415-859-9547
Email: brevail@att.net
A Co, 3rd Tanks, '67 – '69
MOS: 1811/9999/9917
DOB: 7/11/43
Wife: Sheila
Recruited by: Jim Coan, Blues, Sparrow and more

Weatherton, Neil R

21 Basildon Circle
Bella Vista, AR 72715
Phone: 479-855-4271
Email: neil.weatherton@sbcglobal.net
A Co, 3rd Tanks, '65 – '66
MOS: 0141/1811
DOB: 7/31/46
Wife: Carol
Recruited by: Website

Witt, Ernie

500 Custer Court
Modesto, CA 95351
Phone:
Email:
B Co, 1st Tanks, '68 – '69
MOS: 1811
DOB:
Wife:
Recruited by: Sid Ferguson

Zobie, William J

1708 SW Shady Lake Terrace
Palm City, FL 34990-2789
Phone: 772-220-8155
Email: zobiew@aol.com
H&S, B Co, 1st Tanks, '67 – '68
MOS: 2141
DOB: 7/15/46
Wife: Marilyn (Mimi)
Recruited by: John Wear

Chris Vrakelos

Phone: 805-402-7748

Huey Ward

Email: bhward@windstream.net
MOS: 2311

Bob Vaxter

13970 Hillcrest St
Livonia, MI 48154
Email: rvaxter47@yahoo.com

Meet Your Board of Directors

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

Mike “Belmo” Belmessieri

On January 9, 1968, Mike “Belmo” Belmessieri enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps. He completed recruit training with Platoon 369 at MCRD San Diego and ITR (Foxtrot Co.) before attending Tank School at Del Mar, Camp Pendleton. Belmo served with Bravo Company, 5th Tank Battalion, 5th Marine Division; Delta Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 5th MEB; and, HQ Company, 2nd ITR. He was released from active duty on April 8, 1970.

Upon separation from Active Duty, Belmo returned to the academic world and completed the college education which he had begun prior to his enlistment. During his professional civilian life, he worked as a security specialist, a city police officer, held various positions within organized labor, and in 2009 concluded a 35-year career with Georgia-Pacific Corporation. His last job included a variety of production and administrative local facility senior management positions.

Belmo is a member of numerous Veterans’ Service



Organizations and presently serves as the Vice President of the Marine Corps Coordinating Council of Northern California and as the Commandant of the General J.C. Breckinridge Detachment (# 10) of the Marine Corps League. He is the recipient of the Marine Corps League’s Distinguished Citizen Gold Medal, and he has received commendations for valor from the City of South San Francisco for having saved the lives of twelve people at a multi-alarm apartment building fire.

Belmo was a juror in the trial of the State of California vs. Scott Lee Peterson, and is co-author of the book, “We the Jury: Deciding the Fate of Scott Peterson” published by Phoenix Books.

Belmo is married to the former Annette Zammarchi of Staten Island, New York. They have four sons (one of whom is a Marine Sergeant and the veteran of both Operation Iraqi Freedom and Operation Enduring Freedom), a daughter, and six grandchildren. They currently reside in San Mateo County, California. ■

John C. Chambers

Home of record: Evanston, Illinois



The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Corporal John C. Chambers (MCSN: 2178941), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Commander with Company A, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with operations against insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces in the Republic of Vietnam, on 19 May 1967. During Operation HICKORY in Quang Tri Province, Corporal Chambers’ tank was attached to Company E, Second Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines, when the unit came under an intense enemy rocket and mortar attack. In the ensuing battle, his tank was hit by hostile fire, wounding all crew members and setting the vehicle ablaze. Displaying exceptional presence of mind and leadership, he evacuated his crew and was assured that they had received first aid before allowing treatment of his own wounds. Despite the explosions from .50 caliber rounds board his flaming tank, Corporal Chambers re-entered the vehicle, located a fire extinguisher and directed an infantryman in bringing the fire under control. Assisted by a companion, he then proceeded to deliver effective fire against the enemy, alternately firing the

.30 and .50 caliber machine guns and the 90-mm. cannon. Although the heat and smoke within the tank twice forced him to leave to get fresh air, he resolutely returned and aggressively continued to fire on the enemy until he was evacuated. Prior to his medical evacuation, Corporal Chambers instructed an infantryman in the operation of the tank’s machine guns, ensuring that the weapons could be used effectively in his absence. His heroic actions and determined fighting spirit inspired his fellow Marines and contributed significantly in repulsing the enemy attack. By his superior leadership, bold initiative and selfless devotion to duty, Corporal Chambers upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

Action Date: 19-May-67

Service: US Marine Corps

Rank: Corporal

Company: Company A

Battalion: 3d Tank Battalion

Division: 3d Marine Division (Rein.), FMF ■

Letter to the Editor

CORRECTION

I want to correct an error made previously in the Sponson Box when I referred to new member Albert Trevail, a Marine whom I had the honor of serving with in the 1st Platoon, Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks, as a retired master sergeant. He retired as a first sergeant.

Jim Coan
Sierra Vista, AZ
Phone: (520) 378-9659

Missed a lot of Good Stories

The enclosed check is to renew my membership. I was undecided to whether I should continue my membership. While I was deciding, I read all of the articles in the most recent Sponson Box and found them so interesting that I figured it was worth the money just to read all of the troopers' experiences. Normally I just skim thru it. I guess that I missed a lot of good stories.

CWO EJ Kues, USMC (ret)
San Diego, CA
Phone: (619) 463-7093

More on the 1st Tanks Reactionary Team

John, I really appreciate your support and help on the VA issues but especially on the proposed historical write up on the 1st Tanks Reactionary Squad incident. I'll try to send you some of the info I have. I have a synopsis of some info on the post incident perspective from a truck driver who drove a Warrant Officer and other wounded to Marble Mountain for treatment. As I recall his perspective, he felt that the NVA unit was significantly larger than reported. I've never felt that I got an accurate perspective of the incident. You mentioned that the NVA or VC had a heavy machine gun that was the major problem. However, I feel that the enemy unit was a sniper unit with some support. See the info below. I have also read a lot of post battle reports from this period, February 68, from 1st Tanks, and there are numerous incidents of Marine KIA from snipers.

However, I could not find any post battle report from the records for the incident in question. I wonder if some of the officers could have doctored up a report or reports.

My only concrete info came from two of my friends; Lance Sullivan and Frank Stewart who were part of the Reactionary Team. Lance showed me Wayne's helmet liner that had a small hole. It did not look like a 30 caliber hole but I don't know if the gooks were using 6.5 and or 6 mm or similar smaller caliber rifles. Lance told me that Wayne took grenade shrapnel to his legs and called for the corpsman for assistance. According to Lance, when the corpsman came to help, that was when Wayne was fatally shot in the head. It is my recollection that from Lance's comments that the corpsman was also fatally shot and

or wounded. I have not been able to find info on the corpsman's name. There was a post battle report where a 1st Tanks corpsman was KIA on the same day but it did not appear to be related.

Johns was also hit in the head. When they brought him out he was dragged on his back because of the severity of the head wound; he was already KIA. Frank said he recognized Johns immediately because his legs were exposed oh his utility trousers and he could see the significantly hairy legs which were Johns. He was one hairy Marine. Johns had been with part of the team that crossed an open field to attack.

My two friends that were KIA were Wayne Greer and Wayne Johns. We used to call Wayne Johns just "Johns." He was an Alabama man, easy going with a big smile. Johns came from a small town. Wayne Greer was young and was from the Pittsburgh area--Greensburg. I always felt that Wayne was under my wing. We had a lot in common with family type and coming from Pennsylvania. Frank, Wayne, Lance and I were a tight group; bonds that only the Marine Corps makes. Wayne was the youngest only male sibling with a large contingent of sisters. Based upon what one of the sisters told me, his mother never fully recovered from Wayne's loss. I tried to get a meeting with his sisters and possibly his mother, but the one sister told me they did not want to meet. The loss of Wayne was still painful and that she and her mother did not want to open again the painful memories.

They still feel that Wayne and his fellow Marines were left with no support when he was KIA. His sister was adamant about it from the beginning. She must have been given some additional information from others. She said that if I ever found out anything of significance she would like the information. I subsequently heard from a nephew who expressed open communications etc., but he emphasized his Aunt's perspective about his grandmother wanting no further contact. I told them that I wasn't there but I know his fellow Marines would not, and did not, abandon him and that a corpsman was KIA attending to Wayne; based upon info from Lance. I was able to get contact information on Wayne's family from "The Wall" web page.

Frank Stewart, one of the Reactionary Team, told me that there were some complications and heated issues among the leadership prior to going into the attack. Apparently, there was a major who was directing and leading the team. He asked for the firearm that a Warrant Officer was carrying and the WO reluctantly gave up his weapon. The tactics and approach seemed to be a cluster f*ck. I understand that half of the team crossed an open field to the village and the other half went directly to it. The team was brought to the area by trucks. There were no tanks!

Earlier, sometime in '67 and prior to this incident in February of '68, I was with the Reactionary Team that went to the same

village. We went to the area with two tanks, and the team mounted both tanks to approach the village. There was no combat incident. It was a little awkward because we went right down the road to the village and there was high ground on the opposite side of the road and open fields with some tree lines on the other side on the approach to the village. It was just getting dark when we got to the village, but again there was no problem. We were subsequently told that one of the villagers advised us that there were VC in the village. My personal opinion was that it was just another test to see how we would respond.

I read a short insert in the letter to the editor in the VTA magazine about the incident with the Reactionary Team. That is how I ended up getting Bob Walker's name. Bob sent me a copy of the Memorial Ceremony for the Reactionary Team. I had a phone conversation with Bob. The information he provided gave me some insight to the incident. My best recollection on what Bob said was that the grunts would not initiate an attack of the subject village because of the terrain and tactics needed to clear the village of NVA or VC. Apparently the enemy was well dug in and was looking for an attack because tactics and terrain were in their favor. The big question is why the Commanding Officer from 1st Tanks would send in our Reactionary Team to tackle this situation. My synopsis of the whole incident is that the Marines and Marine junior officers, WO, did their jobs, but there was a major failure of USMC senior officers. It would be interesting to know the outcome and perspective of what the Corps had to the loss of our fellow six Marines in this case. Was there any fall out of responsibility? I served under some outstanding officers / men from the Corps but this incident was not, in my opinion, in the finest tradition of the USMC senior officers.

Wayne's sisters reaction is on target, as I still wonder why the Team was not sent with tanks. That was my immediate reaction even when I was advised of the incident on Hill 55 in '68. Also if not tanks why wasn't there artillery called in to support an attack? Why would an officer expose his men to an established and dug in enemy with at least a more innovative tactical plan? If experienced grunts would not attack and clear the village, why would the officers use a Reactionary Team? These are the questions that haunt me.

I've tried to locate Lance Sullivan and Frank Stewart but have not been able to find them. Lance was from Washington State. Frank's family was from Baltimore. I left "country" shortly after the incident during TET of 68. I was on Hill 55, but I had to go through Battalion when leaving country. That was the time that I had to visit with them about the incident one on one. I wished I had spent more time with them discussing the events, but it was an emotional issue for all of us. I had completed my tour in the Corps when I left country. I have always had a problem dealing with the loss of my two friends. More with Wayne than Johns, only because of the bond! It wasn't until late in my life that I have been able to cope with these emotions. I always felt guilty that I wasn't there with my friends. Could I have made a difference? Would they still be alive? At least I would have all the answers or at least most of them!

In fact, the writing of this memo has been a positive

experience. I'm seeking closure. I still feel helpless in my inability to bring closure for Wayne's family. It is awkward; I only live 15-20 minutes from Wayne's family now but cannot bring them peace. I really don't have the answers.

Ted Hildabrand
Eighty Four, PA
Phone: (724) 942-2125

Mixing Napalm and Other Stuff

I was reading a past issue of the Sponson Box the other night when I realized that I had not sent in my annual dues, so here it is and please take me off of the burning shitters detail.

One of the articles in the magazine talked about Napalm mixing. I was on F-33 assigned to C Co, 1st Tanks from Jan '69 to July '69. Jack Mills was the gunner and Ivan England was TC. Since there is only one more crewman left, I was the driver. And I have to admit that I liked my job the best. I was a driver back in B Co, 1st Tanks in '68. All of our Napalm was mixed by hand. I've had some of my jarhead buddies here in my hometown have a hard time believing we mixed 360 gallons of "jelly" by hand. Of course, it is "Tabasco jelly without the seeds" but I assure them we enjoyed every gallon. It does stick to kids, trees, bunkers and gooks. So the article did help convince them I wasn't laying the shit on 'em.

Also, toward the end of December 2011, I had to take a life squad ride since I had signs of a heart attack. They came to the house, and not trusting the VA, I called the VA Hospital in Cincinnati and talked to the triage nurse. I told her my symptoms and she told me to call the squad to take me to the closest emergency room. They took me to Mercy Hospital which is local, since I live 26 miles from the VA Hospital. When I got to Mercy, I told them that I should go to the VA Hospital, but the VA Hospital told them to keep me there and do what needed to be done. It turned out that my blood pressure had tumbled down due to my weight loss and too much blood pressure medicine. They did so many tests on me that I thought that they would also perform a circumcision!

One last point of interest: I had posted a bunch of photos on Facebook. Mike Belmessieri saw them and indicated that he knew one of the guys, Marty Sacco. Mike had gone to high school with Marty. I had been looking for Marty for years with no success and Mike knew him and how to find him. Now Marty and I have e-mailed each other several times and I am working to get him to join the VTA.

Doug Scrivner
Hamilton, OH
Phone: (513) 887-6266

Editor's note: Marty has not become a member yet.

The Raw Power of the Sun

Editor's note: I had sent out an email detailing a story of the raw power of the Sun and this is a reply that I got:

Did you ever know a Lt. Norton out of 1st Tanks at Camp Pendleton around 1970 or so? I had a '66 Ford F-100 that I had cleaned up rather nicely with a new paint job. It took me almost

>>

a month to do the work at the Camp Pendleton hobby shop. The battalion was going to 29 Palms for a month and the Lt. and I went up on the advance party. While we were there the temps were in the 100+ degree range. Young Mr. Norton got the "bright idea" to show his mother how hot it was at 29 Palms by frying an egg on the hood of my pick up truck and then taking a picture of it to send to her. I was not at all a happy camper. As a matter of fact, I went ballistic, but fortunately for me as well as young Lt. Norton, the Bn Assistant Supply Officer was with us at the time and he was able to contain the matter, keeping it "civil"...until the temperature reached a moderate level....if you get my drift.

As I understand the Bn. XO as well as our Company Commander had a few choice words for the good Lt. as well. In short order Lt. Morton was transferred to one of the S-shops, I don't recall which.

Upon our return from "the stumps" to Pendleton, the Bn. Sgt. Major acted a mediator and tried to make things right. It took another two weeks for me to refinish the hood of my truck back to its origin condition. Lt. Norton offered to help with the work and pay for the material. I was so pissed that I declined his offer, wishing to have nothing more to do with him what so ever.

We saw each other from time to time around the battalion area for a short time then we both moved on....I never saw the Lt. after that.

But I do know what the Sun can do.

Arthur E. Nash Sr.
anash3@msn.com

Editor's Note: I sent an email to a bunch of buddies that included a video of a retirement ceremony of the F-4 Phantom jet commemorating 40 years of its service with the German Air Force. The "Phantom" is a favorite CAS aircraft that saved many of our young asses while we served in Vietnam. This is Fred Kellogg's reply:

Not sure if I told you this story: A little more than a year ago, I was going to buy a car from a local dealer using Costco's car service. However, I hit it off so well with the salesman that I asked Costco if I could give him the sale at the same price. The salesman had been an F-4 pilot flying support for the Marines in Vietnam. He flew an earlier model without guns (he was a Navy pilot flying off a carrier) and he frequently became frustrated when the Marines needed help and there he was with no way to strafe the enemy. When I asked him what he did about it, he told me he'd get 4 or 5 other Phantoms to join in trail and they'd go in at tree-top level. Then, when they were near the NVA, they'd go supersonic and pull straight up over them. The resulting shockwave left the gooks writhing on the ground. Pretty cool!!!

On one flight, they had done just that, but when he tried to land on the carrier he had a numb foot. After getting on board, he found that one of the gooks had managed to place an AK round in the seam that was around his armored seat. That freakish placement caused a bullet wound in the lower part of his leg. He is a great guy!

Fred Kellogg
Vancouver, WA
Phone: (360) 609-3404

Be Prepared – Harvey "Robbie" Robinson



An Ontos Ooops!



Editor's Note: Gerry Hodum identified the above image of an Ontos coming off of a landing craft... Note the 106 mm projectile falling out of the muzzle!!!

Below is Gerry's story:

This photo was taken at Little Creek, VA. I was company maintenance chief of Alpha Co, 2nd AT Bn. The company was tasked with sending a platoon from Camp LeJeune to Virginia for training of the West Point cadets and Annapolis midshipmen. I was made Platoon Leader / Maintenance Chief of the 2d Plt. We spent June to September 1962 giving displays of vehicles and conducting many landings at Pendleton Beach, Virginia. There was a whole BLT from 2d Marines there to which we were attached. Since we (Ontos) used LCM-8's for landing and the Army supplied them (a US Army Boat Platoon no less!!) we were detached for billeting and facilities half a base (Little Creek) away from where the grunt area was. It was a fine summer for sure. This was 1962 and I was a SSgt at the time. Such Memories!!!

Gerry Hodum
Floral City, FL
Phone: (352) 341-6864

Brotherhood

Editor's Note: I have a dear friend who back in the mid-1960's was engaged to be married to a Marine (Gary Lynn Irig). Gary attended bootcamp with me back in the summer of 1966. Unfortunately, he was killed in Vietnam while serving as point man with Alpha Co, 1/1. The amazing fact (to me) is that this dear lady tells me that although she went on to get married to another good man and to raise a wonderful family, she misses her KIA Marine finance every day. Last week she wrote me a note telling me about another

Marine veteran (Ed Beisel, Kansas City, MO) who also attended bootcamp with us and who is still connected:

"Marine "brotherhood" is not just a loosely used term but, I have found, a way of life!!!! Eddie still visits Lynn's grave on a regular basis and has for the entire 46 years since his death. Eddie brings grass clippers with him and clips the grass around his grave. When the headstone began sinking into the earth, Eddie went to the caretaker and made sure he corrected it! You Marine guys are certainly very special people indeed! Though I had never been a Marine, I've sure experienced wonderful friendships plus the advantage of numerous blessings from those friendships!"

Hugs

Bobbi Flinn
Email: bflinn48@hotmail.com

Fred Keeps Bumping into Them!

My wife and I went to a local game store to buy a gift for our daughter's 19th birthday. I noticed that the young man helping us (he looked to be around 25 years old) had the tattoo of a Senior Master Sgt - US Air Force on the upper part of his left arm. When I asked him about the tattoo he explained it was to honor his father. The clerk then told me that he was also in the Air Force (reserve) and that he works at the Game Shop between deployments. He has already been to Iraq and Afghanistan, and his next deployment will be to Africa. His military specialty is military rescue. Whenever a pilot is shot down, a soldier or Marine wounded behind enemy lines, etc., it is his job to get to them, provide any needed medical assistance, then fight his way out if necessary.



