



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



2015 Reunion - Washington, DC

Reunion Information Pages 42 - 46

NOTHING SAYS “TANKS” LIKE A SPROCKET and TRACK



Working with the Pentagon’s official mint we have created a large size (3”), one of a kind medallion to commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Vietnam War. We struck just 200 of these beautiful display pieces. This is NOT a challenge coin but rather a piece that you will want to proudly display, unless, that is, you want to trump any challenge coin that is put in front of you. It is a full 1” larger than the largest challenge coin size. The sprocket is silver and the end connectors and sprocket bolts are gold colored metal with hand painted colors in key areas very much like the full-color VTA challenge coin that we introduced at the San Antonio reunion in 2013. The medallion will be \$30 each and it will be available for the first time at the Washington D.C. reunion. Only one per person until after the reunion. Members not attending the DC reunion will be able to order a medallion at a later date if we have any remaining.

Letter from the President

REGRETS – Yes, we all have them ... and sadly they last a lifetime.

There are things that we have done that we wished that we hadn’t. And there are things that we wished that we had done but didn’t. By far, for me, the most significant regrets I have now are about lost time. I used to have a real sense that it is getting increasingly likely that I will die without having ever seen the Amazon River, or learning to speak Spanish fluently, or having built my own house in the mountains. As I grow older, the opportunity cost of truly pointless hours piles up. What could I have accomplished instead of playing computer games or spending countless hours watching television? There isn’t enough time left in my life for me to become a millionaire, a rock star and much less to be elected president of the United States. So if I don’t draw the wrong card in the near future and get prostate cancer at age 70, I might make it to 20 or 30 more of the “1,000 things I want to see and do before I die.”

It would be so sad (to me) to have even one single member of the USMC VTA pass away without having attended one of our reunions. And almost as important, to not have taken the time to be able to tell us his own story about his time in Vietnam.

The Board of Directors discussed the following points during our 2014 meeting and we agreed to make a concerted effort to contact as many of our own Vietnam Marine tanker buddies as we can and to do these four things:

Encourage each of them to attend the 2015 DC reunion keeping in mind their own personal economic situation and if necessary, to find out how we may help them get to DC.

Suggest that they gather their Vietnam mementos & photos, assemble them in a album and to bring it to share with us in the Slopechute hospitality suite.

Ask them to consider participating in the personal interview process.

Recommend that they in turn contact all of their other tanker buddies to encourage those men to do all four of these suggestions.

If each one of us could contact five Marine tanker buddies and if those five buddies could contact five other buddies then we could very well have the largest (and best) reunion ever ... and quite possibly, we’ll be able to greatly increase the VTA membership roles.

Semper Fidelis,

John

“Our biggest regrets are not for the things we have done but for the things we haven’t done”
Chad Michael Murray

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FRONT COVER PHOTO:

The National Mall in Washington, DC, is packed with so many wonderful & historic sites and museums and we will visit as many as we can during our reunion October 28 – November 2, 2015.

Letter to the Editor

Correction - "I Remember Manual Garcia" article

I got my copy of the most recent S-Box yesterday. It is a damned fine publication. The photos really make a difference. When we are proofing only the copy, and don't see the photos, we really don't appreciate it as much as the final copy.

I'm kind of bothered about what you wrote when you quoted RB English as saying the July 27th, 1967, incident happened at the Market Place, since there were many others who indicated that it happened inside the south gate at Con Thien. I used that incident as the prologue for my book on Con Thien. Ten years or so ago, while doing research for my book, both JJ and RB told me it happened inside the wire at Con Thien. I had also spoken on the phone around that same time with John Brock, the platoon leader, and he told me the same thing. Howard Blum, an original VTA member, gave me the complete story about how the tankers were inside the south gate doing maintenance when the NVA shelled them. Howard went up the next day with two other tankers to drive the vehicles back to Dong Ha. He recalled how disgusted he was when he picked up a pipe section on the ground that still had blood and pieces of intestines inside and it all poured out onto his boots. He drove the tank back to Dong Ha barefooted. If those tanks had been at the Market Place, Howard would have known the difference. We even had an S-Box article this year where another Marine commented on going up to retrieve the three tanks from Con Thien the day after most of the crewmen were killed and injured on July 27th. And, my first day at Con Thien in early September, 1967, the 105mm gun battery CO approached me and told me about how English's three tanks were parked in the open by the south gate and got shelled by the NVA. His concluding warning to me was: "You tankers think you're made out of steel like your tanks . . . well, you're not!" I never forgot that.

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From the San Antonio Reunion

In 2013 the 15th SBC reunion shared the hotel in San Antonio with the Vietnam Tankers Association. Several of the tankers asked me to find any former (Korea) tankers who are also members of the 15th SBC. So far I have found only one survivor, Hilliard Staton. The Vietnam tankers

gave me a medallion (challenge coin) and asked that I give it to a survivor. I will send it on to Hilliard.

Semper Fi!

Bill Martin

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What a Great Re-Union in San Antonio!

For many years I had been watching the VTA website but I never joined. I was a city fireman in Oakland, California. The Oakland City shop supervisor for all the city vehicles was a friend of mine, Harold Riensche. I worked with Harold on ordering some 100' aerial ladder fire trucks for the city. Eventually I found out that Harold was a Marine tank retriever commander and that he had won some impressive medals in the Nam. When Harold found out I was in tanks, he told me I should sign up for the re-union in San Antonio ... and so I did.

I looked up some of the names on the membership roster and found Jerry Hearne. He and I were friends when we were at 1st Tanks together at Camp Pendleton. We went to Okinawa with 1st Tanks on the USS Alamo. After we got in-country, there were some losses at 3rd Tanks and I was one of several tankers that got flown up to Da Nang to become replacements. I went to Flames. Eventually we moved to Marble Mountain and after a few months, I finally got back on a gun tanks. My new tank commander was Joe Tyson. You talk about a Marine getting lucky! What a great tank commander and a really good guy!

What really made the San Antonio reunion for me was being able to find and once again talk to all three of these Marine tankers! What really shakes me to the core is the stories these three Marines have to tell! I truly felt very naïve and inexperienced compared to these three! Even though I spent my 13 months in the Nam!

I will not miss another reunion! And I give many thanks to all of the volunteers who have put this great organization together!

Lee Tannehill
Walnut Creek, CA
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VTA Challenge Coins Did Their Job

I haven't heard from you in a while, hope everything is okay. I'm told the email about Purple Heart people getting gifts is bogus. (Editor: It's not!) I told a buddy about it and he told me his Marine son who did two tours in Afghanistan and who also received a Heart said he applied and it didn't work, so it appears that the site >>

is BS. If you have any info to the contrary, let me know; maybe he applied incorrectly. (We got a lot of replies from VTA members who have a PH that they got a nice gift box filled with goodies.) My buddy's other son did one tour and also got a Heart; so, if there is anything I can do for them I try to do it. Both are really good kids. By the way, both of them carried USMCVTA challenge coins during their tours for luck!

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An Hoa River Crossing



I just received the most outstanding issue of the Sponson Box, and as I was reading the article about "An Hoa" tanks on Page 33, I seemed to recall sending you, Joe Tyson or someone, this picture of that crossing. Note the arty prep fire going off in front of our tanks.

Bob Haller
Newtown, PA
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And Bill "Lurch" Lockridge replies: Yes, it certainly looks like our crossing point back in 1966, smoke rounds and all. But Capt. Ev Tunget and I got shot at on the way back when Hill 55's 105's stopped the smoke rounds. We made like turtles when VC rounds were zinging all around us. When we made the crossing the next day, Hill 55 blew the shit out of the south bank as we made our way across. The VC ran away, thank God.

Bill Lochridge
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And Ev Tungent replies: Yes, those are pictures of our crossing the Song Thu Bon en route to hooking up with 1/3 for the start of Operation Macon back in August of 1966. My memory is not one of "total recall", but I'll put in my

two cents re: Bill Lochridge's comments. He and I did walk the river to check out whether we could successfully ford our tanks w/o attaching fording gear.

Prior to our recon, I had been asked by Col D.J. Barrett, the new C.O. of 9th Marines on Hill 55, if I could get my tanks across the Thu Bon River to support his 3rd Bn. operating out of the An Hoa Fire Base. When we found we could successfully ford the river, I reported back to Col. Barrett and the wheels were put in motion for us to take part in Operation Macon.

Rather than crossing the next day for Operation Macon, it was more like a couple of weeks later, as I recall. Between the time of our recon and the actual crossing, a well concealed machine gun bunker had been set up about 50 meters west of our landing point on the south bank of the river. We were receiving a steady barrage of fire on the whole column as we crossed. I was the first tank across followed by one of my flames. While the rest of the column veered east toward our rendezvous with 1/3, I headed up the beach and with one shot from the flame tank and a canister round from my tank, the bunker was eliminated.