As we prepared to leave, my wife told the young man that I was an old Marine. The young man instantly became animated and his face lit up as he told me, "Of all the U.S. military, Marines scare me." When I asked why he said, "When Marines have been in a fight and are full of adrenaline, they are dangerous. They won't hesitate to kill anyone around them if they feel threatened." He said that he really loves Marines. He then came around the counter to shake my hand. It made me extremely proud!

Fred Kellogg
Vancouver, WA
Phone: (360) 609-3404

Jack Hartzell

There was an article in the last Sponson Box by Jack Hartzell. Back in the day, Jack and I hung out on the same street corner in Wilmington, Delaware. I saw him twice in Vietnam: Once when our tanks were operating with 2/9, and once when he and

I were on the same flight from Dong Ha to Da Nang to go on R&R. Jack currently lives in upstate New York on 40 acres. His is retired from AMTRACK (the railroad company). We still keep in touch.

Bill "JJ" Carroll
Stillwater, MN
Phone: (651) 592-1121

CORRECTION

In the most recent issue of the Sponson Box a photo of a mini-reunion in Phoenix, Arizona, that incorrectly identified Chris Vrakelos as a non-member of the VTA. Sorry Chris!

Dereliction of Duty?

The Vice-President of the bank in which you hold the VTA monies called me to inform me that you, Mr. President, are derelict in your duties in that you still have not deposited my dues check. Your failure, again, to properly account for my funds makes you subject to recall. However, that is not going to be possible in that I have submitted your name for an unprecedented eighteenth term as President of the Association. You are doing an absolutely fabulous job, Little Johnny, so, despite your weakness in fiscal matters, I will not order your recall. After all, who else could we get so cheaply and who is willing to work his ass to the bone for this collection of shitfisters.

While on the subject of shitfisters, let me make it clear that you have wooed and won the heart of my darling wife with this last edition of The Sponson Box. For a little girl who doesn't know how to tell a First Sergeant of Tankers from a shitfister tank commander of a flame tank, she has fallen in love with the magazine. She says she just loves to read the letters from the troopers because those are real people leading real lives and she is so grateful for their service. The true life stories also fascinate her and she tells me it makes some of the sea stories I used to tell more believable now.

As we in the Naval Service say, "Well done, John"

Jim Langford (aka "Top Almighty")
Carlsbad, CA

Phone: (760) 729-1933

Arc Lights Anyone? Fluff & Buff?

While I was at the VA wound center with my wife, Toneia and our oldest son, I was getting treatment as a diabetic when an elderly

gentleman was sitting there with his wife. He saw my VTA cap, asked if I had been in Nam. We exchanged a few words and I asked him if he had any pictures of the arc light raids from the ground perspective. I was surprised that even though he served eight tours in Nam, he didn't have one, so I told him I would send him one that I took while waiting to drive the lead tank on a resupply convoy, as we were west on Hwy 9 out of the Rockpile. It was the 1st of Feb in 1968. The Tet Offensive was activated on Jan 13th for us out on Route 9 when an NVA ambush resulting in 80% casualties. In less than 3 minutes, I had to wait on fender of tank several minutes until the ground stopped rumbling to take the picture. I sent the photo to him yesterday. His card (above) was impressive to me. I just sent a note to him inviting him and his wife to our reunion in San Antonio. As an aside, back at the VA that day, his wife kept getting up so he and I could talk. I repeatedly rejected taking her vacant seat but instead I squatted beside his chair to chat. My motivation for inviting them to San Antonio was that, after all, those big Air Force bombers were in support of us for my entire tour. I liked their motto, "Tough enough to fly the Buff"!!! We all liked the B- 52's flying over us and around the Rockpile, Camp Carroll, Ca Lu and Khe Sanh. I guess that was so because we were surrounded all the time! I remember that the little sign at the motor-T shop at Carroll said, "If we can't truck it - Fuck it!"

Wally Young
Ft Deposit, AL
Phone: (334) 227-8669



Photo: VTA member Tom Fenerty with the aftermath of one 2000-pound bomb from an arch light raid.

From a Vietnam Doggie Tank Officer

Ed Note: I have a few Vietnam doggie tanker buddies who send correspondences to each other sometimes recalling their glorious careers. Here is one:

Being a naive and brand new captain fresh back from Nam, I took the Post Headquarters Company at Ft. Gordon, GA. I started out with over 1,000 numbers (names) on my morning report that could not be accounted for with orders. And that was just the beginning. I had a company of WAC's (Doggie speak for "BAM's") to boot ... and they were not very professional, to say it nicely. I had these trashy looking women as clerks and typists in my orderly room and there was always some horny GI trying to

make time with them. Usually I had to run one or two off several times daily. My First Sgt and I went through the personnel records and found men that could type, so the WAC's were replaced and our efficiency improved. Those 100 WAC's were one of my worst headaches, I have to say. I also had Detachment 1, the stockade, and I'd sign a couple hundred courts martial orders every week, as all the area deadbeats were captured and sent there. I did not even have the time to read the names! I also had a platoon of Guamanians and they were a terrible problem. One Saturday night they rioted and threw bunks down the stairwell and out the second story barrack windows. I got the two ringleaders in my office, locked the door, pulled the shades and braced them against the wall. I threatened to whip both their asses, and you might say we had a meeting of the minds. I chased down this 6'4" black soldier and wrestled away from him a .22 auto pistol in the company area. I courts marshaled him, and this fine full-bird, Col. Fuller, my CO, suspended his sentence so the soldier could play on his softball team. I was trying to make up my mind whether to stay in the Army or not. That assignment made me a civilian. When I left, all numbers were accounted for on the morning report.

FTA,

Richard

More Time at Con Thien

After only five days in-country and being given the command of a tank with A Co, 3rd Tanks, I went to meet my crew. As I had said before, they all had quite a bit more time in-country than I did and were pretty "salty." We had been able to get resupplied with ammo and C-rats because I was told, "Tomorrow your tank will escort a convoy to Con Thien," where ever that might be. I was also told to meet the convoy at the west gate of the sprawling Dong Ha Combat Base. In addition, they said that our tank would stay up at the Con Thien firebase for "some time."

I asked my driver if he knew how to get to the west gate and to Con Thien. His reply was: "Maybe."

The next morning we drove out and found the gate and the convoy. Now I have to say I was a 19 year old FNG with little or no clue, but the USMC had seen fit to promote me to the rank of corporal and, since I was an NCO, I rated the command of a tank. When the convoy was formed up, the order came over the radios, "Move out!" As our tank started to head out, my driver asked me over the intercom: "Which way?"

I replied, "I thought that you knew the way and had been there before."

He came back with, "I guess I forgot. Maybe I shoulda checked the map?"

Now that I can recall, I think that my crew were just screwing with me.

Well, west on Route 9 we go and our tank was leading the big-assed convoy. We made a hard right at Cam Lo village and then headed north to the Washout. All the time I was sure we would be attacked by the NVA at any moment and all hell would break loose.

When we finally arrived at the Washout, just south of Con

Thien, they were being shelled. So the convoy stopped and I was informed that they would not go any further. In fact, the convoy commander said that they were turning around and returning to Dong Ha.

Here I was, left all alone just north of the Washout without the convoy or any other tanks for support. So I called back to the company at Dong Ha. I think the radio call sign for Alpha Co. was "Coming Event" and your tank number. The person at the other end of the radio said, "What is the problem?"

I informed him that the convoy had turned around and that I was on my own. I think he yelled at me to get my ass up to Con Thien. Thinking about my training, I had been taught back in stateside that a tank should never be out alone, if at all possible. At this time I was absolutely sure that I would run into contact, one lone tank. Of course, I also did not know how close we were to Con Thien.

Well, off we went heading north. Luckily, it seemed as if the NVA shelling had stopped at Con Thien and we pulled into the base, stopping our tank behind one of the hills that makes up the base. My loader and I began to dismount our tank so that we could find where they wanted us to be placed when we heard a few loud booms in the distance from the north. Knowing that the sound was not our own out-going arty, we both jumped back on the tank to get inside before the gook rounds hit. Well, as my luck would have it, the first round that hit what must have been one of the Marine ammo dumps. There was a very huge explosion, bigger then I had ever seen or heard at the gunnery range in Camp Pendleton. The problem at the time was that I did not know if this was an ammo dump that had been hit. I thought to myself, "If the gooks were shooting rounds like the biggest and loudest explosions in the world, then I'll never get off this hill alive!!!"

Guy Everest
Alpine, CA
Phone: (619) 960-2340

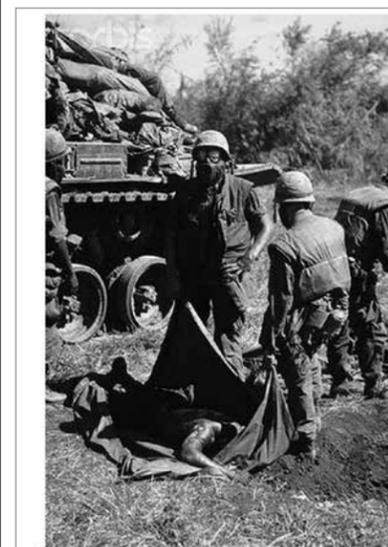
Marine Killed, 4 Hurt in Tank Fire During Training

Sep 18, 2013

TWENTYNINE PALMS, Calif. -- A 21-year-old Marine has been killed and four others injured in a training accident at the Twenty Nine Palms Marine Base in Southern California. Cpl. Nicholas James Sell was killed about 11:20 a.m. Monday when the tank he was inside caught fire, according to a news release issued Tuesday afternoon by the 1st Marine Division in Camp Pendleton. The accident occurred at the Air Ground Combat Center in the desert about 130 miles east of Los Angeles.

According to Camp Pendleton, one of the four injured Marines was taken to Arrowhead Regional Medical Center, where he was in stable condition Tuesday. The other three were treated and released from the Naval hospital aboard the combat center. Their tank unit was training in the Bullion/Lead Mountain area, a spokesman for the combat

center said. The accident is under investigation and no details have been released. The names of the victims also are being withheld pending notification of relatives.



KIA recovery during Operation Buffalo

As a follow up to the many stories about the hapless grunts from Alpha and Bravo Co., 1/9, during the early part of July 1967, this is a photo of the retrieval process that took place a few days after the battle.

Editor's Note: A few weeks before the San Antonio reunion, I got an e-mail from someone whom I did not know asking me the name of the reunion hotel. I replied by asking him who he was and why he wanted the hotel name. He answered that he had been with Charlie, 1/9 during Operation Buffalo in July of 1967 and wanted to talk to and thank the tankers who saved his life back in-country during a very bad time for U.S. Marines. On the second day of the reunion, most of us were gathered in the Slopchute and a pretty lady came up to me and asked, "Where is John Wear?" She was the wife of the Charlie 1/9 grunt and in the ensuing few minutes, Roy LoBue was introduced to Terry Hunter, Hank Brightwell and Greg Martin. This is the reply e-mail that I got from him today:

It was a most rewarding visit. The three tankers from the July 2nd experience, well, meeting them was enriching, to say the least. I trust it was just as interesting for them to meet me. Can you give me their three names, please. I am currently reading the newsletters you gave to me--very carefully. So I'd like to tie in the names as I read through these most wonderful newsletters. The quality of which is surprising to me. I think tankers are way more literary than infantry. LOL.

I have also been reading the after action reports on the internet, and again very carefully. I am forming a picture, that is, the big picture of the entire experience. After all of this, meaning after the Christmas holidays, I can perhaps think about making a contribution. And yes, I would welcome your inputs. As I learn more about you, as depicted in the newsletters, I think our collaboration will result in a piece or two that should be worthwhile.

And please don't fret about running around like a chicken without a head. You were a most gracious host and I deeply thank you for the invitation.

Roy
Charlie 1/9

(Continued on page 33)

LOST (AND THEN FOUND) IN SAN ANTONIO

Editor's Note: During the 2013 reunion in San Antonio we had a new VTA member & reunion attendee who at times seemed a bit overwhelmed. The below story came to us from the hotel General Manager who sent it to the entire hotel staff thanking them. The story was also sent to me to share in this act of "Over and Above" for one of our brothers. The Marine's name has been omitted to protect his identity.

Team, I had to share a story with you that I just heard from Mr. ____, who called me this morning. He was a guest in our hotel this weekend and he was attending the (USMC Vietnam Tankers) Reunion Group. He is a Vietnam veteran. Mr. ____ told me that he ran into Chef Armando yesterday in the parking garage and said he could not find his car. Armando assisted the guest with finding his car by punching the panic button on his remote. Mr. ____ was on his way to the airport and stated he was confused and lost with the directions he had been given. Armando then offered to have him follow him in his truck to the airport. Armando took him all the way to the car rental place and made sure he got safely to the airport. Mr. ____ stated that without this kind gesture from Armando, that he would have missed his flight back home to New York. Mr. ____ also stated that Armando refused to accept any cash for his kindness. Armando simply told him that it

was part of his job to take care of our guests.

Mr. ____ wanted to make sure that management was aware of Armando's kindness and he is very humbled by the act of kindness and going far and above the call of duty. He also wanted me to tell Armando that he was safely home in New York and to extend his deep felt thanks again. Mr. ____ stated that he contacted his organization and they are going to print his story in the next newsletter that goes out to 2500 veterans. Mr. ____ wanted to know if there was anything else he could do and I asked him to publish his story on Trip Advisor.

Armando, thank you for taking such great care of our guests. You have truly set the bar high for the rest of us to follow!

What a wonderful way to start my day hearing such a great story!



Can you guess who the person is in this photo? The first person to contact John Wear at (215) 794-9052 with the right answer will receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.

Man Injured After Stabbing Marine



GUESS WHO

Photo Contest

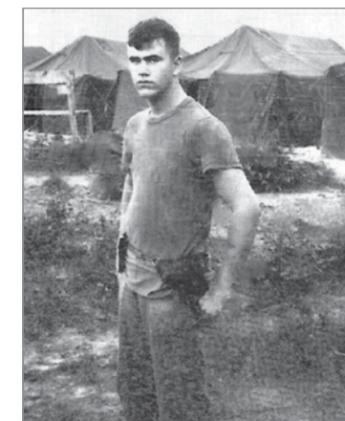
Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner was Wally Young who identified **Bill "JJ" Carroll**.

Wally left a voice mail message on my phone at 4:46 PM on July 25th and beat anyone else who may have wanted to identify JJ.

I also got an email note from JJ saying:

"I think I was 19 at the time. My shoulder holster had rotted away, so I had to make do."



Looking For

CHARLIE COMPANY, 3RD TANKS, GRUNT PLATOON

John, you are the only one I know who can help me. There was a bunch of Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks Marines who became "grunts" and used to go on patrols with...(and for)...me as I served as Charlie Company First Sgt in 1968. I would like to re-connect with any of them that remember me. I was only with Charlie Company for seven months but I had a great time. Maybe we could put a note in the Sponson Box?

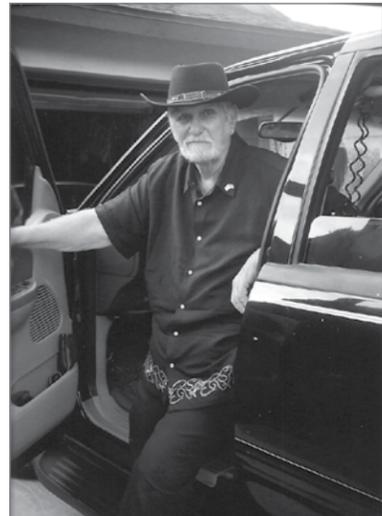
My problem is that I DON'T remember. That is, unless someone reminds me like you did with the drunken gunny story. Here's what I do remember:

I joined Charlie Company in July 1968 and the company HQ was at Cam Lo Hill. There was also a battery of Marine 155's there and they would shoot right over our bunkers shaking sand all over our sleeping asses. While we were there, the company commander, company gunny, and the maintenance chief were all killed by a command detonated mine along the beach as they came back from our outpost up near the DMZ (that was Charlie 4). All the platoons of Charlie Company were deployed from hell to breakfast. I was a "first time First Sergeant" who did not know jack shit about tanks...or how their units functioned. Fortunately, my office clerks helped me out, but I can't remember any of their names (one was Cpl. Handler). The one adventure I'm sure someone will remember is when we stole a refrigerator and its generator from inside an Army colonel's tent whose unit of tanks had stopped by us on their way to Con Thien. My Marines needed my permission to get the perimeter gates opened before daylight so they could get the stolen property off site ASAP... as everyone knew there would be a camp search as soon as the colonel woke up. We did and there was. Many threats were made, but with no evidence they couldn't prove anything.

Soon afterwards we moved to some little ville on the north bank of the Cua Viet River (Mai Xa Tai) and we endured "Typhoon Bess." I remember the area we were in was flooded and one of our lieutenants got damn near killed trying to keep our fuel bladders from floating away. He got very serious burns from the liquid fuel that splashed all over him.

While we were there, I tried showing my tankers how to be grunts by taking them out on patrols and sending them out on ambushes. I went out with the first ambush, along with a visiting friend of mine, another first sergeant. After we were set up all we could do was to wait for the enemy to show up. Shortly, I heard snoring and we went to check out who was sleeping and found everyone except myself and my friend sound ass asleep. I woke everyone up and we went back to the lines.

From that flooded God-forsaken place, we moved the company to another ville that was closer to 1st Amtracs site. We had lots of adventures there including stealing the complete insides of an Army tank to replace the insides of aging Charlie 14. Legend had it that "Charlie 14" was the oldest tank in Vietnam...having come ashore with the Seventh Marines in 1965. I later learned that wasn't exactly true, but the tank had come ashore with the Seventh Marines.



In the photo:
"Top Almighty" Jim Langford

This is where I got my hawk (a genuine raptor bird) and I would go on motorized patrols riding in an Amtrac with my bald head shining, holding my Thompson in my right hand and my hawk on my left wrist.

This is also where one of our patrols almost got shot up by some Force Recon Marines inserted into our TAOR. The Force Recon Marines were in the middle of calling in airstrikes on our Marines when I intercepted their radio transmission... but

I've already told you that story.

We had one big fight in this position, but I can't remember the date or our casualties. All I do remember was how well my tankers fought as grunts in fixed positions instead of in their "Iron Horses."

Semper Fidelis

Jim Langford, 1st Sgt USMC (ret)

Carlsbad, CA

Phone: (760) 729-1933

Email: thebedouin@roadrunner.com

I just got my new Sponson Box magazine and I'd like some help in finding some friends of mine. On Page 14 there is an article on Gary Heckman as having passed away. Ken Zebal sent in the obit. I'd like to see if you can help me find Gary's wife, Betty. My wife & Betty were very good friends when we were at 2nd Tanks. The last time we saw them was in 70's. I've been looking for Gary for some time and I was sorry to hear he passed away.

Wes "Tiny" Kilgore

Email: gysgtusmce7@verizon.net

Editors Note: Ken and Tiny communicated and made some plans. If anyone else may know Betty, please give Tiny a heads up.

FROM THE VTA WEBSITE GUESTBOOK:

If you are a member of tank commander Jim Noyses's crew or any Marine who remembers the August 5, 1967, early morning sapper attack on the bridge at Hill 555, and being over-run, please contact me. It is most important. The tank in question was located in the Delta Company, 1/7 area on the finger overlooking the bridge. The tank was hit at 0215 hours and one of the Marines in the tank crew received a shrapnel wound. The tank had a mounted Xenon light and confirmed sappers coming forward from the east on the opposite side of the bridge perimeter before the attack began. A flechette (beehive) round had been loaded, but the Delta Company skipper denied permission to fire. Three Marines were KIA and most all others were WIA.

If you know anyone that may have any knowledge of this event, please contact me, I need to know what happened to the tank crew. I was one of the Marines who fought in the early morning battle and my location was on the far side (south side) of the bridge. I am now the historian for Delta, 1/7 Marines, Inc., and am writing a book that includes details of all that happened that battle. I need the tank crew's help to fill in the gaps and to give credit to the tank crew. I thank you in advance.

Please contact:

George J. Schneider II

275 Overlook Drive

Sparta, TN. 38583

E-mail gjschneider2@gmail.com

Phone: (931) 739-3335

PS: John please send me a copy of the publication if possible.

A few issues ago we posted a "Looking For" article that was from Brian Berger, the son of a Vietnam Marine tanker. Unfortunately no one responded to his request. He is moving to a new home and I felt compelled to post his address change so if someone reads this and if they recall 1st Lt Roger J Berger from 3rd AT Bn then they will be able to contact Brian:

Brian's comment: Thanks for following up. I have not had anyone contact me that served with my Dad. I'm also in the process of buying a new home so my home address and e-mail address will be changing soon because my current internet provider does not service the area where our new home is located.

As a result I created a new e-mail account at GMail: BrianBerger76@gmail.com

Assuming everything goes through ok with the house closing at the end of this month, my new address should be:

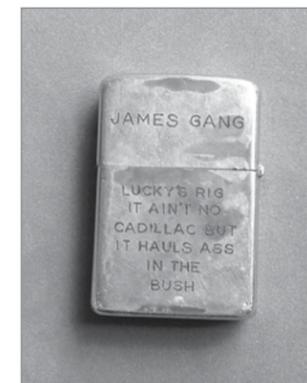
Brian Berger

105 Ivory St.

Lafayette, LA 70506

I truly appreciate all of your help and efforts with locating someone that served with my Dad.

WHOSE ZIPPO LIGHTER IS THIS?



A Vietnam Veteran contacted me the other day and said that he found a lighter at a garage sale out in the Erie, (northwestern) PA area. Does anyone recognize this lighter?

122 MM ROCKET ATTACK



This is the photo that I took while I was the Bravo Company remote XO in late 1968 at An Hoa Combat Base (5th Mar Div) moments before a 122mm strike (a daily affair following our early afternoon B-52 strikes on Charlie Ridge west across the Arizona Territory from An Hoa). The photo is of three unidentified Bravo Company tankers who were working on their tank in an open area along the eastern perimeter of the base. When the multiple rockets hit, I was returning to my tent. I jumped into the nearest bunker when all of a sudden a boot bounced off my back. Picking up the boot, I noted a foot was still in it. We soon heard the cries of the three wounded tankers and we exited the bunkers to check on them. In the meantime, the hapless wounded tank crewmen had all crawled under the tank to avoid more incoming. When we got to them, a sapper just outside the wire was firing at our rescue party. As we circled the tank, we managed to pull the three bloody Marines onto stretchers. They all had lost at least one limb. We lost another three tankers including the death of Cpl Shrekengost) around the same time with the "daily incoming."

I'd like to make an attempt to solicit anyone to help me ID the three tankers who lost limbs (two lost a leg and one lost an arm) one minute after I took this photo.

Richard "Dick" Peksens

St Petersburg, FL

Phone: (727) 520-9151

FOUND IN LEATHERNECK MAGAZINE "READERS ASSISTANCE":

Former Cpl Ronald V. Davidson, Beasley Dr., Lexington, TN 38351, (731) 225-3098, bravo34@charter.net, to hear from Ed Chambers, who served in 3rd Plt, "Bravo" Co, 1st Tank Bn, RVN 1967, and may have lost a leg in December 1967 or 1968. ■

An original poem by
1st Sgt James Lawrence Langford, USMC (ret)
Charlie Co, 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Mar Div, Vietnam

“BUT WE GATHER TOGETHER YET ONCE MORE”

ON THE OCCASION OF THE 238TH BIRTHDAY
OF THE
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS
NOVEMBER 10, 2013

You are the men that I first met
In years long gone, and dim,
But we gather together yet once more
To sing our Battle Hymn.
The Corps was only one seventy-five
When, young, I joined this crew,
But we gather together yet once more
Our friendship to renew.
We come from Places far and wide
With varied Skills and Means,
But we gather together yet once more
These men they call Marines.
We have our memories of Long Ago
Of Peace and Wars galore,
But we gather together yet once more
To Serve and Honor Corps.
Our Nation's Service was our goal
And this we did with Pride,
But we gather together yet once more
To remember those who died.
So, lift your glass and shout “Oorah”
And stand with Honor, tall,
For we gather together yet once more
At this, Our Birthday Ball!

Above & Beyond

Recognizing those members that have made financial contributions above and beyond their normal membership dues to help our organization grow and prosper. Thank you!

Andy Anderson
Mark Anderson
Anonymous
Jack Arena
Greg Auclair
Richard Beirne, IV
Mike Belmessieri
Bobby Joe Blyth
Max Braseau
Hank Brightwell
Jack Byrne
Frank Carr
Al Christy
The estate of Jerry Clark
Jim Coan
Ben Cole
Ron Colucci
Rick Coulter
John Cox
Monty Cramer
Steve Curti
Ken Dahl
Bill Davis
Cookie DeFazio
Florindo DeRoma
Justin Donnelly
RB English
Edgar Evans
Guy Everest
John Everett
James Fanning
Dan Farrell
Sid Ferguson
Charles Fischer
James Fischer
Mike Fischer
Robert Flick
Warren Frankenberger
Mario Fuentes
Dan Galusha
Mike Gilman
Tom Gilsch
Ben Gonzalez
Mike Green
Jeff Griffith
Robert Gullbranson
Jim Gullegde
Gene Hackemack
Tim Hackett
Garry Hall
Anonymous
Rhea Hambright
John Hancock

John Harper
Gerry Hearn
John Heffernan
Rod Henderson
Bev Hoekstra
John Hughes
John Hunter
Terry Hunter
Glen Hutchins
Jake Jacobs
Fid Jarnot
Ron Kalanick
Greg Kelley
Fred Kellogg
Tom Kelly
Ray Kennedy
Jim Knee
Clyde Knox
Fran Kopf
Roger Kropke
Joe Landaker
Richard Langley
Harlan Langlitz
Val Lee
Rick Lewis
Pete Limanek
Joe Liu
Gerry Mahoney
Freddy Martinez
Joe Martinez
Tom Mashburn
Giuseppe Mastragelo
Robert Mattingly
Geary McCleery
John McGuire
Don McMillan
Fred Medley
Gary Mefford
Virgil Melton
Cal Moody
Armando Moreno
Phil Morris
David Munoz
Charley Musser
Craig Newberry
David Owen
Larry Parshall
Bob Peavey
Dick Peksens
Gary Peterson
Johnny Porier
Frank Portello
Anthony Pronnette

Jim Raasch
James Ray
David Ralston
Harold Riensche
Pete Ritch
Tom Roberts
Randy Roberts
Dickie Russell
Louie Ryle
Don Sanders
Jim Sausoman
Ned Schultz
Doug Scrivner
George Search
Sgt Grit
Mike Shaw
Tony Sims
Steve Skinner
James Stayton
Robert Stokes
Lee Tannehill
Dave Thompson
Ed Tierney
Bert Trevail
David Turner
Joe Tyson
Roger Unland
Bruce Van Apeldoorn
Allan Van de Bogart
Mike Vaughn
Bob Vaxter
The estate of Frank Vining
Sonny Venturi
Joe Vernon
Chris Vrakelos
Jerry Wahl
Terry Wallace
David Walters
Rick Walters
Michael Waters
Jan Wendling
Charles West
Gene Whitehead
Herb Whittington
Stan Williams
Dan Wokaty
Lynn Young
Wally Young
Anonymous
Ken Zitz
William Zobie

Please note that included in this list is a small group of generous Life members.

What I Learned from the War in Vietnam

by JERRY SEZAR

I've read the most recent issue of the Sponson Box many times since its arrival and it irritates me every time that I read the Editor's Note about the lack of response to the request for stories about "What We Learned from the War in Vietnam." I guess that everyone is just too busy. I frequently run out of time myself... but tonight I promised myself I would jot some things down that I learned from Vietnam.

1. Good people will give you a "heads up"

I met Tom Glisch on my first day "in-country". While helping me get my 782 gear, rifle, helmet and a place to put my stuff, he warned me that in addition to the "usual" dangers in Vietnam I had evidently pissed somebody off in the Battalion and they were going to try to take me out. I procured a Sturm Ruger .44 for personal protection

2. How to sleep with "one eye open".

Because of the above threat, I was a little tense and I tended to sleep mostly during the day out in the open... even in the rain.

3. There are more shades of green than you could ever imagine.

I spent a lot of time wandering around on patrols with 3rd Tanks and Charlie Med. Every so often we would end up in an elevated position and I was always amazed of how many shades of green there would be in the valleys below.

4. How to dig trenches.

A favorite pastime at H&S company in '65 was to keep everyone who was an E-3 and below out of trouble by digging trenches all around the compound and under the direction of the E-4s and E-5s. As far as I know the trenches probably caused more injuries from people falling into them than any other planned purpose. Eventually they stopped having us dig trenches.

5. How to build bunkers.

This was another pastime for us with H&S company, where everyone E-3 and below would actually build bunkers

under the direction of the E-4s and E-5s... who had no prior experience in designing & building their creations; then redesigning them and finally just digging a shallow hole, lining it with sandbags, using stolen beach matting for the roof, more sandbags, a tent pole on top with a little canvas and presto... a pretty shitty bunker. During the digging and bunker building projects a lot of goofing off was always going on and it was a great way to meet and get to know all the other guys in the Company.

6. Not all snakes without rattles are friendly.

Growing up in the San Francisco/Oakland area I was only cautious of snakes with rattles that we'd encounter in the foothills. All the snakes around my local area were without rattles and non-poisonous. While trenching, I spotted a small green snake and went to grab it when Cpl Braguier and Cpl Early chewed me out while I got the "Don't mess with the snakes, spiders, tigers, pigs and water buffalo" lecture.

7. Never have the selector on auto on an M-14.

Since there were far more experienced 2141s than me who did a good job to maintain the tanks, I was assigned to the bunker building and trench digging duty as well as the day & night patrolling. At times we were attached to other groups of Marines. During one of my early day patrols we were attached to 9th Marines. We were told prior to the patrol that contact was supposed to be eminent.

Nobody ever shot at me before so I was kind of nervous. Then during the actual patrol it happened... incoming!!! I hit the dirt and went to fire my M-14 but it wouldn't fire!!! I was freaking out!!!! I pulled back on the handle to see what was wrong and the bi-pod caught on the underbrush. As I reached forward with my left hand to dislodge the rifle, I grabbed the barrel and felt extreme heat on my hand. While hitting the dirt I unknowingly emptied the magazine.

8. When bullets fly get low.

I had an easy night just doing perimeter guard at the 50 bunker with two other Marines. Most of us would stay behind the bunker or in the trench along side since there were occasional pot shots coming from Phong Bac, from across the Ca De River or friendly fire from the amtrackers to our left. It was twilight as one of the E-6s was checking our post. We mentioned the occasional incoming and I remember that he replied, "They will never get twinkle toes me". He made it about ten steps from the bunker and sure as shit he went down. He just got dinged and I never saw him out on the line again.

9. Never forget the password.

Every night around 6pm (1800 hrs) a new password would be given. It was always two words like "Mickey Mantle" or "Mickey Mouse", etc. I seemed as if for most of the time I was tail end Charlie (the last guy in our squad) so when returning from a patrol or ambush I never had to use the password. While doing our nightly wandering around one evening one of the

guys who went by the nickname of "Red" got hit. He was tended to and we turned around to go back to a secured area. Since we reversed our direction as we turned around I ended up near the front of the patrol. As we approached the perimeter, I realized in the excitement I forgot the password. I felt the sweat running off of my body. Damn! I'm going to get shot by our own guys! Finally I heard one of the guys on the patrol yell out half of the password. It seemed like forever, then finally the return half. Phew!

10. Betel Nut.

While wandering around on patrols I would often see women and men with reddish stains on their lips. Didn't take long to realize they were under the influence of something called Betel Nut. They didn't bother me much as I felt sorry for them and the very difficult life they had to live. I guessed that it was the only way for them to escape the reality of their lives.

11. The rain.

It would rain so hard that you couldn't see the guy in front of you. It was freaky enough just being outside the perimeter wire as it was... but during the rainy season, you kept thinking you saw something move. That makes you very jumpy.

12. The mud.

Getting muddy happened right after every rain. The valley below us would change from a couple of individual streams and rivers into a huge body of water like a lake. Large ponds of water formed everywhere and as it slowly ran off or evaporated it left mud. It was everywhere... on our boots & in our boots, on our pants & in our pants, on our rifles & in our rifles... everywhere.

13. The heat.

Then there was the heat. It dried up the mud but then everything became dusty. It was everywhere. As opposed to the Vietnam mud, the dust got everywhere... on our boots & in our boots, on our pants & in our pants, on our rifles and in our rifles... everywhere. Just like the mud.

14. Why Doctors were drunk.

I spent about nine months with 3rd Tanks and then I went to Charlie Med. It was easy duty physically. I had perimeter

guard and served as security for medical staff around I Corps. I helped unload choppers and other conveyances that carried injured personnel. I saw firsthand the terrible effects of the war on the servicemen and on civilians. Most of the bad stuff happened at night. In the morning, after things settled down, I noticed that several of the medical staff was drunk. It bothered me my whole life until a few years ago when I realized the stress they were going through trying to save lives every night. That sort of experience would make anybody drink or worse... eventually commit suicide.

15. In a Vietnam nobody seemed to know what is going on.

During my time with 3rd Tanks we would often work with other groups of Marines, Navy doctors and sometimes ARVN (South Vietnamese soldiers). I was always asking questions... and it didn't take long for me to realize that nobody knew what was going on. It seemed to me that there wasn't much of a plan. We were just waiting. In May of '66 I was transferred to Charlie Med near the N/W corner of the Da Nang airstrip. It was located on Den Bien Phu Blvd. I did security work for them at night all around the perimeter and I was off during the day. Because I understood that most people didn't know what was going on, I could easily slip into town two or three days a week. I had written before that on previous "in-country" visits from my uncle, in the Merchant Marines, everything was put on Uncle Jack's tab. It was funny how ranking officers and men from my uncle's company (RMJ) always treated me well... I guess my Uncle Jack treated them well.

16. You have to help those who need help.

While I was with Charlie Med there were additional duties that we did to help the medical staff. During the day, the doctors and corpsmen needed guards while they traveled from village to village helping the old men, women and children with their medical needs. It was easy work and I got to see places north of Da Nang instead of south. When there was a lot of activity at night we would help the nurses move the body bags and stretchers around. In the morning we'd help the staff clean things up a bit

and bury body parts for them along the north perimeter. To break the tension, we would sing a crazy song that included "... The worms crawl in the worms crawl out". It was some crazy times.

17. Wounds take forever to heal in the jungle.

I was stationed at Camp Del Mar on Camp Pendleton when one day we were warned that we were to "go on a trip in a couple of weeks." We had to send our personal belongings home and we were told that if we had any leave time that we could use it right away. I had a car and I needed to drive it home. My Commanding Officer specifically told me that he wanted me back on time, yah-duh, yah-duh, yah-duh... making reference to the last time I was in the brig / solitary / diminished rations / breaking rocks. I surprised him when I came back from leave early! While I was home I had gotten into a head-on with another car, I was on a bike. The CO was pissed. The company went on to Okinawa and I went to the Receiving Barracks for a few months in order to heal from my car - bike crash. Finally the stitching that the corpsmen did at the Oak Noll Hospital in Oakland was starting to heal so I got loaded onto the USS Sultan and we made the trip across the pond. On the way over to Vietnam my leg started to fester. A corpsman gave me a bottle of hydrogen peroxide to pour over the wound. As I poured it on, it foamed and cleaned the wound. When I got to 3rd Tanks, I told the corpsman about my leg and he gave me bottles of peroxide. Nine months later the corpsman at Charlie Med gave me the same stuff... more peroxide. The wound finally healed while I was stationed in Barstow, California. I now have a long stitched scar with a big dent from the peroxide on my right thigh.

18. You will never forget.

Most of us have found that even if you try to forget Vietnam, it comes back. Sometimes it presents itself in the middle of the night, sometimes in the middle of the day. Sometimes the thoughts are good and other times not. I take medication now to sleep at night so that I am a better person during the day but I will never forget. How about you? ■

JOKES



CHANGE OF COMMAND

In the great days of the USMC expeditionary forces, a freshly appointed colonel was sent to a jungle outpost in Borneo to relieve the retiring colonel.

After welcoming his replacement and showing the courtesies that protocol demanded, the retiring colonel said, "You must meet Master Gunnery Sergeant O'Grady, my right-hand man. He's really the strength of this office. His talent is simply boundless. He keeps everything running smoothly and can analyze the intelligence reports like nobody else I know. If it hadn't been for the Gunny, we probably would have been overrun by now."

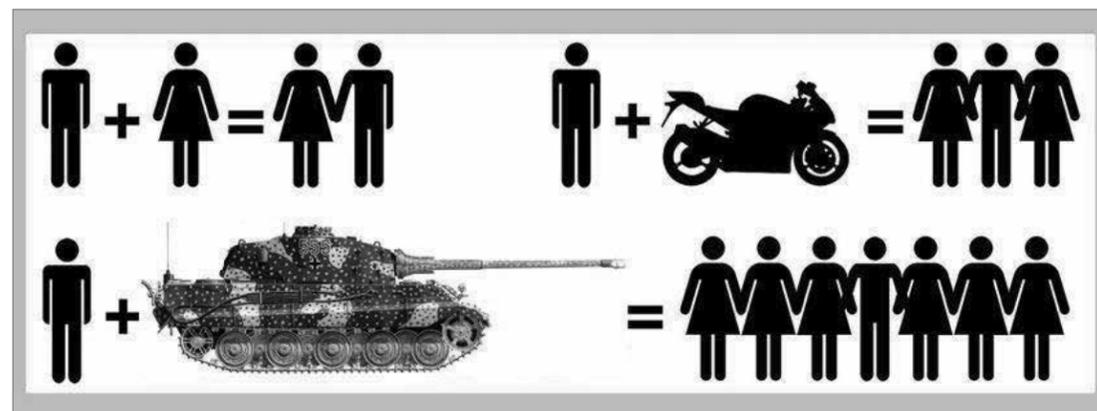
Gunny O'Grady was summoned and introduced to the new CO, who was surprised to meet a toothless, hairless, scabbed and pock-marked specimen of humanity, a particularly unattractive man less than three feet tall.

"Gunny, This is Colonel Sanders, your new CO. Take a couple minutes and tell him about yourself."

"Well, sir, I joined the Corps when I was 18 years old. In boot camp I was platoon leader and guide and was promoted to PFC. I have fought in several areas of the world. I was a decorated sniper for three years and have verified kills of total of 87 enemy combatants. I have one bronze star, two silver stars, and several other decorations for valor. Oh, yeah, I have been wounded and have nine purple hearts.

I've represented the Marine Corps in the intra-service track and field events as a sprinter and won a Gold Medal in the heavyweight boxing championships. I have researched the history of..."

Here the colonel interrupted, "Yes, yes, never mind that Gunny. Colonel Sanders can find all that in your file. Tell him about the day you told that witch doctor to get fucked."