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From Sgt Grit



Found on the Internet: The car is hand-painted in a green tank motif pattern!

Congratulations!

Received my Sponson Box in the mail today and you deserve all kinds of praise for a well published magazine. "Rightly So" (my darling bride) read it and sends her love for publishing my story. I send my thanks for your editing of the story and adding the things I didn't. Incidentally, where did you get that letter from the Skipper? If possible, could I get a copy for my files?

I keep hoping someone will remember "Magnet Ass" Larson

of 1st Platoon and get me his contact info. I really liked that young lieutenant.

I have ordered the book, "Forgotten Tracks," and the check is in the mail. I hope you don't run out of copies. I also will buy one of the following editions as they are published. I cannot describe how happy I am that I joined our little "band of brothers." I haven't had so much fun with my memories in a long, long time. Little did I know that I could come to love tankers like I do when all I've ever known before were grunts. It could be because you were my very first company as a First Sergeant, even though I wasn't even a tanker when I joined you-all? I'll never forget the conversation I had with 3rd Div Personnel S-1 when I reported in:

"You're a gunnery sergeant with an MOS of 9999, Sergeant Langford?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"What the Hell am I going to do with you? I've never seen this before."

"Well, sir," said I, "you're going to assign me as first sergeant to a company, preferably a grunt company, because that 9999 means that I have been selected for promotion to first sergeant and that's what I'll be doing for the next few years of my Marine Corps career."

"I need to talk to the Sergeant Major about this. Hold on a minute."

Pause...

"Well, Sergeant Langford, he says you are correct, but I don't have an available grunt company. How would you like to go to a tank company?"

"Sir, I would like that just fine, although I know jack shit about tanks."

"Charlie Company, Third Tanks, is at Dong Ha and that's where you're going."

"Thank you, sir."

And off I went to find that my company commander, company gunny and company maintenance chief were all dead, killed by a command detonated mine coming down the beach from the "Plantation." What an introduction to my first company as the First Sergeant.

Did I tell you that RB English and I worked together as Nuclear Security Officers at San Onofre Nuclear Generating Station? We didn't know each other before, but were both in 'Nam at the same time. Bob Fierros and I were in 3rd Tanks together, too. Now, Johnny Boy, I arrived in July of 1968 and went to Cam Lo Bridge where Charlie Company had its headquarters. Where were you in July, August, and September of 1968?

Jim Langford
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An Entire Marine Division Goes for a Run



(Official U.S. Marine Corps photo by Cpl. Joshua W. Grant/Released) Brigadier Gen. James W. Lukeman, the commanding general of 2nd Marine Division, and Sgt. Maj. Bryan K. Zickefoose, the Sergeant Major of 2nd Marine Division, lead the entire division in a run to build unit camaraderie aboard Marine Corps Base Camp LeJeune, N.C., May 22, 2014. More than 10,000 Marines comprised one large formation stretching for more than a mile.

Story from The Marine Corps Times

As a follow up to one of the Top Langford articles:

I just got done reading the September 2014 Sponson Box. There is an article in it by "Crazy Jim" Langford. He was a gunny when I was in Charlie Company (3rd Tanks). He had the 1st Sgt position and I was the company clerk when he took us out to see what the explosion was. I believe that it was a water buffalo and not a cow. Yes, Gunny Langford was a crazy MoFo. I went out on plenty of patrols and ambushes with him. He had a big mustache and bald head. It brings back memories when I read of places like Mai Xa Tai or Mai Loc; both were on the Cua Viet River. Gunny Langford got promoted >>

to 1st Sgt after I left Nam in December '68. I remember that everyone thought that he was crazy but we all trusted him and respected him. He also has a great sense of humor.

Tom Hayes
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Thank You!

Thanks for publishing my story about Camp Pendleton. I have since found out that the high rise building that I mentioned is the new Naval Hospital Camp Pendleton. From the freeway it looks like a "First Class" hospital--a beautiful looking building.

John Hunter
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I received the current issue of the Sponson Box and I read with pride the fine job that you did on my interview. Looking forward to seeing you next year in Washington, DC. Keep up the good work; our stories should never be forgotten.

Mike Fischer
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This past issue of the Sponson Box is an excellent magazine, as usual! However, I always get mine two or three days late, as my wife Gloria generally picks up the mail, reads it cover to cover and then grills me - maybe to make sure things match up.

Claude "Chris" Regis Vargo
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Thank you. The article (on Manuel Garcia) was excellent. I sent a copy to Manuel's boyhood friend in LA.

Bill "JJ" Carroll
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I would like to compliment you for the swiftness in handling my problem with the US Post Office. You may recall our conversation about the PO not forwarding the Sponson Box magazine while I was out of town. This happened to me with the #3 - 2014 issue and I was very disappointed not

receive my favorite 'zine. I contacted you on October 28th and a replacement copy was delivered to me on November 1st.... Talk about service! Being the president of our organization should not be a thankless job...So, THANK YOU SIR!!!

Jerry White
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FORGOTTEN TRACKS

I got my copy of Forgotten Tracks a couple of days ago. All I can say is great job. I love reading accounts of events that I took part in from someone else's view point. The talents of some of the people that belong to our organization amaze me and the talents of you guys that pull it all together also amaze me. Thank you and everyone who worked on the book.

Ric Langley
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I am now the proud owner of Forgotten Tracks, Volume 1. It is a well-written series of vignettes by Marines who were actually there, and the way they described their experiences brings the reader right into their laps. For the uninitiated who wish to learn about war and war's actual emotions, there is none better. I have read many a story about war, but, honestly, there is none that I have read which tells the truth as well as FORGOTTEN TRACKS. We can be proud that this event happened on our watch. No one knows what the future holds, but you will know that the Vietnam Tankers Association did it well. Well done, Marine! Please make sure I am informed when successive volumes come out.

James L. Langford, First Sergeant (Retired)
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Wow! What an outstanding book! Forgotten Tracks is one of the best put together books on any subject that I have ever read! If this wonderful book affects the rest of the membership like it has me, you will be getting lots of guys writing their own stories of their time in-country! I can't wait for Volume Two!

Andy Anderson
Tucson, AZ
Phone: (520) 275-9761

Just got my copy of Forgotten Tracks and wanted to congratulate you and the guys on a great job. I am not completely unfamiliar with publishing. I know the work it takes to put something like that together and how much more it takes to make it look that professional. Thank you very much.

Ben Cole
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Ed Note: Ben is the published author of several books.

I'm about three quarters through reading the book Forgotten Tracks. What a wonderful book of experiences regarding tankers in Vietnam. I found by reading other's stories that a lot of similarities are the same things that I experienced when I was in-country. I read that you were real fond of the grease gun. Con Thien sounded like a busy place / area to be around.

Update: Just finished reading Forgotten Tracks. What an enjoyable read. I hope another volume comes out soon.

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Getting "Tanked" in Ireland

I'll be sending you a story titled "Ten Excerpts from my 1969 Vietnam Daily Tankers Diary." The new tankers movie "Fury" has me stoked to write about OUR Vietnam history to help our current PC culture understand that our war was ugly, too. The American military weren't total saints, and that war is in fact a little grimy and messy!

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DEDICATED TO THE MEMORY OF ONE OF OUR FINEST MARINES - MAJOR (Colonel retired) BRUCE M. MACLAREN

I recently found out that one of my Marine Corps heroes passed away. I would like to commemorate his life with the following story which occurred in August of 1968 at Cam Lo Hill, RVN.

I arrived in country in mid-august of 1967 and was assigned to H&S Company, 3rd tanks at Gia Le. My MOS was 2141, tank mechanic. Unfortunately for me though,

the next day, while checking in at H&S Company HQ, the company commander noted in my personnel jacket that I could type, and so my career as a mechanic was put on hold and I became (under protest) the company clerk. They say no good deed goes unpunished, and the next day the battalion adjutant commandeered me from H&S Company to battalion as legal chief. I remained assigned there until I was again Shanghai'd to task force Robby at Cam Lo Hill to work in the command bunker with the S-3. It was there I was fortunate to meet the subject of this article, the task force executive officer Major Bruce MacLaren, and later commanding officer of the same unit. There I performed a variety of duties, but sadly did not get to know any of the tankers assigned to the task force. But enough about me.

Working in the command bunker had its good points as well. I got to observe the officer corps of the two task forces come to and make the decisions that they were allowed. In my opinion, Major MacLaren was a definite Marines' Marine.