How to Get Girls

VIETNAM SHORT ROUNDS

May 19, 1964 – US Air Force begins Operation Yankee Team.

The United States initiates low-altitude target reconnaissance flights over southern Laos by US Navy and Air Force aircraft. Two days later similar flights were commenced over northern Laos. These flights were code-named Yankee Team and were meant to assist the Royal Lao forces in their fight against the communist Pathet Lao and their North Vietnamese and Viet Cong allies.

May 16, 1965 – Accident at Bien Hoa kills 27 US servicemen.

What is described by the US government as "an accidental explosion of a bomb on one aircraft which spread to others" at the Bien

Hoa air base leaves 27 US service men and 2 South Vietnamese dead and some 95 Americans injured. More than 40 US and South Vietnamese planes, including 10 B-57's, were destroyed.

May 30, 1966 – US Aircraft carry out new raids.

In the largest raids since air strikes began in February 1965, US planes destroy five bridges, seventeen railroad cards and twenty buildings in the Thanh Hoa and Vinh areas (100 and 200 miles south of Hanoi respectively). Other planes hit Highway 12, in four places north of the Mugla Pass and inflicted damage on the Yen Bay arsenal and munitions storage area, which was located 75 miles northeast of Hanoi.

August 3, 1966 – Marines launch Operation Prairie.

US Marine units commence Operation Prairie, a sequel to an earlier operation in the area Operation Hastings, which involved a sweep just south of the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) against three battalions of North Vietnamese 324B Division. An additional 1,5000 Marines from Seventh Fleet ships off Quang Tri Province conducted amphibious landings on September 15 to assist in the operation, which lasted until September 19 and resulted in a reported 1,397 communist casualties. ■

USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. Scholarship Program

The Board of Directors of the VTA has implemented an academic scholarship program. A scholarship will be awarded each year in the amount of \$1,000. To be eligible, 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 are not eligible. The scholarship recipient's eligibility will remain in effect for up to four years of school, provided that the student continues to maintain an overall accumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

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 June 1st 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 zjimco@aol.com before the June 1st deadline for receipt of applications. ■

YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE!!!

The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association PHOTO HISTORY PROJECT has begun. We would like for any member with fairly clear photographs of their time in-country to either give Greg Martin a call on the telephone or send him an email telling him what you want to send to him for inclusion on the VTA website. Greg's Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Greg's Phone: (360) 480-1206
All photos will be copied and the originals promptly returned to you.

Surprise in the Paddy

by Mike McIntosh and Bill "Lurch" Lochridge (As recalled in 2012)

Following Mike's story, Lurch provided this lead-in to Mike's story

Early one morning while serving with Bravo Company, 1/1, someone reported that a bunch of VC were moving along the bottom of a high sand dune - right along a rice paddy that was east of our position. A few days before, the Bravo Company CO, had stepped on a small mine that blew his right foot off. Medavaced out, we were all pissed off at what had happened to him. While I don't recall his name today, he was a good Marine Company Commander.

I immediately cranked up my tanks and headed toward the rice paddy as lead vehicle. Coming to the edge of the rice paddy I told my driver to put it into low gear and start to cross. We had not gone far when we simply got stuck. Rounds from both sides were zinging all around us. The VC, were bunkered down firing at us big time.

supporting tanks was under attack in a rice paddy about 100 meters to the south of our temporary company CP. I quickly grabbed my radio to alert our nearby artillery battery to stand by for a possible fire mission. As was normal with those old radios, the transmission was garbled and, generally, required a test count to properly tune to the net. I can remember that, in my haste and excitement, I was trying to give the test count to the radio operators, rather than having them give it to me. Since the goal was to have me tune to the battery net, not the other way around, the RTO very calmly explained that and got started on his count to me.

Once that was accomplished, I joined a small reaction force of headquarters personnel and headed towards the gunfire. When we arrived, we saw one of our tanks mired in a rice paddy, half way

with rifles and one 60 mm mortar that showed up from somewhere.

(Lurch): We fired several 90mm rounds into them, and they stopped shooting. Some just scampered away while others lay on the ground dead.

(Mike): After a couple of minutes of rifle and automatic weapons fire, including what appeared to be several rifle grenades, the incoming gradually died out. It was at this point that the tank commander emerged to survey the situation. He jumped down off the tank, grease gun in hand, and walked around the tank studying it like a man looking at a used car.

(Lurch): I got out of my tank to survey our stuck position. We were in the mud, up above our road wheels. One of our Jerry cans containing water that was just right of my position in the tank cupola had several rifle holes through it. Whose they were was unknown. Later, we pulled our tank out of the paddy with the aid of our other two tanks. The VC that we killed that day had been the rear element of a VC platoon or a much downsized enemy company. They were all armed women.

(Mike): As he turned to waive thanks to our motley crew, I could see it was my old Basic School buddy, Bill (Lurch) Lochridge. Later, while waiting for help to arrive to recover the tank, Bill and I had a chance to catch up and discuss the news about the rest of our classmates and other topics of interest to two young lieutenants who were pursuing their trade in Quang Nam province of the Republic of Vietnam. This was the first of several opportunities we had to see one another, as we worked our way through Operation Liberty in the summer of 1966. ■



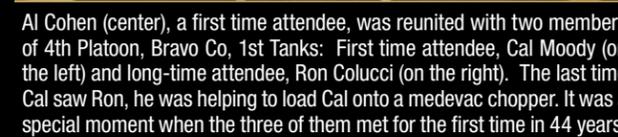
(Mike's optic): It was a sultry, quiet afternoon in June of 1966, when gunfire suddenly erupted nearby. As the radio jumped to life, I learned that one of our

between the tree line where we were and one on the other side of the paddy. There was a pretty brisk firefight in process, so our assorted headquarters crew joined in

2013 USMC VTA Reunion San Antonio



Fran Knopf, Steve Falk and Larry Zuley renew a 40 year old friendship



Al Cohen (center), a first time attendee, was reunited with two members of 4th Platoon, Bravo Co, 1st Tanks: First time attendee, Cal Moody (on the left) and long-time attendee, Ron Colucci (on the right). The last time Cal saw Ron, he was helping to load Cal onto a medevac chopper. It was a special moment when the three of them met for the first time in 44 years.



Wally Young gets ready to frag the Slopchute while Randy Roberts cheers him on



Rick Lewis, Virgil & Janice Melton and Jim Coan in the Slopchute



Todd Phillips and Clyde Hoch put Joe Tyson to sleep with their sea stories.



Sgt Dominick Belmessieri, USMC, and his proud dad, Mike "Belmo"



Belmo mans the VTA PX while Robbie Robinson guards the cash box.



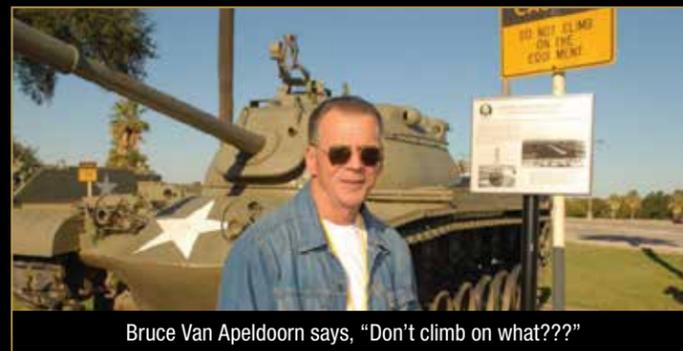
"Newbs" gives us the scoop during the Business Meeting.



Jack and Janine Byrne checking in at the Welcome Table



Todd Phillips always brings Jerry Holly's jacket...



Bruce Van Apeldoorn says, "Don't climb on what???"



Guy Everest surprised Jerri with an engagement ring and the question, "Will you marry me?"
Jerri surprises all of us even more by answering, "Yes!"



If they ever need a picture for the definition of "Warrior" they don't have to look any farther than Barnett Person and Joe Martinez.



John Hancock and Jim Knee had not seen each other in years...



And climb we did...all over that sucker!!!



Roland Castanie shows Bob Peavey and Bruce Van Apeldoorn with some of his art



Ben Hanas brought his whole family plus his beautiful dog!



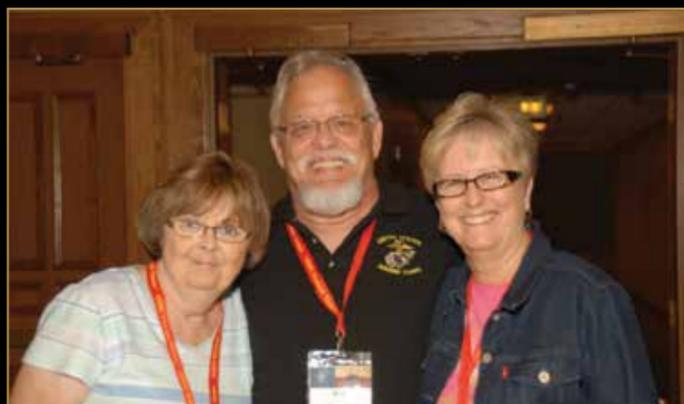
Sid Ferguson chuckles for he knows that Freddy Martinez is a real cowboy from Texas... but Pete Limanek thinks he's a cowboy from Boston?



Hank Brightwell kept his pretty wife nearby...smart man!



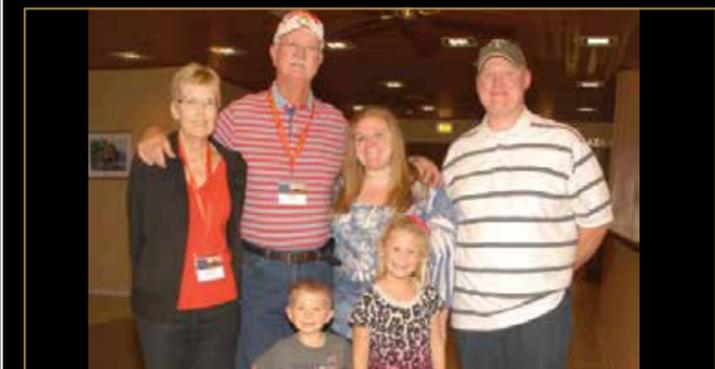
Getting ready to bid at the fun filled and always entertaining auction are Bill Davis, Todd Phillips, Harold Rienche, Rhea Hambricht and Larry Parshall



Joe and Pat Liu are trying to assuage Joy's concern: "Where is Rick?"



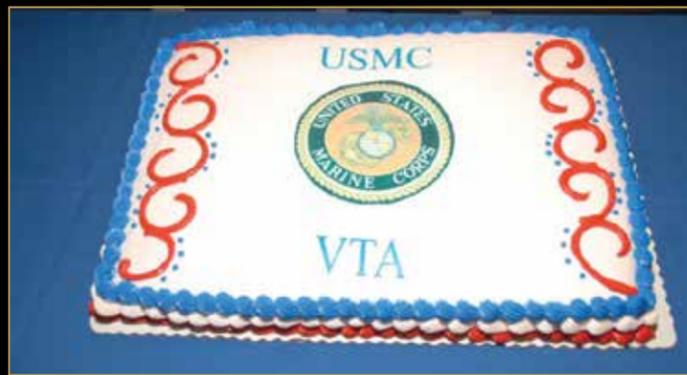
These guys look just like the bandits who prayed on the weak & the poor travelers out along Route 9 back in the day.



Virgil Melton brought a crowd!



ZZ Top? Did somebody bring "That Little Band from Texas" to the reunion?
(L to R) Don Sanders, Harry Schossov, and guest Jim Bartleson



Happy 238th Birthday!!!



The U of Texas, San Antonio had five students visit for a special veteran interview project for their school.



The Youngest Marine, Sgt Chris Conner, great nephew of the Fallen Hero, Pat Conner
The Oldest Marine, MSgt Joe Martinez, USMC (ret)
The Guest Speaker, Cdr Jim Bedinger, USN (ret)



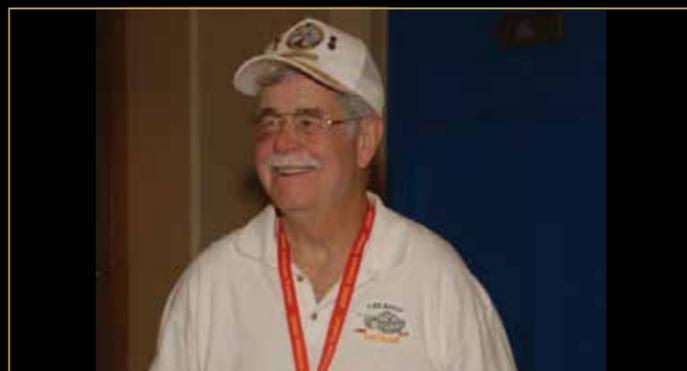
Bob Peavey and Rick Lewis enjoy a lighter moment.



John admitted, "I lost my script for the teleprompter but we made do."



The family of this reunion's Fallen Hero, Pat Connor.
(L to R) Mary Picou (sister); Cheryl Valperts (sister), Yvonne Robillard (niece)
Grace Conner (sister-in-law) and Debra Lavnick (niece)



Even a Doggie tanker, like John Everett, had a great time!



The presentation of the colors by the New Brunfeld High School Marine Corps ROTC cadets.

What Members Are Doing

Dogpatch Revisited?

This past April twelve of us who served together in 1st Tanks, H&S Co [collectively from from '66 - '68] got together in Missouri.

I am attaching a photo of us in front of a store called Dogpatch. Most of us know that the Vietnam "Dogpatch" was just outside the wire of our CP. When we spotted this store, we knew it was a photo op.

Steve Falk
Berkley Heights, NJ
(908) 665-6896



In the photo (L to R): Ken Morrissey, Carmine Montemarano, Steve Falk, Bob Veach, Larry Zuley, Jim Swinnie, Kent Harter, Joe Vernon, Josh Santana, Lee Ullmer, Gary Felix, and Mike Hermes.

about this several years ago. As you can see this is Alpha-2-4 and when I was on the tank it was called "Da Judge" (as in "Here come 'da judge"). When I arrived in-country, the old A-24 had left for "repairs" and the new A-24 came in (I think) in August. I do not know for sure but I believe Joe Bonilla was commander. At any rate, I was the last person to command that tank which was also the night Capt Wunsch died. I was told that "Da Judge" was hit by 13 RPGs of which 11 penetrated. In effect, I sent it back the way I got it. Right now, the only reality I recognize is Alpha 24 and so it is now on my shoulder. At any rate, maybe we could start a "Tankers Tattoo Hooch" where everyone can send in pictures of their tattoos - if they have them.

Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz
Oakdale, CA
Phone: (209) 848-4433

PS: When it is complete I will send another picture. I especially like the detail the artist puts into the tank.

Congrats Ron!!!



VTA member Ron Dudek (on the left), this past September, while attending the 3rd Mar Div Assn reunion in Washington, DC, is shown being presented a 3rd Mar Div Assn Certificate of Appreciation for actions in Vietnam, from the Assistant Commandant of the Marine Corps, General John M Paxton, Jr.

Tank Tat

I do not know if anyone else has sent in something as odd as this but I am at the half way mark of finishing the tattoo you see attached. The artist is local and she took a look at a couple of M48s on line and then did this one free hand. I have only one tattoo and this is it. My dad was in the Corps and had several and always would tell me never - never - never get a tattoo. I abided by his sage advice until today. Actually I started thinking



V. A. News & Updates

For more VA information please go to our website
www.USMCVTA.org

UCMJ APPLICABLE TO RETIREES:

Have you ever heard a retiree say, "They can't touch me now; I've retired."? Fortunately, for the sake of military justice, this is not true when it comes to retirees who violated the Uniform Code of Military Justice (UCMJ) while they were on active duty or in a retired status. Under Article 2 of the UCMJ, the Armed Forces maintain court-martial jurisdiction over retired personnel. Army Regulation 27-10, Military Justice, states "Retired members of a regular component of the Armed Forces who are entitled to pay are subject to the provisions of the UCMJ... and may be tried by court-martial for violations of the UCMJ that occurred while they were on active duty or while in a retired status." Department of the Army policy, however, does limit these trials to cases where extraordinary circumstances are present. The Army normally declines to prosecute retired Soldiers unless their crimes have clear ties to the military, or are clearly service discrediting. If necessary to facilitate courts-martial action, retired Soldiers may be ordered to active duty. The regulation adds that "Retired Reserve Component Soldiers are subject to recall to active duty for the investigation of UCMJ offenses they are alleged to have committed while in a Title 10 duty status, for trial by court-martial, or for proceedings under UCMJ, Article 15." Forfeitures imposed under the UCMJ, Article 15 may even be applied against retired pay. [Source: Army Echoes MAY-AUG 2013 ++]

VA REACHES OUT TO VETERANS ABOUT THE HEALTH CARE LAW

WASHINGTON (Aug. 6, 2013) – The Department of Veterans Affairs has launched an awareness campaign and a new website, www.va.gov/aca, to let Veterans know what the Affordable Care Act means for them and their families.

Veterans receiving health care from the Department of Veterans Affairs will see no change in their benefits or out-of-pocket costs when portions of the Affordable Care Act take effect next year.

Veterans can apply for VA health care at any time by visiting www.va.gov/healthbenefits/enroll, calling 1-877-222-VETS (8387), or visiting their local VA health care facility.

Full details on eligibility are available at www.va.gov/opa/publications/benefits_book

RETIREE SURVIVOR CHECKLIST:

This checklist is designed to provide retirees and their loved ones with some help in preparing for the future. The following information is not all-inclusive and should be used with other estate planning tools to lessen trauma to your loved ones.

1. Create a military file.
 - Retirement orders
 - DD 214

- Separation papers
 - Medical records
2. Create a military retired pay file.
 - Claim number of any pending VA claims
 - Address of the VA office being used
 - List of current deductions from benefits
 - Name, relationship and address of beneficiary of unpaid retired pay at the time of death
 - Address and phone number for DFAS: Defense Finance and Accounting Service, U S Military Retirement Pay, PO Box 7130, London, KY 40742 7130 Tel: (800) 321-1080 option #3 (for deceased members)
 3. Create an annuities file, to include:
 - Information about the Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) Additional information regarding SBP annuity claims can be
 - Obtained from the DFAS-Cleveland Center office at 1-800-321-1080.)
 - Reserve Component Survivor Benefit Plan (RCSBP)
 - Retired Serviceman's Family Protection Plan (RSFPP)
 - Civil Service annuity
 4. Create a personal document file.
 - Marriage Records
 - Divorce decree
 - Adoptions and naturalization papers
 5. Create an income tax file.
 - Copies of state and federal income tax returns
 6. Create a property tax file.
 - Copies of tax bills
 - Deeds and any other related information.
 7. Create an insurance policy file.
 - Life Insurance
 - Property, accident, liability insurance
 - Hospitalization/Medical Insurance
 8. Maintain a listing of banking and credit information, in a secure location.
 - Bank account numbers
 - Location of all deposit boxes
 - Savings bond information
 - Stocks, bonds and any securities owned
 - Credit card account numbers and mailing addresses
 9. Maintain a membership listing of all associations and organizations.
 - Organization names and phone numbers
 - Membership fee information
 10. Maintain a list of all friends and business associates.
 - Include names, addresses and phone numbers
 11. Hold discussions with your next of kin about your wishes for burial and funeral services. At a minimum the discussion should include cemetery location and type of burial (ground, cremation or burial at sea). This knowledge may

assist your next of kin to carry out all of your desires.