I remember one event that occurred within a week or two of both his and my own rotation date. We had two tanks out on observation posts north of Cam Lo Hill. As dusk arrived, both tanks were called to return. One would not start, and the radio started crackling in the command bunker. Major MacLaren overheard the radio and jumped up. "Corporal Lenox" he hollered, "are you not a mechanic?" "Yes sir" I replied. "Grab your rifle and helmet and let's go". We jumped into his jeep and off we went into the darkening skies where the broken down tank waited.

When we arrived at the tank's location, we found the crew at work attempting to disconnect the transmission from the drive wheels so the other tank could tow it back to the Cam Lo perimeter. Well, to keep a short story short, we discovered why the tank wouldn't start, got it started, reconnected the transmission to the drive wheels, and everybody got back inside the perimeter safe and sound before it got too dark.

Can you imagine going outside the perimeter with less than a week to go before rotating home? Before that day, I couldn't, but with the leadership and confidence exhibited by Major MacLaren, I did not feel in more danger than normal. I never got to see Major MacLaren after that task force assignment, but his leadership and attitude will live with me forever.

Simper Fi

David Lenox
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Meet your Board of Directors

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

Gregory “Greg” Martin

Greg serves as the VTA Website Administrator, the VTA National Recruiter and in addition he was recently voted to become a director on the Board of Directors.

He began his career with the USMC when he left home in Washington State for boot camp on February 26, 1966 as a member of Platoon 358 MCRD San Diego, CA. After enduring 2nd ITR at Camp Pendleton, he attended Track Vehicle Crewman School at Camp Del Mar. And then he served as a tank crewman in Vietnam from December 13, 1966 to December 31, 1967.

Greg says: “In Vietnam I was a replacement crewman. I was sent from tank crew to tank crew all over 3rd Tank Battalion. I was in H&S Company in Da Nang then sent to Camp Carroll with (I think) 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co. and we moved to the “C-2” firebase. I was then sent to Con Thien with 2nd Platoon, Bravo Company and then 1st Platoon, Bravo Company. My last assignment was with H&S Company at Phu Bai. After three RPG hits and hitting several mines as a driver and a gunner...and as a passenger while riding on top of 90mm ammo crates in a Six By truck, I headed home on New Year’s Eve December 31, 1967.”

Decorations, Medals, Badges, Citations and Campaign Ribbons Awarded: Purple Heart with gold

star, Combat Action Ribbon – Presidential Unit Citation – National Defense – Vietnam Service w/3* – VN Gallantry Cross (Unit w/palm) – Republic of Vietnam Meritorious Unit Citation – Republic of Vietnam Campaign, Rifle Sharp Shooter and Pistol Expert

Greg was released from Active Duty on February 26, 1970. After his military service he had jobs as a mechanic, machinist, bartender and small business owner. In 1995 he went back to college and studied computers and telecommunications. He then worked in telecommunications until 2005. After that he was self employed again in home remodeling until he fully retired in 2012.

Greg adds: “The best part of going back to college was in my third year. It was the year after my son graduated from High school and he was going to the same college. We both needed a college credit in English so we agreed to take the class together. So the first day my son and I are sitting at the same two person desk. The teacher calls on us for introductions. He said Nick Martin and I said Greg Martin. The teacher asked, are you two brothers? I said no, I’m his Dad and the class cracked up. Nick beat me with a 3.6 GPA and I had a 3.4.



1967 with Bravo, Co. 3rd Tanks



Today

“I was married twice and divorced twice. I have a wonderful son (Nick) his wife (Jennifer) and grandson (Owen) a step daughter (Shannon) and step granddaughter (Skye). My son’s wife works as a Project Budget Supervisor for Boeing. My son is a Project Manager also at Boeing. Funny enough, my son reports to his wife when a project needs more money. (I think it works the same at home for Nick.) My step daughter also works for Boeing in a supervisory position. So all the kids are doing really well.”

Greg first volunteered his services as our much-needed webmaster during the VTA reunion in San Antonio. He has successfully served in that capacity for over four years. During that time he also volunteered to fill in with the duties of the VTA National Recruiter. Greg adds: “After all my work. I was asked to join the Board of Directors. I could not be prouder to be a part of the Vietnam Tankers Association and I really enjoy doing whatever I can do to help.” ■



Can you guess what the US Marine vehicle 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.

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Last Issue Winner

At 2:45 PM on Saturday, September 13, 2014, Rick Armstrong called me and identified the M-551 Sheridan tank. Just for the record, Ed Tierney, called me at 6:54 PM that same day and correctly identified the tank. Later on at least ten more members also called and correctly identified the tank. Thank you all for the great response!!!



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

Silvestre A. Soto



After fighting the good fight, and surrounded by family, Silvestre Alberto Soto, "El Supremo", 72, passed away on Thursday, October 2, 2014 in San Antonio.

He was born December 31, 1941 in Victoria, Texas. He was preceded in death by his parents Felipe G. and Mary Ann Pena Soto, and his wife Barbara Elizondo Soto.

He attended Nazareth Academy and was a graduate of St. Joseph High School. He began his military career serving in the United States Army for three years as a paratrooper. He then enlisted in the United States Marine Corp and retired as a Gunnery Sergeant after twenty-one years. While serving in the Marine Corp as a tank commander and during his three combat tours in Vietnam, he was awarded the Silver Star medal, the Bronze Star w "V" and three Purple Hearts. He was a true American hero.

He went on to work for the United States Postal Service where he retired in San Francisco, California. Upon his retirement from the Postal Service, he and his wife moved to San Antonio, Texas to be near family.

This notice is from Dan Wokaty who served as an honorary pall bearer.

In Addition: Andy Anderson also commented on the news of Soto's death: This is a very sad thing, but seeing him go from "Cloudy, looks like rain" to all "Sunshine and blue sky" at the San Antonio reunion; is one of the Great Moments in Life for me. May God love and keep him. I think that "Semper Fi," has no greater meaning.

Marvin Alvin Russell

August 19, 1935 – July 8, 2011

Marvin Alvin Russell, age 75, Lincoln, Nebraska,

died Friday, July 8, 2011 at his home.

From the desk of the Commandant of the USMC: "Attention, Gunny Russell, You are hereby ordered to report to the Marine Brigade stationed at Tun Tavern to meet your fellow Marines and family. You have been through hell with two tours in Vietnam and this last indignity to your body. It is time to rest." "Sir. Semper Fi" With a smart salute, a click of the heels, the orders were carried out.

Marvin Russell and his twin brother were the sixth and seventh children born to Lloyd and Vadah (Ellis) Russell in Geneva. In 1955, he joined the Marine Corps and in 1960 he married Marilyn Johnson of York. During the next fifteen years the family moved numerous times. Sherrill and Christopher were born at Camp Pendleton, CA. Andrew was born in Lincoln and David in Philadelphia, PA. Marvin retired from the USMC in 1975 to Lincoln. He worked for Brewer Remodeling, United Way, and Eastridge Church.

This obit is from Laura Riensche, the wife of VTA member Harold Riensche.

Michael "Mike" J. Brandi



Michael "Mike" J. Brandi, Sr. of Saginaw, Michigan, passed away peacefully surrounded by his family on Friday, October 10, 2014 at his home. He was 65 years old.

He was born on October 8, 1949 in Saginaw, Michigan to the late Robert and Betty (Kingry) Brandi. Mike graduated from Carrollton High School with the Class of 1967. He then proudly served his country in the United States Marine Corps during the Vietnam War from 1967 until 1970. He was a tank commander, earning the rank of sergeant and a Purple Heart medal. After his honorable discharge, he met his future wife, Patricia Ann Cardinal and daughter, Monica Lynn. They were married on August 20, 1971 and he adopted Monica that same year. They survive him. He was employed by LaCross Glass for 10 years and then went on to be a postal worker

until he retired in 2011. In Mike's free time, he was an avid reader, loved to be out on the bay on his boat, and working in his yard.

Posted on Facebook

In addition: Steve Arnone commented: Mike and I were on "OP Hawk" together (Hill 47). Mike helped show me the ropes. After I detected these gooks with a 140 mm rocket, Mike let me ride security on the "Sweet Cream Lady" and later "ELI" often for about 6 months. I got to drive all over SW I Corps and we saw all the sites. I got transferred to An Hoa and heard about two weeks later Mike got wounded by a B-40 on Go Noi Island. We had a reconnection in 1969 and his passing makes me sad.

Lonnie T. Hedges

On November 13, 2014, Jim Knee called to say that his loader, Lonnie Hedges, of Universal City, Texas, had fought the good fight but had passed away at the VA hospital in San Antonio on or about November 1. Lonnie was cremated and his family took his ashes to the highest ground of the Texas Hill Country and scattered them. Lonnie asked that there be no obituary written for him and that he would be proud to guard the Streets of Heaven.