12. You could also pre-arrange your funeral services via your local funeral home. Many states will allow you to pre-pay for services.
13. Investigate the decisions that you and your family have agreed upon. Many states have specific laws and guidelines regulating cremation and burials at sea. Some states require a letter of authority signed by the deceased in order to authorize a cremation. Know the laws in your specific area and how they may affect your decisions. Information regarding Burials at Sea can be obtained by phoning Navy Mortuary Affairs at (866) 787-0081.
14. Once your decisions have been made and you are comfortable with them, have a will drawn up outlining specifics.
15. Ensure that your will and all other sensitive documents are maintained in a secure location known by your loved ones. Organizations to be notified in the event of a retiree death:

1. Defense Finance and Accounting Service, London, KY Tel: (800) 321-1080
2. Social Security Administration (for death benefits) Tel: (800) 772-1213
3. Department of Veterans Affairs (if applicable) Tel: (800) 827-1000
4. Office of Personnel Management (OPM) Tel: (724) 794-8690
5. Any fraternal group that you have membership with: e.g., MOAA, FRA, NCOA, VFW, AL, TREA
6. Any previous employers that provide pension or benefits.

[Source: Shift Colors I Spring 2013 ++]

VA TRAVEL ALLOWANCE UPDATE 13:

The Department of Veterans Affairs may soon reimburse veterans for the travel expenses for receiving care at a VA medical center outside their region as an alternative to paying for local but more expensive private providers. The VA is considering the rule changes to try and curb the rising costs associated with sending veterans to private providers, which the General Accountability Office says climbed from \$3 billion in 2008 to nearly \$4.5 billion last year. The rule change would only authorize reimbursement if it is more cost-effective but equal to what they'd get by being referred to a private medical provider closer to home. In part the VA medical centers are incurring higher costs for fee-based private medical providers to keep the veteran from paying out of his own pocket for travel costs to another VA hospital. Under current rules a VA medical center may only cover travel reimbursement for veterans with at least

a 30 percent service-connected disability rating or an annual income below a specific level. The hospitals are not even allowed to consider the cost effectiveness of paying veterans' travel costs in order to keep their care within VA facilities.

In one example cited by the GAO, the VA Medical Center in Biloxi, Miss. has at times incurred additional costs of between \$30,000 and \$40,000 to refer a cardiac patient to a private, fee-basis provider in the region because the veteran did not qualify for reimbursement if he traveled to the Houston VAMC. At other times, VA regional hospitals will refer veterans to private providers to make sure the veteran is seen within the wait-times set by the Department of Veterans Affairs. The Alexandria, Va., VA Medical Center often refers veterans to fee-basis specialists in audiology, cardiology and ophthalmology. The problem is that the VA has not tracked how long it takes for veterans to be seen by the private providers, so the agency does not really know if the goals are being met, according to the GAO. The VA, in its response to the findings, said its business office is already at work building a national wait-time indicator for measuring the performance of fee-based providers, and expects to have it completed in September 2013. [Source: NAUS Weekly Update 14 Jun 2013 ++]

VA CAREGIVER PROGRAM UPDATE 21 ► ONLINE WORKSHOP AVAILABLE:

Are You a Caregiver for a Veteran? If so, you might want to take advantage of the online workshop which provides information and support to caregivers. It's called Building Better Caregivers™ and it's a free workshop for family caregivers of Veterans. If you are taking care of a Veteran, this workshop will help you learn a variety of skills like time and stress management, healthy eating, exercise and dealing with difficult emotions. Participants log on two to three times each week to review lessons, exchange ideas with other caregivers and access tools o make care giving easier. The program, developed at Stanford University, has been recognized for its ability to reduce caregiver stress, depression and increase their overall well-being. This comprehensive online workshop addresses specific needs of caregivers who care for Veterans with dementia, memory problems, traumatic brain injury, post-traumatic stress disorder, or any other serious injury or illness. The program has been recognized for its ability to reduce Caregiver stress.

How does it work? It's a six-week, highly-interactive, online small-group workshop where 20-25 family caregivers complete the online workshop together. It's facilitated by two trained moderators, one or both of whom also are caregivers. Participation may be at two to three times during each week, for a total of two hours a week for six weeks. VA and the National Council on Aging are making this program available through an innovative partnership to provide self-management support for family caregivers. "VA is committed to providing caregivers with the support they need to help those who live with scars borne in battle in defense of our nation's freedom," said Secretary of Veterans Affairs Eric K. Shinseki. "We are especially pleased to be working with the National Council on Aging which has worked with multiple

generations of Veterans and is uniquely qualified to provide this support to caregivers of Veterans from all eras."

How Do You Sign Up? Caregivers of Veterans interested in participating in Building Better Caregivers™ should contact a local Caregiver Support Coordinator. There is one designated Caregiver Support Coordinator at every VA Support Coordinator by visiting www.caregiver.va.gov and entering your ZIP code in the ZIP code finder.

[Source: VA News Release | Hans Petersen | 26 Aug 2013 ++]

VA APPEALS BACKLOG ► CURRENTLY 256,061 DECISIONS ON APPEAL

As the Obama administration touts its recent progress in reducing the enormous backlog of veterans' disability claims, a second backlog is rarely mentioned. More than a quarter-million veterans are appealing disability-claim decisions they say are wrong, and in some cases they can wait four years or more for a ruling, figures from the Department of Veterans Affairs show. The 256,061 veterans appealing decisions represent an approximately 50 percent increase since President Obama took office. And more are coming. The Board of Veterans' Appeals, which

makes the final administrative decisions on appeals, expects its number of pending cases to double over the next four years. The appeals backlog has grown partly because VA has directed resources away from appeals and toward the high-profile disability backlog, according to interviews with VA workers and veterans' advocates. "VA is robbing Peter to pay Paul," said Glenn Bergmann, a former appellate litigator in VA's Office of the General Counsel who now frequently represents veterans on disability-claim appeals.

VA Secretary Eric K. Shinseki acknowledged in an interview last week that appeals do not get the same emphasis as new claims but said that will change as the backlog shrinks. "Yes, there is a need to focus on appeals," Shinseki said. "This is an elephant. You have to take bites one at a time." In recent months, amid criticism from Congress and the media, the department took dramatic steps to attack the claims backlog. It mandated overtime for new claims and directed that disability cases older than one year be moved to the front of the line. Gerald Manar, deputy national veterans service director for the Veterans of Foreign Wars, said VA officials at regional offices often make a "calculated decision" to pull workers off appeals and redirect them to new claims. "Over the last three years or so, every time VA has made a push, they pull almost all of the employees out of appeals and into front-end work," said Manar, a former VA benefits manager. Beth McCoy, assistant deputy undersecretary for the Veterans Benefits Administration, said VA headquarters has directed regional offices not to take workers off appeals. "It's tempting to take those appeals resources," she said.

"But that wasn't our intent, and we continue to reinforce that."

A veteran who takes an appeal through all available administrative steps faces an average wait of 1,598 days (over 4 years), according to VA figures for

2012. If the veteran pursues the case outside VA to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims, it takes an additional 321 days on average, according to court documents. The duration in part reflects the fact that the process is meant to favor the veteran, who is allowed at any time to submit new evidence and thus extend a case indefinitely. But VA officials acknowledge that the appeals system must be transformed. Though VA is converting the claims process into an electronic, paperless system, the great majority of appeals remain paper-bound. As appeals are digitized, more of VA's 14,355 claims processors will focus on appeals and the process will speed up, McCoy said. "We're not satisfied with how long it's taking on the rating side or the appeals side," she said.

To prepare for the influx of appeals, the Board of Veterans Appeals has hired 100 new lawyers in recent months and has begun a push to handle more cases by video teleconference, a step that can cut 100 days off the process, said Laura Eskenazi, vice chairman of the board. VA assigns veterans who file claims a disability rating, a percentage measure that governs compensation for disease or injury incurred or aggravated during active military service.

About 10 percent of claimants challenge the rating. Once a veteran files a notice of disagreement - the first step in an appeal - it takes 270 days on average for the VA regional office to respond with a formal statement assessing the case and sometimes reversing some or all of the initial decision, according to VA figures for 2012. If the VA stands by its initial decision the next step is to file a substantive appeal. VA's regional offices take an average 692 days for the next step, certification of the appeal, a process that can involve gathering further evidence and that sometimes includes input from service organizations assisting the veterans, McCoy said. Next, the vet is given a hearing before the Board of Veterans' Appeals The board hears cases sent by all 56 regional offices. "All of a sudden you merge down to one lane," said Rich Dumancas, deputy director of claims for the American Legion. "It's hard for the board to keep up with all the cases."

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[Source: Washington Post | Steve Vogel | 11 Sep 2013 ++] ■



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

Editor's Note: I promised myself that one day I would dig into my old files and pull out materials that I had been meaning to publish but either we did not have the room ... or they simply got lost. Here is one that Todd Phillips sent me back in 2010.



MILTON P DYE

I don't know if you have room in the Sponson Box or not, but if you do I'd like to pay homage to one of "America's Best" and one of the "Corps' Finest." I believe that in the VTA we accept Marines with another track MOS, and I thought some of the members might remember this man. Once while Clyde Hoch was visiting me, I introduced him to Milton P. Dye; he was quite a guy. While serving in Viet Nam, Milt was attached to Bravo Co, 1st AMTRAC Bn., 3rd MarDiv as a gunnery sergeant. I believe that he served more than one tour in-country. As I said, he retired as a Sgt. Major. Milt was Post Commander of the VFW Post, 5356 National Road, Saint Clairsville, Ohio. I attended a memorial service at the VFW for him on September 17, 2010. The new post commander came in wearing his dress blues. He was also a Sgt. Major, USMC. I asked him what his MOS had been and he replied, "1812 (tanks)." I told him I was an 1811 in RVN and that he was just a pup...only 50 yr. old. I wasn't sure if the VTA accepted tankers from other than Vietnam.

Milton P Dye, 66, of St. Clairsville, Ohio, died 9/10/10 at the East Ohio Regional Hospital, Martins Ferry, Ohio. Milton was born Oct 7, 1943. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by his wife, Frankie Kelly, in June 2002. Surviving are three sons: Christopher Dye of Ellentown, FL; Dugan and Darin Dye of Bannock Ohio.



JERRY LYNN SPENCER (March 30, 1947 - October 7, 2013)

Jerry Lynn Spencer, age 66, of Jasper, Arkansas, passed away Monday, October 7, 2013 at North Arkansas Regional Medical Center in Harrison, Arkansas. The son of John Duane and Hazel Louise (Sloan) Spencer, he was born March 30, 1947 in Harrison, Arkansas.

Jerry was a veteran of the United States Marine Corps and the United States Army. Upon completion of his service with the Marine Corps, he transferred to the Army, retiring from the Army

on March 13, 2007. He was a member of the VFW; American Legion; Bravo Company, 5th Tank Battalion in Vietnam; Marine Corps Tankers Association; National Rifle Association; and, Jasper Assembly of God Church.

Jerry was preceded in death by his parents and his wife, Sharon Spencer, on March 12, 2013.



CHRISTOPHER GILES HICKS

Christopher Giles "Chris" Hicks, 65, of Morganton, NC, passed away Tuesday, March 19, 2013 following an extended illness.

Born January 25, 1948, in Morganton, NC to the late Byron James Hicks and Neta Mull Hicks. Chris was a graduate of Salem High School. Chris served honorably and with distinction with the United States Marine Corps receiving the National Defense Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, Vietnam Campaign Medal and the Combat Action Ribbon. Chris continued to be active throughout his life in the Veterans Administration, local Veterans groups and was an avid member of the Table Rock Post 5362 of the Veterans of Foreign Wars located in Morganton.

Chris had a tremendous sense of humor, a large following of friends, and never refused assistance to a person in need. He enjoyed spending time with all his friends at the VFW, Bob and Terry Wise, the Powell family, and Rob and Bobby Denton.

Surviving are his best friend Rosetta Marie Corpening "Rose"; brother, Carlos Dean Hicks and his wife, Barbara Hicks; nieces Deanna Burton Hicks Leake, Shannon Alyss Hicks Read, and Kathryn Casey and their spouses; four great-nephews; and his faithful canine companion, Square Head.



EDWARD STANLEY "WOJO" WOJCIECHOWSKI

Born in Jersey City, New Jersey on April 6, 1944 and passed away September 13, 2013 at the Seattle VA Hospital in Seattle, WA. He served his country with the United States Marine Corps. He was a member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, a member of the National Rifle Association, Moose Lodge, and Fraternal Order of Eagles. He loved to fish and hunt.

Survived by son Edward J.(Cynthia) Wojciechowski of Rancho Santa Margarita, CA; daughter Crista Marie; sister Louise Burnstad of Florida; brother Steve Wojciechowski of Arizona;

grandsons Michael and Mark Wojciechowski of Rancho Santa Margarita, CA

Also from the Breech Block e-newsletter:

Some of Cpl. Ski's duties and accomplishments while in Vietnam included "owning" and operating B Co. 1st. Tanks' tank retriever, Nadine; he really loved that piece of iron! Ski was also the B Co. welder/electrician and constructed the communications tower, built our 55-gallon drum showers from salvaged bomb crates, among many other things, and set-up and maintained our diesel electric generators that supplied our company area with electric power. Cpl. Ski, as we all knew him by that name, was a hard working, can-do attitude, and dedicated Marine, that loved anything mechanical or technical and went above and beyond his duties to try and improve our living conditions while in Vietnam.

In one of our many e-mail communications of months ago, Cpl. Ski informed me that he was coughing/spitting, and passing blood in his urine. As far as I know, he was hospitalized and received treatment from the VA and/or Port Angeles, WA area hospital for these conditions. As to what he was diagnosed with, I do not know at this time. He will surely be missed, and I think this little bit of info about him, fits him quite well, as you may agree...

Semper Fi, Cpl. Ski



RALPH E. MCCOY JR.

Passed away at 69 years old at 9:16 p.m. Sunday (Oct. 13, 2013) at home. He was born on July 7, 1944, in Champaign, the son of Ralph Edward and Ella Anna Wildenradt McCoy. He married Reyna Gonzales McCoy on June 25, 1983, in Champaign. She survives. Also surviving are one daughter, Marina K. Scarano of Tallahassee, Fla.; one brother, Charles McCoy of Champaign; one sister, Agnete (Leonard) Miller of Redondo Beach, Calif.; one granddaughter, Sophia Scarano; two nephews, Jarred and Leonard Jr.; one niece, Ella Anna; and his dog, Blondie.

Prior to entering the service, he was employed by the old Sears Roebuck and Company in downtown Champaign. He retired from the University of Illinois O&M division. McCoy was a U.S. Marine Corps Vietnam veteran sergeant assigned to 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. Although he was not a member of



the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, he was a member of the Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation.

Reprinted from the Breech Block newsletter

Editor's Note: The following obits are not of tankers but after reading them we thought that our readers might find them interesting.



LCPL HERBERT "HARRY REEMS" STEICHER

Steicher was 65 when he passed away in Salt Lake City. After the Corps, he was an actor in Off- Off Broadway plays. He needed money and appeared in pornographic films, the most notable was "Deep Throat" in 1972. He later became a successful real estate broker, content to live in obscurity.



GEN VO NGUYEN GIAP



Vo Nguyen Giap, the relentless and charismatic North Vietnamese general whose campaigns (and tenacity) help drive both France and the United States out of Vietnam, died on Friday, October 4, 2012, in Hanoi. He was believed to be 102. General Giap was among the last survivors of a generation of Communist revolutionaries who in the decades

after World War II freed Vietnam of colonial rule and fought a superpower to a stalemate. In his later years, he was a living reminder of a war that was mostly old history to the Vietnamese, many of whom were born after it had ended



BARBARA STUART



Barbara Stuart, actress in May 2011. She worked extensively in film and television; she may dwell in the popular imagination as "Bunny", the girlfriend of Sgt Carter, in the US TV series, "Gomer Pyle, USMC." ■

How Writing Heals Wounds — Of Both the Mind and Body



by MAIA SZALAVITZ
July 13, 2013

Editors Note: We want to encourage all of our members to write their stories (good, bad, funny or not-so-funny) ... so that not only our survivors know & understand what we did in-country ... but so we will have the below healing process work of us...

Talking about difficult experiences can be a way of easing the emotional pain of trauma, but the latest research shows that expressing emotions in words can also speed physical healing. The study is the latest delving into the mind-body connection to suggest that expressing emotions about a traumatic experience in a coherent way may be important to not just mental but physical health as well. It showed that the calming effect of writing can cut physical wound healing time nearly in half.

Researchers led by Elizabeth Broadbent, a senior lecturer in health psychology at the University of Auckland in New Zealand, studied 49 healthy senior citizens, aged 64 to 97. For three days, half were assigned to write for 20 minutes a day about the most traumatic event they had experienced, and were encouraged to be as open and candid as they could about exactly what they felt and thought at the time. If possible, they were also asked to share thoughts or emotions that they had never expressed to others about what they had undergone.

The other participants wrote for the same duration about their plans for the next day, avoiding mentioning their feelings, opinions or beliefs. Two weeks after the first day of writing, researchers took small skin biopsies, under local anesthesia, that left a wound on the arms of all participants. The skin tissue was used for another study.

A week later, Broadbent and her colleagues started photographing the wounds every three to five days until they were completely healed. Eleven days after the biopsy, 76% of the group that had written about trauma had fully healed while only 42% of the other group had.

"This is the first study to show that writing about personally distressing events can speed wound healing in [an older] population that is at risk of poor healing," says Broadbent.

It's not the first, however, to reveal the intriguing connection between state-of-mind and physical health. In previous studies, this type of emotionally expressive writing, as opposed to writing on neutral topics, reduced viral load in

HIV-positive patients and increased their levels of virus-fighting immune cells. The practice also increased the effectiveness of the hepatitis B vaccination by increasing antibody levels generated by the vaccine and speeding wound healing in young men.

But in terms of psychological health, the results are more conflicting. A recent study found that writing about disturbing combat experiences may improve marital satisfaction among soldiers returning home from war zones while another paper in which patients with post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) wrote about their difficult experiences did not find that the practice reduced symptoms. Putting emotions down in words did, however, improve mood and reduce levels of stress hormone in these patients.

One way that writing about distressing events could give the body a boost is by promoting sleep. "We found that people who got at least seven hours of sleep most nights had faster healing than those who got less sleep," Broadbent says. Sleep deprivation can lower levels

of growth hormone, which is important for repairing injuries. And writing about their traumatic experiences also seemed to help participants to actually get more sleep. "Many people who have written about their negative experiences report that it allowed them to gain greater insight into what happened and to put the event into perspective," says Koschwanez, "This might reduce the extent to which the event troubles them and possibly improve their sleep."

The writing may also help the body by reducing stress; less anxiety means fewer stress hormones, which can interfere with chemicals needed for wound healing. While Broadbent's study did not find

such a link, it's possible the researchers were not evaluating the right anxiety measures. "It might be that our perceived stress questionnaire was not assessing the right type or duration of stress," says Heidi Koschwanez, a study co-author and postdoctoral fellow at the University of Auckland.

It's also possible that emotional writing is not helpful for everyone. In one study published last month, when people who typically are stoic wrote about their worst trauma, their anxiety actually increased. Those who were accustomed to being emotionally open, however, showed a drop in worry measures. That suggests that different people may have different

ways of coping with traumatic events, and that writing may be an effective outlet for those who are normally more expressive, while pushing people to express feelings when they are not inclined to do so can actually increase risk for PTSD.