William "Jake" H. Jacobs



February 18, 1944 – November 30, 2014

William "Jake" Jacobs, age 70 of Sevierville, TN passed away Sunday, November 30, 2014. He was born on February 18, 1944 in Niagara Falls, NY. Upon completing High School in Niagara Falls, Jake spent 13 years in the

United States Marine Corps which included two tours in Vietnam. He received a medical discharge after receiving two Purple Hearts and a Navy Cross. Jake loved traveling across the United States, visiting military bases and monuments, fishing and spoiling his grandchildren

Notification from Fred Kellogg

The Saluting Marine



Cpl. Casey Owens, 23, of Houston, TX, was critically wounded Sept. 20, 2004, in Iraq while on his second tour of duty. Owens has sustained numerous injuries including over 200 shrapnel wounds, broken jaw, broken

collar bone, amputated right leg above the knee and amputation of the left leg below the knee. In October of 2014, he lost his personal battle with PTSD and left our world to guard the gates of Heaven. When our men and women return from war physically wounded, they heal but mentally they are rarely the same. Rest in peace young Marine.

Posted on Facebook

An Iwo Jima Tanker

Joseph J."Coach" Marcino, Jr., 91, of Whitehall, died Monday, October 20, 2014, at Glens Falls Hospital surrounded by his loving family by his side following a brief illness.

He was born on May 25, 1923. Joe was a graduate of Whitehall High School. He enlisted in the United States Marines Corps serving in WW II, achieving the rank of Sergeant. While serving with Company A, Fifth Tank Battalion, Fifth Marine Division on Volcano Islands of Iwo Jima on March 18, 1945, his tank became disabled forward of the enemy lines. Under heavy enemy fire, he and his crew dismantled the tank and made repairs enabling them to continue forward on their mission. For his devotion and courage, he was awarded the Bronze Star.

From the Sgt Grit Newsletter ■

Looking For

DID YOU WORK WITH THE KOREAN MARINES?

Gunner Bob Embesi is writing an article for the Sponson Box that will detail his experiences while working with the ROK Marine Corps. If you were ever deployed with them, he would very much like you to contact him. Bob indicates that his predecessor, Gunny Petrowski, also had a tank platoon assigned to the ROKs so perhaps you worked with the Gunny in a like capacity.

Bob's home phone is: 406-821-3075.

KENNETH RAY BRADLEY



To Ron Davidson: My name is Jan Trantham. My first husband, Cpl. Kenneth Ray Bradley, was a member of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co., 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Div. He served in Viet Nam from April 17, 1967 until his death during the Tet Offensive on February 6, 1968. I found the web site where you held a reunion and I have always wanted to communicate with someone who served with him. If you knew him or you know of someone else who knew him, would you reply to me? Even though it has been 46 years, I still feel the need to hear stories from the men who were with him. Hoping to hear from you or other men who served with Ray (Ken).

Jan Trantham
2 Pershing Road
Asheville, NC 28805
Home Phone: (828) 299-0221
Cell Phone: (828) 776-1122
Email: jantran@charter.net

To John Wear: I got the above email from this lady. I served with Ken in Nam. Ken was killed in 1968 (a few months after I rotated back to the World in December '67) along with Gunnery Sgt. Flanagan, Sgt. Ben Green and lot's of others

who were killed & wounded. Lt Traiser was the Platoon leader then. I was home and discharged when I got a letter from Dennis Tannahill who said that they all got shot up real bad. I wonder if it would be worth a spot in the Sponson Box? Maybe there is someone out there we haven't found yet that knew Ken. He was a really great guy, kind of quiet, and a great tanker. Just a thought.

VTA Member Ron Davidson

Jan's Reply: Wow! I always knew the Marine Corps took care of its own, but the immediate response to my request for contact has astounded me. I have wondered for years (46, actually) if anyone was with Ray (Ken) when he died: Did he die quickly? Did anyone else in that tank survive? I know my questions are probably common to people who have lost a loved one in combat and I do not really understand why these questions are important or why they keep coming back to me. And I am sure it is bittersweet; knowing more and re-living the past are tough things to reconcile. In response to how I found Ron Davidson, I simply Googled "Reunion for the 1st Tank Bn, 1st Marine Div, Bravo Co., 3rd Platoon" and the information appeared that they had met in Missouri. At the bottom of the article was the e-mail address of bravo34@charter.net, and that turned out to be Ron. He responded within 24 hours and now you and I are communicating. Thank you for your response, your caring and for your continued work with the tankers.

HENRY ROSE

Henry and I served together at 3rd Tanks on Alpha-11 at Con Thien and at Khe Sanh. If you know of him or how to contact him, please contact me.

Harold Fournier
El Sobrante, CA
Phone: (510) 243-1262
Email: hjfournier@att.net

ROBERT M. DELLVILLE

My uncle's name is Robert M. Dellville. He was born in Watertown, MA and later served in Vietnam at the time when I was born. In honor of his name, my mother and dad named me after him. I have always been proud of my name and of what my uncle sacrificed for our country. My uncle served in Bravo Company, 5th Tanks, and is a Purple Heart recipient. My uncle Robert is very sick at this time. He is

(Continued on page 27)

What Members Are Doing

A VTA Member and Published Author, Clyde Hoch, Addresses Veteran Suicide

Accurate statistics about suicide in the military are hard to pin down, but are alarming. One issue of Stars and Stripes newspaper reported one active duty suicide every 18 hours for active duty personnel and NBC News reports that in 2012 the military suicide rate was higher than the Killed In Action casualties. Suicides among veterans no longer on active duty are even harder to define, but there are estimates that 150,000 Vietnam War veterans that have committed suicide since that war ended. By far the most common causes are TBI (Traumatic Brain Injury) and PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder).

The problem may appear to be overwhelming, but Marine Corps Vietnam Veteran and local author Clyde Hoch has never been one to ignore problems. He has just published a 32-page booklet "GOD HELP ME! Cause No One Else Will." It is based on his own experience with PTSD following a year in Vietnam as a tank commander with 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division. He feels very strongly that a veteran is often more able to help another veteran than a professional non-veteran counselor. The booklet is intended to help the veteran as well as wives, parents, and friends understand the veteran's mind set.

The Lehigh County District Attorney's office has ordered 70 copies of the booklet for their people involved in their Veterans Mentoring Program. S/Sgt. Hoch made a presentation September 27, 2014, at Lehigh County Heritage Museum in Allentown, PA.

All profits from the sale of the booklet will be used to start a website to match a veteran mentor with a veteran mentee. S/Sgt Hoch has authorized six other books about both his own experiences in combat as well as the combat experiences of other veterans. All the books are available on Amazon.com under his name. The profits from all of his books go to other veteran causes. Among his many projects related to veterans is the temporary housing for veterans on

the Square. A screen writer working on a script about tanks in Vietnam has approached Clyde about consulting with him.

Clyde is a lifelong resident of Pennsburg. He was born in the oldest residence in Pennsburg and continues to live there over sixty years later. S/Sgt Hoch is available to speak to schools and various organizations.

The 239th Birthday



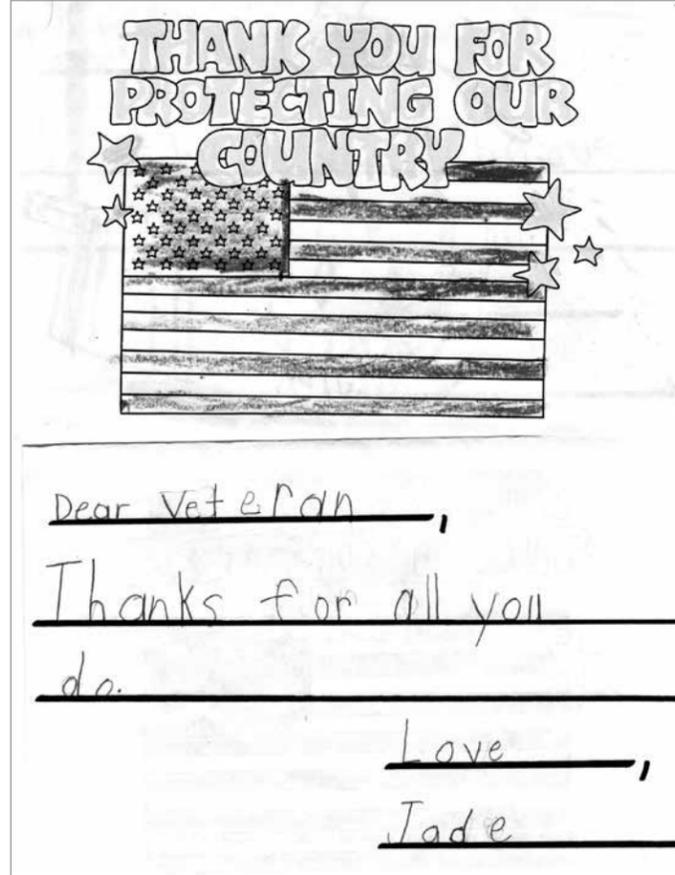
(On the right) MSgt Bruce Van Apeldoorn, USMC (ret) says: "Was put to work escorting the cake at today's Birthday Celebration at the Marine Corps League. L/Cpl. "Oz" and I were the only ones in blues. Once the cake was delivered, he stayed (youngest Marine) but I got to go back to my table. The oldest Marine, a WM born in 1917, was escorted up to take the position as the oldest Marine.

A Special Veterans Day Program

I was asked by a neighbor to come to the local elementary school and take part in their Veterans' Day program. She is the Vice Principal there. I have no relations in that school, but I said I would. The wife and I went and actually enjoyed the program. There were other vets from different services there also. They had chairs arranged for us on the gym floor so

>>

everyone could see us. They did a really great job, for a bunch of little folks. Best of all, they really understood what it was all about. I was surprised to hear them recite the pledge of allegiance and sing God Bless America and other songs that I thought were banned from school systems. They were so sincere and it meant so much to them, that I could feel a tear



well up in my eye. I maintained though. Then hundreds of them passed by and handed the veterans a handmade card of thanks to a vet of their choice, or pretty much at random. The outsides of the cards were all the same, but on the inside of the card, each child printed a message of their own feelings. It was pretty cool, guys. It meant so much more hearing it from them, than all the people who “thank us for our service”, mostly because it is the “in” thing to do now.

I applaud the teachers at the school for passing on our country’s history, and teaching the children that it is not just another holiday or chance to get out of class for a while. It is a day to show our thanks to all who have sacrificed in any way, to make our country the greatest on earth, and protect the freedom, morals and values that we hold so dear. Below is one of the many cards just to show you the sentiment involved from these kids. The grades at the school are from

K to 5. I am listed in the program as “Honored Guest’s” and I truly was.

Semper Fi,
 Ronald Davidson
 Lexington, TN
 Phone: (731) 249-5450
 Email: bravo34@charter.net

A High Flying 86 Year Old!



Roger Chaput writes: My tanker buddy, J.P. Haynie was Joe Sleger’s driver on A-35 in KOREA 1950-51. He is now 86 years old. Most folks like to keep their feet on the ground but it appears as if JP’s feet are lighter than air? My advice to JP: “Give your wife power of attorney before it’s too late!”

Honoring our Fallen

This may be something you can use for the “What members are doing” section of the Sponson Box. The past few years, I have been on committees coming up with ideas for veteran memorials that get me very involved with different designs, materials, costs and where to get the funds necessary to efficiently and economically complete a project that honors our veterans.



The first picture is a memorial in Mt. Calvary, WI.

There are 678 veteran’s names on 4x8 inch pavers placed on three upright pillars with granite tops. This design worked great for Wisconsin winters since the snow doesn’t cover the pavers so that they can be viewed year around.



The second picture is a memorial we just completed in Chilton, WI. This memorial is much larger since it has a statue for each branch of service and one for women of the armed forces. It also has a bronze eagle in the center. The veteran’s names are sand blasted in large stones that are placed along a path coming from the entrance and going towards the center of the memorial.

The last picture leads to the point of this story. Charles Thatcher had planned on attending the VTA reunion in San Antonio, Texas, but he passed away before it took place. Barnett Person, Mike Fischer and I were looking forward to seeing Thatcher again but it wasn’t to be. The three of us were sitting at our favorite place at the reunion Slopchute having a cold one when I mentioned the memorial I was involved with in Chilton. I suggested we chip in together and buy a plaque for Thatcher. They thought it was a great idea and with one click of our drinks it was a done deal. When I returned home, I contacted Thatcher’s family to make sure our idea was OK with them. Not only did they like the idea but they were grateful that Thatcher’s fellow tankers would buy him a plaque. This is the only memorial in the entire State of Wisconsin that has the medals and awards of the recipient etched in with the name. At the present time there are four hundred plus plaques on the memoria, but Charles Thatcher is the only one with a Navy Cross.

If any of the VTA members are involved with a veterans memorial near them, please put a fellow tanker on it.



Whenever you walk by, it will put a smile on your face and a sense of pride in your heart.

Don Gehl
 Chilton, WI
 Phone: (920) 849-4596

“Top Almighty” is Really a Softie

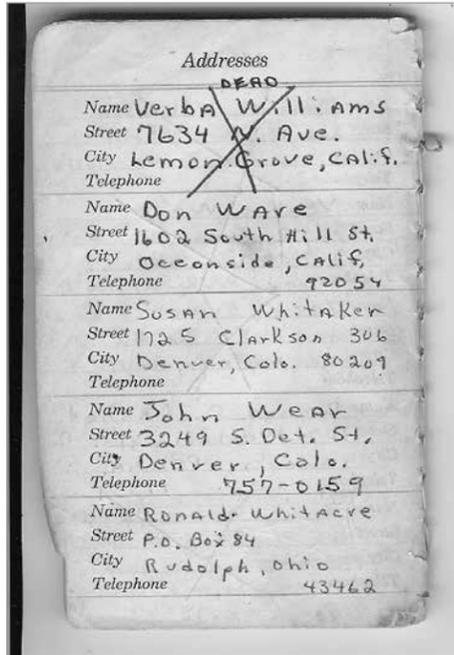


1st Sgt Jim Langford, USMC (Ret.) writes: “Since childhood I’ve been called a son-of-a-bitch; this picture shows that I really am one and this photo of two of my grandchildren prove it.”

A Flash from the Past

John Wear writes: Bobby Joe Blyth sent this image to me awhile ago. It is an image of his hand written >>

address book that he carried in Vietnam. The next to the last entry is my parent's home address when I was on Active



Duty in the USMC. I have zero recollection of giving it to Bobby Joe back in the day!!!

Mike's Quilt of Honor



My father is Mike Andereg. He asked that I e-mail you as he does not use e-mail. I am sending the above picture of him and his two grandsons holding the "Quilt of Valor" that was presented to him on Purple Heart Day here in Michigan. We are very proud of him! I am also including the link to the article that was included in the local news, although he was awarded two Purple Hearts which the article doesn't state.

<http://www.lenconnect.com/article/20140808/NEWS/140809231/0/SEARCH>

Please let me know if you need anything further. Thank you for your service as well.

Tracie Randolph
Proud daughter of Mike Andereg

A Gathering at the Marines Memorial Club

I was at the Marines Memorial Club in San Francisco on Thursday to help celebrate the Korean War anniversary



on 18 September 2014. That's me on the left. This guy sits down across from me and I remember that I had just seen his picture in the Sponson Box, so I introduced myself and we talked about the VTA. I guess he is going back to DC soon with you to plan and set up for next year's reunion! You guys should have a blast! His name is Mike Belmessieri.

Lee Tannehill
Walnut Creek, CA
Phone: (925) 930-9389
Email: lee_tannehill@hotmail.com

Joe Gets Gussied Up



Joe Tyson and MOH recipient, Colonel "Barney" Barnum attended the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundations Gala in October of this year at the Chrystal Tea Room in the Wanamaker's building in Center City Philadelphia. This gala is the foundation's biggest fundraiser for the year. Joe notes that Col. Barnum received the MOH on "Operation Harvest Moon" in December 1965. Joe added that he was also on that same operation as a member of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks.

A San Francisco Bay Area Mini Reunion



(L to R) Bert and Sheila Trevail, Tom "Sparrow" Moad, Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri, Roger "Blues" Unland enjoying a meal and each other's company at Jack's Restaurant in San Bruno on September 29th of this year.