For those who do experience relief from expressing their emotions, however, writing may become an important part of helping them to recover —both in mind and in body— from difficult situations.

Read more: <http://healthland.time.com/2013/07/13/how-writing-heals-wounds-of-both-the-mind-and-body/#ix-zz2ZE3s2Bdv> ■

Letter to the Editor

(Continued from page 33)

Robbie & Sandy



As some of you know, I had a service dog named "Sandy." A few years ago we had a nice story in the Sponson Box about her and me. She was my dog for about three years and she was a great friend and companion, as well as a wonderful service dog. For those of you who don't know about Sandy, I got her from the DAV in Hot Springs, Ark. to help with my diabetes. The first minute that she and I met, we bonded hard and fast. She's a yellow lab with a medium build who weighs about 66 lbs. She

was well-trained in looking for the signs of trouble with diabetes and seizures. About six weeks ago, I had read about a young boy that was having very bad seizures, and so his mother was looking for a service dog. This lady is a single mother with a low-paying job, and she really couldn't afford to purchase a dog. Considering the fact that I now have my diabetes under control, even though Sandy was a very dear friend, her job with me was becoming less and less important as a service dog's duties are concerned. One evening I was in my easy chair reading my new S-Box, when Sandy came and put her paw on my knee, I put the magazine down; looked into her brown eyes and said: "What's my baby want?" She went and got the newspaper with the story of the little boy needing a dog. How did she know that she was needed elsewhere? My eyes filled tears and she jumped up and gave me a hug to let me know she still loved me, but it was time to help someone else.

Sandy is now with her new young friend and helping this boy. His mother told me that Sandy has actually saved his young life several times since she has been with him. God works in many different ways to let us know and to understand that you can help others without saying a word. My time on Earth is short and maybe by me giving Sandy up, this boy will have a long and happy life. I still love my four-legged yellow friend; I will not forget her. She will stay in my heart.

I LOVE YOU, SANDY

Sgt. Harvey (Robbie) Robinson 1962 - 1968 ■

This is in Memory of Ricky Dycus and Bill Bloomfield

by CPL EUGENE CSUTI
Golf Company, 2/1 ('68 - '69)

Dycus Ricky D.
2413367
Long Beach, CA
Cpl United States Marine Corps
3rd Platoon
Golf Company
2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment
1st Marine Division
KIA 2 June 69
Panel 23W 43

Bloomfield, William D.
2456854
Springfield, Ohio
PFC United States Marine Corps
3rd Platoon
Golf Company
2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment,
1st Marine Division
KIA 2 June 69
Panel 23W 42

Okay, before I start this "In Memory", I want to say that the events I am going to share with you in no way reflect ill respect to any chopper pilot, other than the one associated with this memory. This story needs to be told, as it is something a grunt had to face up to. I mean, it happened. I will not use the exact medevac chopper call sign, but I have the call sign etched in my mind and will never forget it. I will also never forget the conversation with that medevac chopper that night. Myron Olson and I looked for this pilot while we were in Nam. Myron was a Marine medevac chopper driver, temporarily attached to Golf Company. So, with that out of the way, I wish to pay respect to my friends.

Ricky Dycus was a California surfer-boy type, his nickname was "Surfer." He was married to a great looking blonde. Ricky had gotten in-county just after I did, in July 1968. As it sometimes happened,

my orders to go home had Ricky's name on it, even though he was KIA. I still have a copy of those orders. Ricky was a hot-head. He and "Hillbilly" had a couple of knock-down, drag-out fight's.

Billy Bloomfield ... we called him "Big Red." We had to distinguish between Big Red and Little Red, because we had both of them in the platoon. Big Red had fire-red hair and freckles. He was about 6' 2" tall and, sadly, he had the coordination of a water buffalo. I did not know Big Red all that well, because he had gotten in-country on my short-timer calendar and I did not hang with the new guys. It was bad Karma.

We were about five days into Operation Pipestone Canyon. Basically, what was going on was that we had a funnel of Marines for about ten miles leading to Go Noi Island. As I have mentioned

before, Golf Company was the point of this operation. We had four tanks moving with us. There were three gun tanks and one Zippo tank. Now, I always hated tanks. They attracted B-40's and RPG's, and they always seemed to get stuck in the paddies. So, generally, they were a pain in the ass. We were walking the ten miles, flushing the NVA southwards through "Dodge City" and "The Arizona" towards Go Noi Island. We had had a very few brief firefights, but no real contact. We had walked about six miles so far. We took off on the morning of June 2nd and had moved about a half mile when we came upon a river. The tanks could not cross it, so we left a platoon with them, and the remaining two platoons of Golf Company crossed the river. The tanks and our platoon were going to move to find a crossing the tanks could get across and catch up to us.

>>

We had moved about a mile from the river and were slowly crossing some dried up paddies. We had not expected it so soon, but the NVA had decided to quit running and to fight us, rather than facing the Marine blocking forces that were dug in ahead of us. It was mid-morning when the gooks sprang their ambush on us. The ambush was well-laid and they opened up first with their RPD machine guns and three 12.5's. Then, they started in with their mortars. It's hard to describe to someone who has not experienced it, how you want to just pull the ground over your head when you are caught out in the open. We had some cover from the paddy dikes, but the machine guns and 12.5's were slowly destroying the cover. I remember hearing the tanks come up, asking us what was happening. They had found a crossing and they thought they were about 3/4 of a mile from us; they were coming to us fast!

I don't know how long it was, but the next thing I remember was the tanks-- those beautiful, noisy, pain-in-the-ass, fucking tanks. Just like the movies, there was dust and black diesel smoke flying behind them. They were hauling ass and turning to position themselves in front of us, so they could get the gook machine guns off us. They had no sooner pulled up to a stop when their 90's started working out and the Zippo was torching NVA bunkers and flushing the NVA out. I guess the NVA broke and ran south, because of the tanks. When it was all over, I could not believe it. We had survived, with only five wounded. I called the medevacs, sent in the sit-reps, got a resupply going, and we thanked our Grunt Gods. Battalion came back and told us to dig in where we were for the night and wait for resupply. They added that they were chasing the NVA south with chopper gunships.

We set up for the night with the tanks facing forward (or south). About 2100 hours, the NVA hit us hard. They started with their mortars and the machine guns and they shot at the tanks with their B-40's and RPG's. I think they wanted to get a tank, because that would open up the biggest hole in our lines. Ricky and Big Red's hole was close to one of the tanks. I remember seeing this, as my hole was 40' to the right and behind them. The

first RPG went screaming to the right of the tank and over our heads. Ricky had broke open a LAW and was lining up on where he thought the RPG gunner was. The RPG gunner was faster than Ricky and the gook let loose first. The RPG hit the tank and blew up, but it was a glancing blow. Ricky and Big Red were not as lucky as the tank. They both took the deflected RPG blast full force. "Doc" Marshall took off to help Ricky and Big Red, while I started a call for a medevac. Ricky was missing his right side, but was alive. Big Red had shrapnel wounds all over him and a sucking chest wound. Both of them were in really bad shape. Battalion had come back to me and said they had diverted an Army medevac bird and he would be coming up on our frequency in a minute. I thought that this was great, less than two minutes and we got our medevac. The guys are going to make it.

Myron Olson, (remember my land-bound medevac chopper driver assigned to me?) was helping Doc Marshall and Doc Van treat Rickey and Big Red, when the medevac bird came up on my radio.

Most of the below is my radio transmissions of that night. As long as I live, I will never forget those transmissions.

Golf 28 this is Blondie 22. Do you have a visual?

Blondie 22, this is Golf 28. I have your lights, vector 120 degrees relative, approximately two miles.

Golf 28, this is Blondie 22. Is the LZ secure? I see lots of muzzle flashes both directions. Are you in heavy contact?

Blondie 22, this is Golf 28. NVA at the 180 degree, 100 to 200 yards from us, LZ will be 300 yards to the north of our position, am lighting up LZ now, contact is light, and your LZ will be secure.

Golf 28, this is Blondie 22. Be advised, have spotted 12.5 muzzle flashes and RPG's, you got a hell of a firefight going on down there, Blondie is aborting.

Blondie 22, this is Golf 28. If you abort, the WIAs will be KIAs, before I can get another bird. LZ is secure. I say again LZ is secure. Swing around and approach from the north. The north is secure. I say again, negative contact to north. The north is secure.

Golf 28, this is Blondie 22. Sorry, your

LZ and area looks too hot for approach at this time.

Blondie 22, this is Golf 28. The fire fight is 400 yards to the south of the LZ. We will get the tanks to work out when you come in. Your LZ will be safe. I say again, your LZ will be safe.

Golf 28, this is Blondie 22. Negative, Negative that, Blondie is aborting.

Blondie 22, this is Golf 28. You Chicken Shit Mother Fucker!

Golf 28, this is Blondie 22. I will have you busted for that transmission, request your name and rank, Golf 28.

Blondie 22, this is Golf 28. Fuck You! You want me? Come on down and get me, chicken shit. I knew we should have gotten a Marine bird.

By now, Myron has realized what was going on. He asks for the handset for a chopper-pilot-to-chopper-pilot talk. I grab another radio and call battalion and start requesting another medevac bird.

Myron is on the radio talking to Blondie 22

Blondie 22, this is Marine Medevac Swift 17. Be advised, I am a Marine medevac chopper pilot. Your LZ is 400 yards to the north of the firefight and your LZ is safe. I say, again, your LZ will be safe.

Marine Swift 17, this is Blondie 22. Be advised Blondie is aborting now. Good luck Marine Swift 17. Blondie 22 out.

We were left high and dry. It was about 20 minutes before the next medevac bird showed up, which was about 35 minutes in all. Rickey was KIA by then and Big Red was dying fast. Big Red never made it to the hospital in Da Nang. He was KIA a few minutes after leaving the LZ, on the next medevac chopper.

Blondie 22, I say this: "I am over the frustration of that night 27 years ago. If and when we meet, may it be in this life or in life afterwards, all I want to know is your side of the story. To ask you, Why?"

A toast to my friends: Cpl. Rickey Dycus and PFC William Bloomfield, Golf Company, 2nd Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division.

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Memorable Viet Nam Experiences

by EV TUNGENT, LT. COL., USMC (RET.)

Several years ago, I read the book, "We Were Soldiers Once...and Young", by Lt. Gen. Hal Moore, USA (Ret). His book was the basis for the movie, "We Were Soldiers", starring Mel Gibson, and had to do with one of the first terrible battles of the Viet Nam War. In his book, General Moore made a very poignant statement that we should "hate war, but love the warrior". I feel that, today, there is a large segment of our society which has little appreciation of, nor "love", for the warriors of this country and the sacrifices they have made, and continue to make, to guarantee the freedoms so often taken for granted.

Perhaps, sadly, it has to be enough for us to know we proudly did our duty as Marines in Viet Nam and were "loved" by the most important persons - our fellow Marines. We all had memorable experiences there; some we treasure and some we don't care to think about often. My experiences covered the period of March 1966 to April 1967, during which time I was the CO of "B" Company and the Battalion Operations Officer, S-3, 3rd Tank Battalion.

These are some of my remembrances:

Another captain, John Gary, and I reported in to the 3rd Tank Battalion Headquarters, then located on Hill 34, south of the Da Nang Air Base, in March of 1966. We were welcomed by the Bn. CO, LtCol Milt Raphael, an "Old Corps" tanker from WWII & Korea. LtCol Raphael was one of the finest, most dedicated Marines I have ever known. There were two company command billets coming vacant but, prior to our assignments, LtCol Raphael directed that, since both John and I had been out of tanks for a few years, we undergo a couple of weeks of refresher training. To this day, I am grateful to MGySgt Robert H "Bob"

Heine, the Bn Operations Chief, who was assigned as our instructor, for his expertise and patience. (Bob Heine is a member of this Association).

Following our refresher training, I was assigned to command Bravo Company, which was spread out over a large area of the southern portion of the Da Nang TAOR in support of the 9th Marines. The company CP was located just north of Marble Mountain next to a large cantonment area used to stage units for R & R and further assignment. For the first couple of weeks, I spent a lot of time "riding the circuit" in my jeep to visit my platoons and to conduct liaison with the battalion commanders they were supporting. I was disturbed to find that tanks were all too often not included in infantry operations and were used primarily as CP perimeter defense weapons.

I saw my job as educating infantry commanders in the value of tanks as MOBILE gun platforms and insisting that my platoon leaders take an active part in advising how they could best be utilized in future infantry operations. Over a fairly short period of time, tactical successes started improving significantly as well as the morale of my tankers.

Before all this happened, however, I realized I had to get the attention of my troops. On an early inspection trip, I found the tanks in one of my platoons to be in pretty sad condition. The crews had become lazy with their inactivity. The tanks were filthy dirty inside, tank record books were not kept up to date, and there were mechanical deficiencies not attended to. About halfway through the inspection of the platoon, I was furious and pulled my platoon leader aside. I told him I would be

back in a week and expected his tanks to be fully squared away to the extent that I wanted to be able to eat off the deck of the turrets!

I returned a week later and my lieutenant had obviously passed the word that the "Skipper" was a bit upset. The turnaround in the condition of his tanks was dramatic. Most of the corrections had been made or scheduled and the turrets were all painted inside with the required fire retardant white paint. As I dropped down inside one of the tanks, the first thing I saw was a C-Ration hamburger patty lying on the sparkling white deck. Without saying anything, I picked up the patty and munched on it, as I completed my inspection. That tank commander had obviously overheard my comment about eating off the deck. He passed my test and I believe I passed his! I had no more problems with the condition of this platoon's tanks.

In early May, 1966, the 2nd Bn, 4th Marines was moved by ship from Chu Lai to Da Nang and placed in the cantonment area next to my CP, awaiting further deployment orders. They had been in the field for two solid months, sleeping in holes and eating nothing but C- Rations.

I had a strong-back mess hall tent, "borrowed" from the cantonment area, in my CP. On the day 2/4 moved in, my company cook came to me and said, if the battalion would provide him with their cooks and several messmen, he would organize a hot meal schedule to feed them. I said, "You know you're talking about feeding some 1,100 men, don't you?" He said, "Skipper, I can draw the rations from Navy Supply in Da Nang and, if they'll help out, we can do it!"

I went over to 2/4's headquarters and

talked to the CO, LtCol Paul Xavier ("P.X.") Kelly, and the XO, Maj. Ernie DiFazio about the offer. They gladly accepted, since all their mess equipment was still aboard ship in Da Nang Harbor. We fed the battalion hot meals for over a week until they received orders to head north to the DMZ area. LtCol Kelly thanked me and wrote up my company cook for a letter of commendation. (LtCol "P.X." Kelly was later to become the 28th Commandant of the Marine Corps.)

I think the most bizarre experience I had in Viet Nam occurred in late May. As if the ARVN forces didn't have their hands full dealing with the VC, they started fighting among themselves! South Vietnamese generals were de facto government officials in the various districts and provinces throughout the country. Within government and military circles, there were two factions, Buddhists and Catholics, constantly vying for control. The war against the VC came to a screeching halt while they "duked it out!"

I was called to the Bn CP by LtCol Raphael and placed in command of a task force to protect U.S. interests on the Da Nang Air Base, in case this fighting spilled over onto the base from the city of Da Nang. I had a reinforced tank platoon, an infantry company, and a number of AMTRACS in the task force.

The government in Saigon had airlifted several light tanks to Da Nang to reinforce Catholic-led forces and had them dispersed around the city. LtCol Raphael and I conducted a helicopter recon over the city and located where their tanks were, marking the positions on our maps. My primary mission was to be prepared to engage any ARVN forces attempting to enter the Air Base; otherwise, adopt a wait-and-see posture until they settled their differences.

All U.S. commands were ordered to remain in their compounds until this situation was resolved. I'm sure the VC were gleefully repositioning themselves, as they moved about with impunity. My task force was positioned within the perimeter of the Engineer Bn CP, just outside the western gate of the Air Base, onto which we could roll within minutes. After about a week and a half, the ARVN "timeout"

from the real war ended, as they had settled their territorial disputes.

During my de-brief at our Bn HQ, I recommended to LtCol Raphael that I be allowed to move my CP from Marble Mountain to Hill 55, about 15 miles south of Da Nang, as that was where the 9th Mar Regt was concentrating its activities. He concurred and, in early June, I co-located my CP with that of the 1st Bn, 9th Marines on Hill 55. This was a "crackerjack" battalion and I soon developed an outstanding rapport and working relationship with the CO, LtCol Jones and his XO, Major Jim Day. (I believe Major Day later retired as a Lt. Gen.) They were happy to have the major thrust of my tank support and I kept my tanks busy with their field operations. I started spending more time in the field with my tank to learn the lay of the land and to determine just where we could operate most effectively.

It was during this period that I found we could run our tanks in areas "the book" said was not trafficable for tanks, especially rice paddy areas. By probing paddies with tank bars, we found that, underneath the water and mud, there was a hard pan which would support the weight of a tank. This obviously allowed us to be more maneuverable and not be road- or-trail-bound. Someone, I'm not sure just who, but I suspect it was my 2nd Plt Ldr, Willard F. "Bill" Lochridge, named us the "Paddy Rats", likening us to the "Desert Rats" of the British Army tank forces of WWII in North Africa. (Bill Lochridge is also a member of the association.)

Even though I worked closely with the battalion commanders of the 9th Marines, technically I was the regimental commander's staff armored operations advisor. The only problem with this scenario was that the regimental headquarters was located near the Da Nang Air Base, some 15 miles from where the action was. This all changed when the regimental headquarters was moved in mid-June to the rear slope of Hill 55.

I was now expected to attend frequent regimental staff meetings, where the emphasis was not on combat operations briefings, but on proper policing of the area and having troops in clean, serviceable uniforms at all times! I came under

special scrutiny because my tank park and maintenance area looked "trashy" and was an eyesore to visiting dignitaries. I tried in vain to explain to the Regimental CO that the "trash" he could see was tank parts, tracks, etc., from battle-damaged tanks supporting his battalions. This was not an argument that a captain could wage successfully against the opinion of a full colonel. I was becoming more and more frustrated over this situation, particularly since this was at a time when combat operations were heating up.

The "straw that broke the camel's back" in my increasing frustration occurred one night when a light section of my tanks was supporting a company of "the Colonel's Marines" along the north bank of the Song Vu Gia. The VC attempted to cross the river and fired a number of RPG's from across the river to knock out the tanks. One crewman was killed and another lost his right arm in the ensuing firefight.

The next morning, I wrote a letter to the mother of the Marine killed and later that day went in to the hospital in Da Nang to visit the Marine who had lost his arm. I wasn't sure what I was going to say to the young Marine, but he stunned me when he said, "Captain, I'm going to get a new arm and I'll be as good as new." He also said that it had been an honor serving under my command and wished us all well. It was all I could do to control my emotions then and there. I stopped by the Tank Bn. CP before heading back to Hill 55 to talk to LtCol Raphael about my anger and frustrations over trying to support a regimental CO who, in my opinion, seemed to care more about looking good than doing good. I recall shedding some tears of anger and anguish.

LtCol Raphael assured me I was doing a great job and not to worry about the regimental CO, as he was about to rotate. LtCol Raphael rotated a few weeks later and called me in to read his departing fitness report on me. I was graded "Outstanding" down the line and, in his write-up, he stated, "This officer is the finest company commander I have ever had under my command." THAT certainly buoyed my spirits!