YESTERDAY AND TODAY



Clyde Hoch and Gary Mefford – San Antonio in 2013



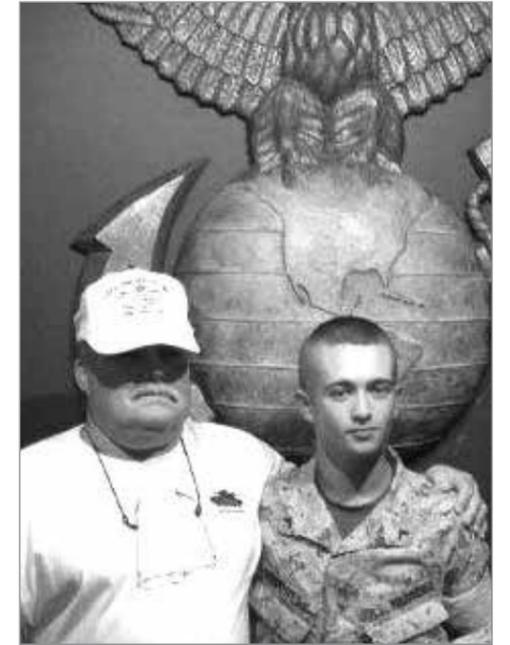
Gary and Clyde

South of Marble Mountain at C Co HQ, 1st Tanks in 1968

Bobby Joe Expands His Marine Family

October 2014, MCRD Paris Island; Bobby Joe Blyth stands with his grandson, Dustin, who is a freshly – minted Marine. Dustin will be a member of the Marine Reserves until he finishes college; at that time he will be promoted to lieutenant.

Dustin is planning to make a career of the Marine Corps as a pilot. After boot camp, Dustin took his Marine Combat Training at Camp Geiger, and after his November graduation he will move on to his Military Occupational Specialty School



that ends in Feb 2015. Dustin already has his private pilot's license. During his college education, Dustin will be with his grandfather every summer for more flight training. Dustin plans to be in DC with his grandfather for our 2015 Reunion Farewell Banquet.

Boys With Their Toys



During the month of October, Joe Tyson (center) got a visit paid to him from Lee Tannahill (left). This photo was taken at Joe's neighbor's firing range. Joe said that they shot fully automatic weapons and blew up a bunch of exploding targets. Joe is holding a fully automatic Uzi submachine gun while Lee has an M-16 with a selector set for full "rock n roll."

How The War in Vietnam Affected me?

BY MICKEY DEE

The USA has had great success in war. Vietnam is supposedly the blemish on the perfect record. Vietnam has been known as the war that America lost. Our soldiers (and Marines) were considered the “losers.” More North Vietnamese were killed in one day than the USA lost the entire war. We, our team, the USA, killed over 3 million Vietnamese. The Vietnamese killed (just over) 50,000 of our boys. I say boys because that’s what most were. Most were not eligible to vote. We certainly kept Vietnam a third world country. We may have taken their most valuable resources.

Who is the rightful loser? We all are. I was unwittingly involved in the destruction of a country and the deaths of millions of people. What our country did was no different than other acts of genocide that have been perpetrated around the world, such as with the American Indian. Until about 1500 AD, this entire hemisphere was isolated from Europe and Asia. For thousands of years The North-Americans and South Americans were here. But the “new white European Americans” (that have only been here for a few hundred years) feel that their lives and livelihoods are threatened by the original inhabitants. Our Mexican friends have been in this hemisphere tens of thousands of years before white people decided they were aliens.

Vietnam was a thankless war. It was more than 20 years after coming home from Vietnam that I was thanked for being there. In all there have been only 5 people to sincerely and spontaneously thank me for what I did. Uncontrollably I cried all 5 times. Upon returning home I was not greeted as a hero. When I called girls for dates I was often told by parents to not call again. I began to think that there was something wrong with me. I was not as morally fit as others. I’m not sure of when it started but I was actually mentally and spiritually ill. People were going to the movies, the beach, or whatever, and the war was to be forgotten.

For as long as I can remember I’ve kept busy to keep my mind busy. It continuously returns to some un-pleasantry about Nam or life since. I usually work or play until I’m exhausted. Every morning or when I have any spare time, at all, I do cross-word puzzles. ■

Above & Beyond

Recognizing those members that have made financial contributions above and beyond their normal membership dues to help our organization remain financially strong and to allow us to continue providing our history.

If we inadvertently missed a name, please forgive us and be sure to let us know of our mistake.

- | | | | |
|----------------------|----------------------|----------------------|-----------------------|
| Anderson Andrew | Ferguson Sid | Knight Ron | Russell Dickie |
| Anderson Mark | Fierros James | Knox Clyde | Santos Ladis |
| Andregg Michael | Fischer James | Kopf Francis | Sausoman James |
| Arena John | Fitzpatrick Lloyd | Kropke Roger | Schossow Harold |
| Arnone Stephen | Fornwalt Robert | Kues Edwin | Scrivner, Jr Douglas |
| Balleweg Joseph | Fournier Harold | Landaker Joseph | Search George |
| Beirne IV Richard | Frankenberger Warren | Langford James | Serrano Ralph |
| Bell Donald | Fuentes Mario | Langley Richard | Sezar Jerry |
| Belmessieri Michael | Fuentes Ramon | Langlitz Harlan | Shaw Michael |
| Binion Sammy | Galusha Daniel | Lewis Richard | Skeels Robert |
| Bisbee William Eddie | Gehrman David | Lochridge Willard | Skinner Steve Frank |
| Blanchette Eddie | Gordon Conrad | Maddox Jerry | Slovik Frank |
| Bohlen William | Griffith Jeffrey | Manson James | Stayton James |
| Bonderrud Robert | Gulbranson Robert | Martin Otis | Steigelman Herbert |
| Box Frank | Gullegde James | Martin Gregory | Stokes Robert |
| Brazeau Max | Hackett Timothy | Marvin Kim | Thompson David |
| Brusha Joseph | Hall Garry | Mastrangelo Giuseppe | Tierney Edward |
| Byrne John | Hanas Benedict | Mattingly Robert | Traynor Jr. Andrew |
| Castillo Michael | Hancock John | McCabe Michael | Turner David |
| Christy Albert | Harper John | McCleery Geary | Tyson, Jr. Joseph |
| Clavan Robert | Harrigan Joseph | McGuire John | Vaughn Michael |
| Colucci Ronald | Hayes Thomas | McMillian Donald | Vaxter Robert |
| Cotton William | Heffernan John | Mefford Gary | Venturi Sandino Jerry |
| Coulter Richard | Helfrich David | Metcalfe Kenneth | Wahl Jerry |
| Cramer Monty | Henderson Rodney | Miller Harold | Wahlsten Bruce |
| Crossman Sr. Thomas | Heniff David | Moreno Armando | Walters David |
| Cummings Charles | Hika Eugene | Musser Charles | Ward Huey |
| Curti Stephen | Hoch Clyde | Owen David | Waters Michael |
| Dahl Kenneth | Hoekstra Beverly | Owens Gary | Wear John |
| Davidson Florindo | Hollister Gordon | Parshall Larry | West Charles |
| DeRoma Florindo | Hunter John | Peksens Richard | Whaley Raymond |
| Donnelly Justin | Hutchins Glen | Peterson Gary | Whitehead Gene |
| Duck Eli | Jarnot Fidelas | Porier Johnny | Whittington Herbert |
| English Richard | Jugenheimer Richard | Raasch James | Williams Larry |
| Evans Edgar | Kelley Gregory | Ralston David | Williams Stanley |
| Everest Guy | Kellogg Fred | Riensch Harold | Wokaty Daniel |
| Ewers Douglas | Kennedy, Sr Raymond | Ritch Peter | Anonymous |
| Fanning James | Kirik, Jr. Michael | Roberts Thomas | Zitz Kenneth |
| Farrell Dan | Knee Jim | Ruby Chester | Zobie William |

V. A. News & Updates

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

Aid and Attendance

Week of July 07, 2014 - The Department of Veterans Affairs Aid and Attendance benefit helps reduce the out-of-pocket costs for veterans who need assistance with daily living. The maximum monthly payment ranges from \$1,758 for a single veteran to more than \$2,700 for a couple where both are veterans. To qualify, a veteran has to have at least one day of military service during a time of war. The wartime veteran or surviving spouse must need the assistance of another person to perform daily tasks, such as eating, dressing, bathing, etc. Being blind or in a nursing home or residing in an assisted living facility qualifies. The benefit will also help pay for caregivers in the home. The veteran cannot have more than \$80,000 in assets and must meet an income requirement, which cannot exceed about \$22,000. For more information, visit the VA website.

Special Military Social Security Rate

Under certain circumstances, military veterans who served between 1940 and 2001 can be credited for special extra earnings for Social Security purposes. These extra earnings may help you qualify for Social Security or increase the amount of your Social Security benefit. Depending on the length and time frame of military service, some veterans may find that the benefit increase may be minimal. These special extra earnings are granted for periods of active duty or active duty for training. Special extra earnings are not granted for inactive duty training. Social Security cannot add these extra earnings to your record until you file for Social Security benefits.

Here's How It Works

The information that follows applies only to active duty military service earnings from 1940 through 2001. This program adds to your overall income factor and may have little effect on your actually monthly Social Security benefit, as the increased earnings does not equate to an equal increase in monthly benefits.

Here's how the special extra earnings are credited:

Service In 1978 through 2001

For every \$300 in active duty basic pay, you are credited with an additional \$100 in earnings up to a maximum of \$1,200

a year. If you enlisted after September 7, 1980, and didn't complete at least 24 months of active duty or your full tour, you may not be able to receive the additional earnings. Check with Social Security for details.

Service In 1957 Through 1977

You are credited with \$300 in additional earnings for each calendar quarter in which you received active duty basic pay.

Note: The increased earnings does not equate to an equal increase in monthly benefits.

Service In 1940 Through 1956

If you were in the military during this period, including attendance at a service academy, you did not pay Social Security taxes. However, your Social Security record may be credited with \$160 a month in earnings for military service from September 16, 1940, through December 31, 1956, under the following circumstances:

- You were honorably discharged after 90 or more days of service, or you were released because of a disability or injury received in the line of duty; or
- You are still on active duty; or
- You are applying for survivors benefits and the veteran died while on active duty.

You cannot receive credit for these special extra earnings if you are already receiving a federal benefit based on the same years of service. There is one exception: If you were on active duty after 1956, you can still get the special earnings for 1951 through 1956, even if you're receiving a military retirement based on service during that period.

Contacting Social Security

- <http://www.ssa.gov/ww&os2.htm>
- Call the toll-free number, 1-800-772-1213.
- "TTY" 1-800-325-0778.
- Call or visit your local Social Security Office.
- If you live outside the United States, see <http://www.ssa.gov/foreign/>

CRDP/CRSC Programs ▶ SecNav's Explanation on Policy

There are two concurrent receipt programs available to Navy and Marine Corps retirees who have VA-rated disabilities. They

are the Concurrent Retirement and Disability Payments (CRDP) program and the Combat-Related Special Compensation (CRSC) program. Retirees who receive VA disability payments have their retired pay "offset" (reduced) by the amount of VA pay. These concurrent receipt programs "restore" some or all of that retired pay. The Defense Finance and Accounting Service (DFAS) calculates and pays monthly CRDP and CRSC compensation. It is highly recommended that you have a myPay account set up with DFAS to manage your retired pay. If you do not refer to the following on how to set up an account: <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/manage/mypay.html> .

In order to be eligible for these programs, disabled retirees must be eligible for retired pay AND be in receipt of VA disability compensation. Medical retirees (TDRL & PDRL) with less than 20 years service are eligible for CRSC only. Twenty year and Temporary Early Retirement Authority (TERA) retirees (15-19 years of service) and Reservists (age 60) are eligible for both CRSC and CRDP, but can receive compensation from only one program. Applicants must apply to the service CRSC Board from which they retired (<http://www.public.navy.mil/asnmra/corb/CRSCB/DD%20Forms/dd2860.pdf>).

- CRDP is automatic and is paid to 20-year and TERA retirees who have VA rated service connected disabilities of 50 percent or higher. There is no application required, nor accepted. DFAS determines eligibility and pays monthly CRDP compensation. CRDP payments are taxed.

- CRSC is for military retirees with combat-related disabilities of 10% or greater. Combat-related determinations are made by the CRSC Board for the branch of service from which the member retired. A combat-related determination is made for each VA disability claimed. The retiree must apply using the CRSC application form (DD-2860 July 2011). The "burden of proof" is on the claimant and the claim should include the member's DD-214, VA Rating Decisions, applicable Service Medical Records (SMRs), the PEB Findings Letter (for medical retirees) and pertinent service personnel records. Reconsiderations are accepted if new documentary evidence as to the cause of the disability is provided or for any new disabilities rated by the VA. Appeal authority for CRSC is the Board for Correction of Naval Records (BCNR).

CRSC compensation for medical retirees is calculated by DFAS using a complicated formula that takes into account the PEB, VA and CRSC percentages. CRSC pay can never exceed what would have been the years of service (YOS) retired pay amount, but can be much less and sometimes zero. CRSC pay is not taxed. At www.dfas.mil/militarymembers/woundedwarrior/disabledretireest.htm medical retirees can determine the approximate CRSC pay they will receive. Applicants may apply for CRSC under one of four categories: 1) Direct result of Armed Conflict (AC), 2) while engaged in Hazardous Service (HS), 3) in the performance of duty under conditions Simulating War (SW), and 4) disabilities resulting from the operation of an Instrumentality of War (IN).

In order for a CRSC claim to be approved, there must be

a direct causal relationship between the armed conflict or training exercise that simulates war and the resulting disability. The CRSC board makes combat-related determinations only on VA rated service connected disabilities. Slips, trips, and falls, lifting heavy objects, as well as physical training, are not combat-related disabilities. The fact that a veteran incurred a disability during a period of war or simulated war; or in an area of armed or simulated conflict, or while participating in combat or simulated combat operations; is not sufficient to support a combat-related determination. Only the CRSC Board for each branch of service is authorized to make combat-related determinations. Combat Zone (CZ) notations in VA and PEB documents are not combat related determinations.

A reconsideration request to the CRSC Board is required if your VA rating percentage increases due to the VA approval of a new or unclaimed disability. For further explanation of reconsideration requests go to www.public.navy.mil/asnmra/corb/CRSCB/Pages/CRSCB%20main%20page.aspx. This site should be reviewed the prior to applying or contacting the Board at <http://www.public.navy.mil/asnmra/corb/CRSCB>. The primary means of communication with the DoN CRSC Board is by email at: CRSC@navy.mil. If you want a call, send an email with your phone number. [Source: Navy Personnel Command | Shift Colors | Spring 2014 ++]

VA Primary Care ▶ PC3 Program Expanded to Shorten Wait times

Veterans waiting for a primary care appointment at a VA medical facility may now be able to get one at a private physician under a program that allows veterans to seek medical treatment outside the Veterans Affairs Department. VA announced 13 AUG that primary care has been added to its Patient-Centered Community Care, or PC3, program. The initiative originally was designed to provide specialty care, inpatient and mental health treatment to veterans who could not access a VA hospital or clinic because of distance or prolonged wait times and their regular facility. But it was expanded to include primary care in an effort to expedite treatment to patients sitting on wait lists, according to a VA release. "With the addition of primary care services, VA medical centers can now use PC3 to provide additional types of care in order to reduce wait times," VA Secretary Robert McDonald said in a prepared statement.

In September, VA awarded contracts worth up to \$9.4 billion over five years to two health care companies to provide specialty care and mental health treatment in the private sector under the PC3 program. Former Tricare West Region contractor TriWest Healthcare Alliance and Health Net Federal Services, the company that manages the Tricare North Region, run the program. According to VA, the change is part of the department's "Accelerated Care Initiative," a massive effort to move veterans — many of whom have waited months for care — off appointment wait lists. VA has been under fire since April for allegations that some facilities gamed the appointment system to meet VA metrics and excessive wait times for appointments and consults may have lead to >>

patient deaths. The scandal led to the resignation of several top officials, including VA Secretary Erik Shinseki, who left the department in May.

While VA facilities have had the authority to outsource care, many facilities have been reluctant to use the option and in turn, many veterans prefer to use the VA, which they perceive as a benefit earned with military service. VA spent \$5 billion on private-sector care in 2013 and launched the PC3 program in January to provide care to veterans using established health care provider networks. TriWest President David McIntyre described the PC3 program as a “release valve” for overburdened VA facilities. “The first place care should be rendered is in the federal system with federal providers where it can be done. And where it can’t, we are that valve,” McIntyre told Military Times last month. For more information on obtaining private medical care through VA, the department recommends turning to its non-VA care web site <http://www.nonvacare.va.gov/PC3/index.asp>. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Patricia Kime | Aug 13, 2014 ++]

VA Claims Assistance Update 05 ▶ DAV NSOs Eager to Serve

If you or someone you know started a claim through eBenefits since early 2013, remember that those claims expire if not completed and submitted within 365 days. As thousands of claims face expiration, DAV wants to remind you that they have nearly 280 National Service Officers (NSOs) nationwide who are ready to help veterans and families obtain earned benefits. VA’s electronic claim submission process lets veterans start a claim online with limited information, allowing 365 days to collect data, treatment records, and other related information. During that year, a veteran may add data or upload documents pertinent to the claim. At any point in that year, a veteran may click “submit” and a claim will be established. But after 365 days, any data in an incomplete claim becomes inaccessible and the initiated claim date is removed from the system. DAV services are 100% free, and they’re provided by the most highly trained and experienced representatives in their field. All NSOs are veterans with service-connected disabilities, who have the expertise to make sure the right information is gathered and properly submitted. For assistance go to the DAV website <http://www.dav.org/> and enter your zip code. You will be provided a telephone number and location where you can get assistance or you can complete an online email to explain the services you need. [Source: DAV National Adjutant/CEO J. Marc Burgess | Aug 0, 2014 ++]

VA Veterans Choice Card ▶ How it is to be Used

Veterans reading only headlines, hearing only sound bites, might have a few misconceptions about how Congress and the VA plan to use non-VA healthcare providers to ensure more timely and convenient access to care. A magical sounding item called a “Veteran’s Choice Card,” for example, won’t be a limitless credit card given qualified veterans to cover whatever health services they receive from whatever physician they use. And veterans not already enrolled in VA health care won’t gain accelerated access to outside care as promised by the

legislation – unless they serve in areas of combat operations within five years of enrollment. The centerpiece of the Veterans Access, Choice and Accountability Act of (H.R.3230) is a special \$10 billion Veterans Choice Fund.