The Tank Bn XO, Major Jim Doss,

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assumed command of the battalion and two more majors reported in when LtCol Raphael rotated home. I was awakened by my radio operator one night in early August and was told the Bn CP was under heavy mortar attack. I got on the horn to battalion and talked to my friend, Captain Arnie Facklam, the S-3, to get a situation report. He told me they had a number of casualties, including Major Doss and the new XO, who had been seriously wounded and medevaced. The other new major, the Bn S-4, had been killed. This made me the senior officer left in the Battalion.

I drove back to the CP the next morning after the engineer mine sweep of the road. When I arrived, I conferred with Arnie and started compiling the necessary reports to Division Hdqs and reported that I was assuming temporary command of the Battalion. Later that afternoon, Division called and told me that Major Bob Larsen, my first tank company CO at Camp Pendleton some 10 years before and now the XO of the Anti-Tank Battalion, was being detailed as the CO of the Battalion. Bob came across the road from the AT Bn Hdqs, which was co-located with us on Hill 34, and formally relieved me so I could return to my command on Hill 55. In early September, LtCol William R. "Bill" Corson reported in as the new CO of the 3rd Tank Battalion and Bob Larsen became the XO.

While all this was going on, the 9th Marines received a new CO, Colonel D. J. Barrett, Jr., who was a quiet, experienced leader, determined to take the war to the VC. The major obstacles to my being able to provide maximum support to his units in the entire Da Nang TAOR were the two rivers, Song Thu Bon and Song Vu Gia, which cut completely through the lower third of the TAOR. Col. Barrett asked me if there was a way to get my tanks across these rivers into the area called "The Arizona Territory" to support expanded operations out of the An Hoa Fire Base. I told him I had an idea I wanted to check out.

The maps we were using in Viet Nam were constructed from French aerial photographs, dating from their Indo-China occupation years. The aforementioned rivers were raging torrents

during the monsoon season, flooding vast areas. However, during the dry season they were slowly moving waters approximately 100 meters across. I noticed from our maps that there were light shaded areas on the opposing banks of the rivers a few meters up or down stream from one another. I ran a terrain recon along the north bank of the Song Thu Bon and found that the light shaded area on the map was a build up of sand and heavy gravel, presumably washed down from the mountains during the monsoons and which had collected at a high point in the river beds. This appeared to be a possible fording site for my tanks to get into "The Arizona Territory".

The only sure way to determine if the site was suitable was to walk the river, probing the bottom, to see if the sand and gravel held up all the way across and that the water level didn't exceed 5', so as to not drown the tank engines. Bill Lochridge and I, armed with "grease guns", flak jackets, steel helmets and tank bars, spaced ourselves about 10' apart to account for the width of a tank, and then some, started across the river. The depth in the middle of the river was just under 5' and, as we continued probing to the south bank, we knew we had a good fording site.

I had an infantry platoon deployed on the north bank to provide us with covering fire, as necessary, and an artillery battery firing smoke over the south bank. For some unknown reason, the arty smoke stopped as we reached the south bank. I told Bill we were heading back. When we reached the middle of the river, we started taking small-arms fire from the bushes on the south bank. Our infantry support started laying down suppressing fire and Bill and I made like turtles, with only the tops of our helmets showing the rest of the way back. It was good to be "home".

A few weeks later, I led a tank/infantry column across the Song Thu Bon fording site to link up with a battalion from the 3rd Marines, which had been heli-lifted into "The Arizona Territory" for a large scale sweep. This was Operation Macon. Along with an infantry company from 1/9, a platoon of AMTRACs, my headquarters tanks, flame tanks and Bill Lochridge's 2nd Plt, I had the 3rd Plt of "A" Company, 3rd Tank Bn, which was the supporting

tank unit for the 3rd Marines battalion. MSgt Gene Whitehead, USMC (ret), also a member of the association, was a L/Cpl driver of one of the "A" Co. tanks in this operation.

Following a successful operation, which covered several square kilometers of VC territory, the 3rd Marines battalion was heli-lifted out and my force returned to our fording site. I left Bill's 2nd Plt on the south side of the river to support the Fire Base at An Hoa. For his actions in a subsequent encounter with a large VC unit, I recommended Bill for a Silver Star, which was later awarded along with the Purple Heart Medal.

I discovered another fording site over the Song Vu Gia, which allowed us to cross in support of a large scale sweep of the western portion of "The Arizona Territory" during Operation Suwanee. This area had long been a safe haven for large VC units and their headquarters, as it was separated from the rest of the TAOR through the confluence of the Thu Bon and Vu Gia rivers. Now, with tank and AMTRAC support available, infantry units were able to "ruin Charlie's days" more often.

About this time, I learned I had been selected for promotion to major. I was reassigned as the Tank Bn. Operations Officer, S-3. While the remainder of my tour would not involve field operations, it proved to be a most challenging and rewarding experience. This assignment turned out to be multi-faceted. I was to plan and supervise the employment of the Battalion's armored assets, coordinate the activities of some 9 separate support units in the defense of the Southern Sector of the Da Nang Air Base, including scheduling nightly artillery and 4.2" mortar H & I fires on likely infiltration routes to the Air Base and the Division CP and, finally, oversee meaningful pacification efforts in the hamlet of Phong Bac, adjacent to our CP on Hill 34. When I reported to Battalion HQ, one of the first points made to me by Bill Corson was that he expected the 3rd Tank Bn, under my staff direction, to be an effective combat unit and one which paid more than "lip service" to the pacification effort.

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a story to a grandson

Editor's Note: I may have written this introduction before, but I don't recall if I ever did. While serving as a U.S. Marine tanker, I was exposed to a fairly good sampling of Staff NCOs who carried the 1811 MOS. There were fine leaders among those select few, but my mind's eye tells me that there was no better 1st Sergeant than Jim Langford. While I spent six months of my tour in-country with Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks, Top Langford was the fairest, and the one SNCO who insisted that his men do their jobs without a lot of meddling direction or interference. I think that the main reason that Top Langford was the kind of leader that he was is due to the fact that he spent 95% of his time in the USMC as a grunt.

Jim wrote: This is a story I wrote to my grandson, who is in the U.S. Army Second

fought in the rains, and "misery" was just a word.



Infantry Division at Fort Wainwright, Alaska

Water ... Water Everywhere ... and Lots of Dinks to Shoot

Hi Kyle,

I'm feeling somewhat better this afternoon, so I thought I'd tell you a war story about the exploits of your old grandpa in Vietnam.

It was the middle of April, 1969, and the monsoon rains were beating down on us. Nothing was dry and there was no way for us to get drier. We ate, shit, slept and

We were coming down the hill from where our firebase was located and the path was a running stream. We slipped, slid, and fell the eight hundred meters to the valley floor, and found ourselves in a flooded stream bed that during the rest of the year was dry. We were a hundred men strong, counting the officers, among whom was a distant cousin of yours named 1st Lt. Jay Langford from Enterprise, Alabama. He commanded 1st Platoon and also filled in as executive officer of the company.

The previous week, we had wiped out a company of North Vietnamese sappers to the last, but one, man. One enemy did get away, but we killed 98 and captured one. That, however, is another story and it is mentioned here only to set the stage that we knew the enemy was heavy in this area.

The rains slacked a little as the day wore on and, in the afternoon, we were approaching a small hill situated sort of by itself. The CO, thinking this would make a good observation point, decided to see what was up there.

The company was strung out for about three hundred meters in a column of platoons and I was located forward, right

behind the lead platoon, which was the first platoon of the company. Our point man stopped the formation while about half way up the hill because he thought he saw something. After a long, careful look, he turned and waved us on. Just as he faced forward, a sniper took the left side of his head off.

Marines are aggressive soldiers and, instead of hitting the deck and returning fire, we all charged straight up the hill towards the enemy. I encountered a small cliff in front of me and, as I pulled myself up, an enemy soldier, the same sniper that killed our point man, was taking a bead on me from about two feet away. I knew I was dead, but one of my sergeants blew the sniper away before he could kill me.

We charged on over the hill, chasing the enemy away down the back side, but the squad that I was with had discovered a bunker that no one else had seen, so we attacked it. I got around to the back side of it and threw a grenade inside which revealed a line of other gun ports in the bank. I continued throwing grenades until we had knocked out all nine bunkers. I thought I was going to be a big hero, but it was not to be. It turns out that the Vietnamese had been using these particular bunkers to store their dead in. My grenades had caused the bodies to rupture and we had the worst smell you could imagine. We wound up putting CS gas on the bodies, so the enemy would not come back to rebury them. It also helped kill the stink.

As we consolidated our defenses, getting set up for the night, the enemy started in on us with mortars. I counted sixty-five rounds in the air before the first one hit the ground. What I have

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not yet mentioned is that, in addition to enemy soldiers on that hill, there was also an unexploded American 2000-pound bomb, and the VC were trying to hit it with their mortars. If they had been successful we would have all been killed.

When the mortar rounds started hitting the deck, I heard one of my M-60 machine guns opening up and immediately headed towards it because I thought an attack was developing. That's when one of the mortar rounds exploded near me and I was hit in the knee with shrapnel. I kept on going, however, and

got to the M-60 position to find two of my men dead because one of the mortar rounds had landed directly in their foxhole. We called in other machine gun fire on the area from which the VC had been firing and we also called in counter-mortar fire.

Finally, the enemy fire had stopped and we were left alone the rest of the night. The casualties were heavy on my side, as I lost a total of three dead and eighty-five wounded, counting me and the company commander. One would normally have thought that many casualties would

have gotten us a trip to the rear for recuperating, but Marines don't fight that way. I evacuated eight of my most seriously wounded and the dead, but the rest of us stayed on patrol for three more days.

At the end of those three days, I got wounded again in the ass, but that's a story for a later date.

Take care, my son. Remember to watch your six, and I want you home in one piece when next we go to war.

Semper Fidelis,
Papa

OPERATION HASTINGS

by RIC LANGLEY

Memorable Viet Nam Experiences (Continued from page 38)

Bill Corson was perhaps the most unassuming, genuinely intelligent person I have ever known. He had not come to Viet Nam to win medals or earn a promotion, but rather to contribute the full measure of his extensive knowledge and experience toward achieving success in that most unusual and difficult war. While he had been trained as a tank officer, he was also a highly trained and respected intelligence agent who had cut his teeth on such work as a Marine enlisted member of the OSS during WWII. Following his commissioning, Bill spent a number of tours of duty as a Marine Officer "on loan" to the CIA as a Southeast Asia specialist and intelligence operative in that part of the world. He was living and working in the "so-called grass roots level" of Southeast Asian culture, long before our country became involved in the Viet Nam struggle.

When Bill said he needed an officer to ramrod the specific pacification efforts he was planning, I suggested Bill Lochridge, my hard-charging former platoon leader. Bill was reassigned to Battalion Hdqs and immediately grasped and effectively implemented Bill Corson's plans to create a "laboratory for capitalism" in Phong Bac hamlet. The projects were many and varied and involved the villagers from the get-go, so that, in time, they could take over and operate them. Bill Lochridge could speak

in greater detail than me concerning the challenges and rewards of these efforts. Because of our unique pacification efforts, we started receiving a number of "visiting firemen" with a special area of interest and expertise in developing social, economic and political reform in Viet Nam. We gave them an eyeful and an earful of what pacification was all about.

LtGen Lew Walt, CG III MAF, often brought high-ranking military visitors to our CP for briefings on tank operations throughout I Corps. Bill Corson told me one day that General Walt was bringing an Army major general and his chief of staff in for a briefing. This general commanded a mechanized division operating in the Delta Region near Saigon. I had a large-scale wall map of our TAOR with an overlay, showing where we could operate tanks and I explained how we had learned to overcome "book-type" obstacles to tank trafficability. When I finished the briefing, the Army general turned to his chief of staff and said, "George, do you get the impression that our battalion commanders have been bull-shitting us about not being able to operate in parts of our TAOR?"; to which the colonel replied, "Yes, Sir!" I wisely refrained from further comment. This experience was unique in that the colonel's name was George S. Patton, III.

One of the units I coordinated with for the Southern Sector defense of the Air Base was a Navy POL Supply Dump located just north of our CP on Hill 34. On my first

visit to this unit to meet and talk with the CO, I noticed a couple of people tossing a football around nearby. The CO asked me if I knew of Roger Staubach and would like to meet him. He called Ensign Staubach over and introduced us. I can't recall who mentioned it, but the next thing I knew we were playing catch. (That was my one and only shot at playing professional football with a Dallas Cowboy!)

I was promoted to major in October and pinned on the gold leaves. Shortly thereafter, LtGen Victor ("Brute") Krulak, CG FMFPAC, visited Battalion HQ. Bill Corson had all the staff officers assemble in our little thatch hut "O Club" to meet the general. When he got to me, I said, "Good afternoon, General, I'm Captain Tunget." Without missing a beat, General Krulak said, with a small grin, "How long have you been a major, Captain?" I don't remember what I said, but it should have been something like, "DUH!"

On the night of November 11, mortar rounds started impacting the Battalion CP area. As I was running for the Ops Bunker, a mortar round struck a tree nearby and I was struck in the right cheek with a piece of shrapnel. I was spun around and collided with another Marine heading for cover. We both went sprawling and, when I got up, continued to the bunker. I was pretty well-saturated with blood. I was holding a handkerchief to my face, when Bill Corson

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In August 1966, Dong Ha, Vietnam was changing from a small outpost a few miles south of the DMZ to a major combat base in Northern I Corps. In the days after 1st Plt. Arrived, the base

troops or combat supplies. Trucks ran continually from the river port in Dong Ha. Landing craft were used to transport cargo from the ships off shore and up the Cua Viet River to Dong Ha.



began to grow by leaps and bounds. Large transport aircraft were coming and going non-stop, dropping off either

Everybody recognized that something big was in the wind.

First Plt. set up its command post

and went about doing its part. Things were extremely different than they had been in Phu Bai. No more hot chow or hot showers and no tents to sleep in. We had a single tent for our CP and that was it. We lived on our tanks, kind of like an ugly motor home. At night we were assigned a spot on the base perimeter. Each guy on the crew stood a two-hour watch starting at 10:00 at night and ending at about 6:00 in the morning. Each night your watch would move up one spot. Only occasionally was there any activity and this amounted to minor probing, which was probably just curious kids.

There seemed to be no end to the number of tanker lessons that came my way almost every day. A few of these include never sleep under a tank hatch when it rains; it will leak. If you hang your pistol on an end connector and forget it, the tank will drive away grinding up your pistol between the track and the sprocket and you will owe the Marine Corps \$61.00 for a new pistol. You can drink hot beer and actually enjoy it and wish you had more. This list grows with every passing day and as time goes by the lessons become more and more serious.

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As expected, our driver rotated shortly after we moved north, making me the permanent loader and Rodriguez the driver. Driving just was not Rodriguez's bag. He had improved, but he was by no stretch of the imagination proficient.

Early one morning after a night of heavy rain and cold, we had just made our way back to the CP when we were told that C-12 and another tank would be moving to Cam Lo to train the grunts (infantry) on what to do and what not to do when operating with tanks in the field. After loading our gear on the tank, we pulled in behind the jeep that was to lead the small convoy east along Highway 9 to the base at Cam Lo. The jeep, C-12, two trucks, and the other tank made our way down the road, and in what seemed like a very short time we were pulling through the barbed wire gate at Cam Lo. I jumped down to ground guide Rodriguez, making sure not to walk directly in front of him. I guided Rodriguez to the other side of the outpost where we were to take up our position on the perimeter while Sgt. Jones headed for the grunt CP to find out exactly what they had in mind for us. We parked the tank and the gunner and I started making up a range card with all the pertinent information. Rodriguez made himself busy checking track, suspension, and engine and transmission fluid levels. Sgt. Jones returned after a short time with the scoop. Every day we were to take a group of grunts and pass along information that would help to keep them safe when working with tanks in the field. They were taught how to use the intercom on the rear fender (if it hadn't been torn off), to stay back behind the center of the turret when the tank is firing, to make sure the TC can see you before you try to climb up on the tank, and a lot more. The last thing we wanted was to be running over or blowing away our own troops, so we took this training very seriously.

At the end of the training session we would ask for questions and there was always a ton of them. The number one most asked question was how they could

get transferred into tanks; they were tired of all the ground pounding. The grunts were allowed to climb on and into the tanks and were very impressed by the iron monsters. All in all it was good for both the tank crews and the grunts and it did help later on when we began operations.

While in Cam Lo we got word that more tanks had moved into the Dong Ha area, the more the merrier. Cam Lo was quiet with very little activity, just short patrols and listening posts at night. We stood our two-hour watch at night, did our training during the day and played cards, read, or napped the rest of the time--really boring. It was so quiet it was spooky. Everybody was just waiting for the other shoe to drop. Rumors ran like wild fire through the ranks of the troops at the small outpost. On any given day you could hear anything from the war was over and we were going home to we would be charging across the DMZ and invading North Vietnam. At last the word came down; the Marines in and around Dong Ha would move north into the area just south of the DMZ, later to be called Leatherneck Square, to conduct operation Hastings. Selected units would be inserted by helicopter into the area where the operation would kick off while others, us included, would move north by ground, hopefully pushing the NVA into the waiting forces.

Recon teams had been working the area for several months prior the Marine build up. The reconnaissance had shown extensive NVA activity in and around the DMZ. The troops were not Viet Cong but well-trained and equipped uniformed North Vietnamese Army personnel. There was no doubt they were not there on a Sunday picnic.

Sgt. Jones briefed us the day before we were to jump off on what our role in the operation would be. The tone in his voice indicated that this was serious business. At the end of his briefing, Sgt. Jones turned to me and said that I would be doing the driving and Rodriguez would be loading. This came as a total surprise; we had no clue the he was going to make this change.

Now I had to step up to do a job even I wasn't sure that I could handle along with facing my first combat action. No pressure here!

On that sunny morning we mounted up as many grunts as we could safely carry on the tanks and headed north to the Cam Lo River, heading north, again not a good sign. Upon arriving at the river we rendezvoused with tanks from "B" Co. and their contingent of grunts. After mechanical problems for one of the Bravo tanks and a bath for myself, thanks to a rookie mistake while fording the river, we dismounted the grunts and began sweeping the villages just north of the river.

Recon had reported enemy bunker and tunnel construction going on in the area during the last week. Several hours later, with all the villages cleared and no contact except for being cussed at by a couple of old ladies and being told we were "# fucking 10" by some kids, we stopped long enough to check fluid levels and grab some C-rats (C-Rations). We had destroyed the bunkers and tunnels that we came across by simply driving over them with the tanks.

With the grunts mounted up again, we turned north and headed down a narrow road that dwindled into a trail and then to a foot path with jungle close in on both sides and large tree branches over head. There were signs of enemy presence everywhere we looked. Being the lead tank, Sgt. Jones was starting to become concerned about our inability to maneuver on the narrow path and passed his concern along to the grunt commander. Just as the decision was being made to turn back and find a more desirable route, there was a large explosion directly over the third tank in the column. The tank's radio antenna had tripped a 105mm artillery round hung in a tree over the path. Immediately, the jungle to our front and right flank erupted in small arms and machine gun fire. The grunts were off and behind the tanks in a heartbeat with their rifles answering the enemy barrage. Hand grenades were flying back and forth like the grunts and Charlie were playing catch with each other.

The tanks were able to swing their guns towards the incoming fire and commenced to pound the jungle with canister rounds. Our tank was firing at the muzzle flashes directly to our front. I could not believe the amount of destruction those canister rounds could inflict. Small trees, branches, leaves, dirt and, I am sure, body parts flew everywhere. This intense fighting went on for what seemed like hours, but in reality lasted only a few minutes before the enemy fire slacked off and the NVA slipped away, knowing they could not defeat the tanks head on.

Charlie had made a critical mistake. If the ambush had been placed just a few hundred yards down the path, the tanks would not have been able to traverse their 90mm guns and therefore would not have been able to bring their massive fire power to bear on the enemy. Lessons were taught to both sides by this small skirmish.

Four grunts had been killed and several more were wounded by the booby trap in the tree, so we had to find a suitable LZ to bring in medevac choppers. We back-tracked to an area on top of a small rise that had a large open clearing for an LZ and called in the medevacs. Mortar rounds started falling almost as soon as we pulled up on the rise, followed shortly by sniper fire. Charley was not going to let us get away that easily; he just changed his tactics.

Our machine guns were barking at everything that even looked like it might be a bad guy. We fired several HE rounds just to let them know we had the ability to reach out and touch them if they screwed up and showed their position. The sniper fire stopped and the mortars slacked enough that the choppers were able to get in and get the dead and wounded loaded on board. They lifted off and were out of there without a problem. As the choppers lifted off, we were already getting ready to move out. We had stumbled into a much larger force than we would be able to handle on our own and were ordered to move south back along the route we had taken north that morning.

We would learn later this was a huge mistake. Following our tracks, we moved south at a very fast pace with the grunts holding on for dear life. After not more than forty five minutes travel time there were again more explosions at the front of the column; this time, the lead tank and the second tank in line had both run over and detonated mines. Charlie had come in after we had passed this way earlier and planted the mines in our original tracks. Luckily for us he didn't set another ambush along with the mines. Those lessons kept popping up.

One tank was not damaged too badly and could be repaired in the field. The second did not fare so well and would need assistance from a retriever to make it back to Dong Ha. With the sun sinking low in the sky there was no time for the retriever to make it to our position before night fall. Our only alternative was to set up a perimeter around the damaged tanks, get them repaired as much as possible, and hold out until morning. We used our tanks to knock down the grass and brush so we would have better fields of fire while the grunts dug in. It was a tight perimeter with the tanks close together in the hopes that Charlie would think twice before trying to overrun our position.

Throughout the night we could hear movement just outside our lines, but aside from some mortars and some probing it was a quiet night in the small encampment with very little sleep. First thing in the morning, 1st Plt. was ordered to load two squads of grunts on board our tanks and head for Cam Lo. Bravo company tanks would wait with the remaining grunts for the retriever to arrive and then tow the disabled tank back to Dong Ha. We were more than ready at first light to move out and made it back to Cam Lo without further contact with the enemy before noon. I didn't even get another bath while fording the river. Learned that lesson!

Without much said, we set about doing the things that tankers do after

an excursion into the field. Guns were cleaned, suspension was lubed, fluids were checked, spent ammo was replaced, and all the things it takes to make the tank ready to move out if called. By late afternoon we were all squared away and sat down to have some chow. It seemed funny to me at the time, but our talk did not turn to the day before. The only talk about the operation was what we should do differently in the future. I would notice this behavior the rest of the time I was in Vietnam. There was never a lot of conversation about what happened during times of combat. "How can we make it safer for the tank crews when faced with going into combat" was the only question asked.

After chow, Sgt. Jones was called to the CP, returning a short time later with a huge smile on his face. He had, along with our gunner and several other members of 1st Plt., received their flight dates. The next morning they would catch the first convoy back to Dong Ha. One thing for sure, I would no longer be the newest guy in the platoon, which felt great. I was finally feeling at home. I was doing the job that I wanted to do and was confident I could do it well. I would, at last, be with crew mates that were going to be around for some time. I had faced combat for the first time and the fear that went with it. I was probably more afraid of what I would do when put in a combat situation than I was of the actual combat. Would I freeze or panic and not perform the way I should. There is no arguing the fact that I was scared to death but I was able to overcome that fear and focus on what I had to do. I knew that people's lives depended on me to control my fear and drive that tank. I would carry that fear with me, not only for myself, but for every member of our platoon, every time we would go into harm's way. It's true; if someone tells you that they were in combat and they were not afraid, it's a lie. I had found my home away from home in Vietnam. It was on the back of C-12, where ever she might be parked, and that would be in a lot of places. ■

Jesse and Me Take a Ride

by JOHN HUNTER

Jesse Salinas and Tom Snyder were the two motor transport drivers assigned to 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion. These two guys were as much into tanks as the rest of us! We went to Vietnam by ship on the USS Alamo, LSD-33, leaving San Diego in May of 1965. We were supposed to go to Hawaii but that stop was canceled so we went directly to Okinawa. Our trip was in an arch which took us way up into the Northern Pacific. I remember some really cold day's en-route.

After we debarked from the ship, driving the tanks across the island to Camp Hansen was a cool experience especially since it was my first time driving on an asphalt road. But going into the village was a doubly good experience.

We passed all of those bars with the good looking women and all those stores with everything that you could ever want to buy. I was driving B-35 which was the last tank in the column. As we entered the Camp Hansen back gate, my brakes failed and I rammed into the back of B-34, Sgt. Allen's tank.

I remember the look on his face. I guess that he thought I was messing with him and that he did not realize I had no brakes. Bad things could have happened crossing Okinawa without brakes in an M-48A3. We were lucky that day.

While on Okinawa, I bought my first 35 MM camera, a Petri - 7S. I think that it cost me \$25.00. It was a good camera and it worked well until it fell off the back of a 5-ton truck one day while we were in the field in Chu Lai. After that, it never works correctly again...but I did not know it. I just kept clicking all of those wasted pictures and now those lost memories. That was the day we had to fill in for a grunt unit that was called out to help

another unit that was being pressured by the Viet Cong. I remember occupying sand bagged bunkers as a tanker without a tank. That was a lonely feeling to be sure.

After we were in on Okinawa for a couple of weeks, we again loaded everything on a ship, the USS Point Defiance, LSD-31 and took off for parts unknown. The date was June 24, 1965. We were headed for Vietnam. Actually I don't remember if we were officially told that or not. We cruised around for two months stopping at Subic Bay in the Philippine Islands. We unloaded the tanks at Subic Bay, did some maintenance work and we drank some Miller Hi Life in the clear glass bottles. I have since learned that

the ship and some of our Marines went on a rescue mission to help get a stranded destroyer off a reef. It was August 31, 1965, when I drove B-35 onto a LCU and took it to the beach at Chu Lai. I think that I am pretty typical for a Viet Nam vet where the memory (or the lack there of) is concerned. According to my Service Record, I spent over a month at Subic Bay...I wish! Before landing at Chu Lai we made a

short stop at Qui Nhon on July 1, 1965. We took two tanks ashore (B-34 and B-35). That fact is in my Service Record. I remember this well because I have photos to prove it. Sgt. Allen was in-charge of the three of us: LCpl. Tookolo, LCpl. Reed and me. We spent seven days at Qui Nhon acting as a stationary deterrent on the beach. It was kind of like a vacation! Don't blame me, I was just following orders. I was a PFC, low man on the totem pole.

In Chu Lai we had our tank park and living area located in a nice sandy area near the South China Sea. I remember some of the guys trying to dig a water well in the sand. It did not work to well since it kept caving in and filling with sand. We had a big sand dune ridge behind the camp with some air defense missiles located up there. Behind that ridge you could hear artillery firing, Huey helicopters flying around and Douglas A-4's taking off and landing. We had hard back tents to sleep in when we were back in that area. There were 55 gallon drums set up for showers and the old pit toilet near the bottom of the ridge. There was also a big tent where the motor transport people hung out. They had weights there to work out with and sometimes we would spend the evening there pumping iron. It didn't help me much since I was the skinny one of the platoon.

One morning I believe in October or

good friend, I said sure. I checked out with my tank commander, Sgt. "Mac" Mackenzie and we took off. We were not too far down the road when Jessie asks me if I wanted to take the long way and to see some sites. Of course I said yes! Big mistake! We went north along the beach and then took a dirt road inland toward Highway 1. The road was completely deserted. We were peacefully traversing this road when we came upon what look like a big puddle. I should mention we were in a 2-1/2 ton (I think) 1,000 gallon tanker truck. When we came to this supposed puddle, we stopped and examined the situation. It looked ok so we proceed and that was when the truck sank to the bottom of what turned out to be a river. Where we first entered was the deepest part. The water was up to the top of the seat cushions. Of course the truck engine stalled and it would not start. We had to swim out of the thing and we decided to walk on west on the road instead of going back the way we came since we knew there was nothing behind us for several miles.

So we started our walk down the road in the middle of nowhere with one .45 pistol which was mine. Jessie was unarmed. Talk about two lucky dumb asses. The first thing of note that we saw on the road was a large bamboo snake that was about 3 to 4 feet long. It crossed the

officers. Riding shotgun in the first jeep was a full-bird Colonel. I have no idea who he was but I would bet he was the 7th Marines Regimental Commander. The first question he asked me was, "Where is your cover Marine?" Not...What the hell are you two doing out here? But, where is your cover? I told him that I left it in the truck when it stalled in the water and we had to swim out. It was a very lame excuse but he accepted in and the two Jeeps went on their way...and so did we. Not long after that, we came upon something that was almost as good as a tank, an amtrac. Really, an amtrac coming down the road many miles from the ocean. Coming to rescue us? We spoke to the crewmen and described our problem. They told us that they were glad to help. Back down the road we went to our drowned truck. "The Bean Burner" was Jessie's name for it. They hooked up the tow cable and pulled us out. And then dragged us all the way to Highway 1 and onto the asphalt. You would have thought we would have tried to pop the clutch and get it started when the amtrac was pulling us but we did not try that. They dropped us on the highway and we flagged down a Marine driving a big dump truck. He pulled us a short distance and we got the truck jump started. We drove back to the tank park, four hrs and 30 minutes later.

No one said a thing to us. I guess they thought that was how long it took to pick up a load of fuel but we did not get anything except water in the cab. A few days later I saw Jessie and he told me the engine in his truck had blown up and it need a major overhaul. No one ever knew about our wild ride and we were very fortunate that day. Not only could we have gotten shot or drown, we also could have gotten in big trouble if our wild ride had been discovered.

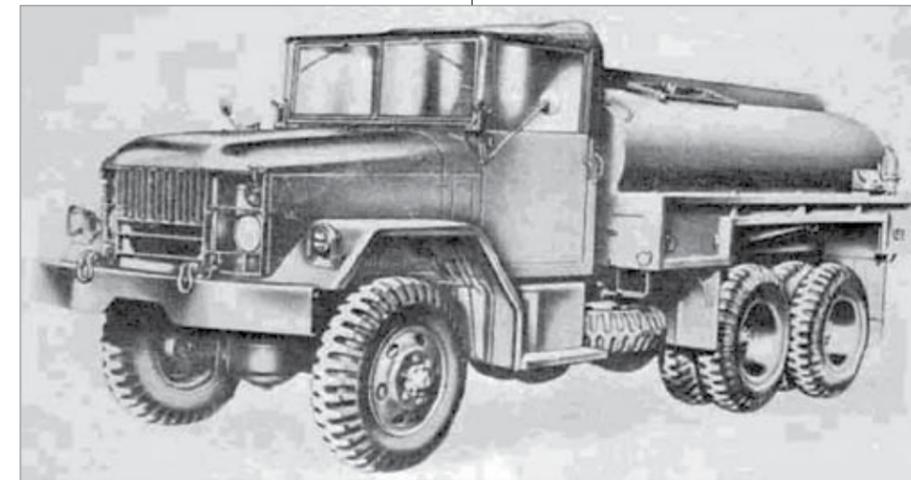
My advice to people is if they have a job to do, just do it and leave the side trips alone. A short cut or a long cut can lead you to a place you don't want to go.

Semper Fi

John M. Hunter

B Company 1st & 3rd Tank Battalions

Vietnam 1965-1966



November of 1965, I was in my tent when Jessie Salinas came by and ask me to accompany him, or ask if I wanted to go with him, to pick up a load of diesel fuel at the local fuel dump. Since Jessie was a

road in front of us and entered a stand of... what else? Bamboo. Next to happen on our stroll, we see some Jeeps coming up the road toward us. As they approached, we could see that both Jeeps were full of

Memorable Viet Nam Experiences
(Continued from page 40)

came in to the bunker and told someone to get me over to the AT Bn Aid Station across the road. The doctor there said he had to stitch me up right away, but he didn't have any Novocaine. It took 28 stitches, but my cheek was so numb, I didn't feel them.

I returned to the Ops Bunker while the mortar rounds were still falling and learned that the VC had penetrated the wire between the AMTRAC Battalion CP and Charlie Motors CP, just to the north of us, and sappers had destroyed a few vehicles. I dispatched our "Reaction Unit" with a gun tank and a flame tank from the Hdqs Section with Bill Lochridge in charge to close the breach. Bill Corson and I took a radio operator and went outside just in time to see them kill the retreating sappers and saw the flame tank illuminate and eliminate another group of sappers and a mortar team heading for the Da Nang Air Base and the Navy POL Supply Dump. (Staubach probably owes me one!)

The next determined attempt by the VC to disrupt/neutralize the Da Nang Air Base was with the use of 8" solid fuel rockets. One night in December, I had just left the Ops Bunker and gone to bed, when I was awakened about 3 a.m. by the sound of what seemed like a freight train roaring past. I jumped out of bed, headed for the Ops Bunker and saw flaming contrails going directly overhead. In the bunker, I was told the Air Base was being rocketed.

As part of our Southern Sector defense organization, we maintained an artillery OP on a hill west of the Air Base and Division CP. The artillery sergeant in charge of the OP called us with the coordinates of where the initial flashes came from. I immediately got on the land line to Division Operations and requested counter-battery fire on the coordinates which showed an area about 2 kilometers southwest of our CP and on a direct line to the air base. I was told to "Wait", and after what seemed to be an interminable "Wait" and, while the rockets were still going overhead, I was told the location was too near a "No Fire" civilian area and my request was denied. I was also informed

that the area would be swept the next morning at first light by an infantry unit.

Well, guess what? The infantry unit found the casings the rockets had been carried in and the crude wooden ramps they had been fired from at the EXACT location we had reported to Division the night before. This was not the last rocket attack on the air base, and the subsequent ones were always launched from areas near "No Fire" zones. Thanks again to Mr. Johnson's and Mr. McNamara's "Rules of Engagement", we were fighting with our hands virtually tied behind our backs.

In late February 1967, Bill Corson was reassigned to III MAF HQ to take charge of the Combined Action Platoon (CAP) Program and would be working directly for General Walt. This was a daunting assignment for Bill Corson, but one which was right up his alley. He stated that he was going to take Bill Lochridge with him and asked if I would extend my tour 6 months to help him also. Under any other circumstances, I would have gladly agreed. However, at about the same time as I was wounded in November, my wife had been thrown from a horse and fractured her neck. Although she was making a good recovery and was being helped with our children by her mother, I felt I needed to go home. Bill Corson understood completely and said that was where I was needed most.

In March, 3rd Tank Battalion HQ was the last Division unit to move north to rejoin the 3rd Marine Division and support operations in the Quang Tri/DMZ Area. We had been OpCon to the 1st Marine Division which had relieved the 3rd MarDiv in the Da Nang TAOR. I headed up the advance party to facilitate the movement of the rest of the Battalion HQ to the Hue/Phu Bai Area. With orders in hand to become the CO of the Marine Barracks, NAS Lemoore, CA, I was detached from the battalion in late March and I proceeded to the Transient Facility at Da Nang Air Base for the flight to Okinawa and home.

My flight was a Continental Airlines charter due to arrive and depart the afternoon of the day I checked in. An announcement was made that the flight was delayed and no ETA had been determined. When it became dark, and

still no flight, I began to get a bit edgy, as the VC were still rocketing the air base from time to time. I thought to myself that it wouldn't be quite fair to have put up with their crap for a year and then have them put a rocket between my legs on my last day in country! The flight finally arrived around midnight. There was no more beautiful sight in my memory at that time than the sight of that gorgeous white airplane with the yellow tail rolling up to the terminal.

As I settled in for the flight to Okinawa, I suddenly experienced some bittersweet emotions. Certainly I was glad to be heading home; however, I was also leaving behind a portion of my life that had been the defining period I had expected it to be. I knew I had been an effective combat leader and staff officer. I had also had the honor and privilege of leading and serving some of the finest Marines one could ever hope to be associated with. Bill Corson has to head the list of those Marines with whom I was privileged to serve. Even though we were never able to be together physically after Viet Nam, Bill and I did maintain a close relationship through telephone conversations and correspondence until his passing in July, 2000.

Bill Corson wrote and had published a book entitled "The Betrayal", a scathing report of how we were losing the "other war" of meaningful pacification efforts and promoting a stable, honest South Vietnamese government structure. In losing the "other war", he predicted eventual defeat in our efforts to "save" South Vietnam from a communist takeover. We all know how prophetic that prediction was.

The most important award/reward I shall treasure all my life from my Viet Nam experience came in the forward of "The Betrayal" when Bill wrote:

"I am indebted to many persons for their help and encouragement in writing this book: to Major Everett L. Tunget, USMC, who, as my operations officer in Vietnam, sharpened and honed the rather blunt instrument of a Marine tank battalion so that it could be effective in the entire spectrum of the Vietnam Conflict and who was my most devastating critic in the best meaning of the term." ■



MPC Exchange

Sometime around the middle of 1968, I was driving out the gate at Chu Lai headed for the village of Ky Khuong as part of my duties with the Marine Air Group (MAG-12) Civic Action Team. When I got to the gate I was informed by the Americal (Army) MP that I couldn't leave the base. I pulled out my pass that said I could go anywhere in Quang Tin Province. He then told me, "No one gets off the base today until the MPC exchange is finished." I vaguely remember the total amount of money lost that day on the black market but I think it was reported in the Stars and Stripes newspaper as around \$4 Million. Of course the Vietnamese would gladly take MPC or American dollars on a one-for-one basis as the exchange rate then was 118 Piasters per dollar. They would talk some dummy GI or Marine to exchange it for them in order to make the 18 Piaster gain. The Vietnamese lined the fence on our base that day, begging

anyone to take it and exchange it for them as the Vietnamese workers were not allowed on base. I had less than \$25 of MPC so I took it to disbursing and got the new MPC. HOWEVER, no one could exchange more than \$200 that day without proof or explanation of where they got it from. Would you believe the Disbursing Chief (NCOIC) had collected over \$900 as poker winnings and he was paying volunteers to convert his! Apparently only the CO and our Disbursing Officer were the only ones that knew about it proven by what happened to our Disbursing Chief. Before the 5 p.m. deadline, one of disbursing clerks I knew had \$38 of old MPC that he couldn't get converted so he gave it to me. The easiest \$38 I ever made!

MSgt Gene Hays, USMC (ret)
RVN '67 - '68

From the Sgt Grit's on-line Newsletter

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

Please note that we have included a special return envelope in this issue for you to mail your 2014 dues. Annual dues are payable on January 1st of each year regardless as to what date you first became a member. Please help your organization save postage money by mailing in your 2014 dues right now so we do not have to send you a reminder post card later. If the number that follows your name on the address label is anything other than "14" then your dues are due now.