Over the next three years, VA is to use the fund as needed to buy care from non-VA care providers for veterans if they face long waits for VA care – defined initially as more than 30 days – or if they reside more than 40 miles from VA care. The intent is to eliminate VA patient wait lists that some VA health administrators and staff conspired to hide in recent years, thus compromising the integrity of performance reports and putting patients’ health at risk. VA leaders and veteran service organizations prefer to attack wait times through improved resourcing. They want VA spending raised to meet actual patient demand from wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, from the expansion of diseases presumed caused by defoliants used in Vietnam, and from higher costs of caring for aging veterans. So H.R.3230 also authorizes VA to spend \$5 billion more to expand its own capacity to deliver care, by hiring more medical and support staff and also building and leasing more space.

House-Senate conferees, in shaping the final bill, categorized the Choice Fund as emergency money so the \$10 billion gets added to the nation’s debt but not to VA budgets. The \$5 billion for more VA-delivered care is to be paid through cuts elsewhere in VA, including executive bonuses and by deferring planned rate cuts for some types of VA home loans. The legislation mandates use of a new Veteran’s Choice Card but it isn’t a golden key to private sector care. It will be more like an informational insurance card to be presented to non-VA health care providers to identify the veteran and to verify eligibility for episodes of care that, sometime earlier, were arranged through and approved by a VA care coordinator. The administrative challenges ahead for VA in coordinating a vast expansion of private sector care, monitoring outside care quality and integrating those medical records back into VA health care will be profound. But the bill is said to set aside only \$300 million for these added tasks.

Indeed, in reviewing the new law’s requirements, VA officials are weighing whether current Veteran Identification Cards (VICs), which are issued when veterans enroll in VA health care, might be modified to serve as the “choice card” that the new law mandates. Other details in the reform package will disappoint reformers who seek to fully “privatize” VA care. The bill is a series of compromises between near-term action to address the patient wait-time scandal and steps to shore up the integrated VA health care system so prized by many veterans and their service organizations. Here’s more on how non-VA care will grow:

- **ELIGIBILITY** – The hurdles to gain easy access to non-VA care go beyond how far veterans reside from a VA clinic or how long their wait for care. To be eligible, veterans must have enrolled in VA health care by Aug. 1, 2014 or, if they enroll later, they must have served on active duty in a theater of combat operations within five years of enrolling. These restrictions

address cost concerns fiscal conservatives had after the Congressional Budget Office projected that up to two million more veterans would drop current health insurance and enroll with VA if given the chance to use current doctors and have VA foot the bill.

- **NO FIRM 30-DAY GOAL** – Architects of H.R.3230, Sen. Bernie Sanders (I-Vt.) and Rep. Jeff Miller (R-Fla.), would like non-VA care offered to any vet who can’t get a VA appointment within 30 days. But their legislation allows VA to set a different wait-time goal if they can defend it. What VA finally decides will be part of interim rules for implementing the law, to be published within 90 days of President Obama signing the bill into law. The bill would require that if VA can’t offer a timely appointment then it must inform the veteran electronically or, if the veteran chooses, by mail, and explain that outside care is authorized. Last year, VA spent \$4.8 billion on non-VA health care but half of that involved emergency services.

- **40 MILES AS CROW FLIES** – Veterans who reside more than 40 miles from a VA medical facility or who must travel by air, boat or ferry to access VA care are to be offered non-VA care instead. VA is to use “geodesic distance” or the shortest route between two points on Earth, or, if you like, “as the crow flies.” VA’s early estimate is that 500,000 vets will qualify. However, House-Senate conferees in their explanatory report on H.R.3230, say they do not intend the 40-mile criteria “to preclude veterans who reside closer” to a VA facility “from accessing care through non-VA providers, particularly if the VA facility...provides limited services.” So VA will have to clarify in regulation what 40 miles really means.

- **CHOICE OF PROVIDER** – Not all veterans who become eligible for non-VA care will get to choose their outside provider, and not every non-VA care provider will opt to treat veterans through the VA coordinated care program, even if the vets are existing patients. One issue for physicians will be the level of reimbursement and another the timeliness of VA payments. VA has existing contracts with individual physicians and with pools of private sector providers. Many more such arrangements are expected. But VA cannot pay rates higher than Medicare allows, with exceptions possible if care is delivered in very rural areas. Timeliness of VA payments to non-VA care providers has been a significant concern for years. The reform bill has language urging VA officials to improve their payment procedures.

[Source: Stars and Stripes | Tom Philpott } July 31, 2014

PTSD Update 173 ▶ Veracity of Many Claims Questioned

As disability awards for PTSD have grown nearly fivefold over the last 13 years, so have concerns that many veterans might be exaggerating or lying to win benefits. Robert Moering, a former Marine and psychologist conducting disability examinations at the Veterans Affairs hospital in Tampa, FL, estimates that roughly half of the veterans he evaluates for the disorder exaggerate or fabricate symptoms. Such was the case of the 49-year-old veteran who explained to Moering that he suffered from paranoia in crowds, nightmares and unrelenting

flashbacks from the Iraq war. He said he needed his handgun to feel secure and worried that he would shoot somebody. The symptoms were textbook post-traumatic stress disorder, but he suspected the veteran was exaggerating. Hardly anybody had so many symptoms of PTSD so much of the time.

Depending on severity, veterans with PTSD can receive up to \$3,000 a month tax-free, making the disorder the biggest contributor to the growth of a disability system in which payments have more than doubled to \$49 billion since 2002. “It’s an open secret that a large chunk of patients are flat-out malingering,” said Christopher Frueh, a University of Hawaii psychologist who spent 15 years treating PTSD in the VA system. Diagnosing PTSD can be difficult in the best of circumstances. Experts have long debated how to define the condition. One person can suffer crippling anxiety from an experience that wouldn’t faze someone else. Assessing PTSD becomes even more difficult in a VA system that gives veterans a financial incentive to appear as sick as possible, former and current VA mental health clinicians said. The number of veterans on the disability rolls for the disorder has climbed from 133,745 to more than 656,000 over the last 13 years. Vietnam and the recent wars have fueled the growth in roughly equal measure.

Frueh and other critics of the disability system have sparred in medical journals with senior VA mental health officials, who argue that the extent of malingering is impossible to know without more research. The veteran Moering evaluated was already receiving \$1,600 a month in disability pay for PTSD as well as various joint problems. But he wanted to increase it. Three tests designed to detect dishonest patients by looking for highly unlikely response patterns strongly suggested that the veteran was exaggerating, according to disability records that Moering allowed The Times to review. The case is one of eight that Moering opened to the newspaper. In each, he challenged a PTSD diagnosis. The records were redacted to hide names and other identifying information. Moering said he could not determine whether the veteran was feigning entirely or simply stretching the truth. “This is the dilemma we face,” Moering said. “How can a disability rater honestly rate this veteran?” Government policy in cases without a clear answer is to give the veteran the benefit of the doubt. The VA left his disability rating intact.

In some ways, the explosion in PTSD cases is a sign of progress. Though descriptions of the disorder show up in literature as far back as Shakespeare, it did not become a formal diagnosis until 1980, and even then remained controversial. After decades of downplaying the psychological toll of war, the government has finally acknowledged the damage and boosted assistance to veterans in need. The VA has increasingly recognized non-war-related PTSD as well, extending monthly compensation to tens of thousands of veterans traumatized by accidents — both on- and off-duty — that occurred at the time they were enlisted. In one case The Times reviewed, a woman was awarded PTSD >>

VA News & Updates

(Continued from page 25)

compensation based on breaking her leg in a fall walking to the mess hall. As the number of cases has climbed, so has debate over their legitimacy. A 2007 study of 74 Arkansas veterans with chronic PTSD, most of them from the Vietnam War, concluded that more than half were exaggerating symptoms. Other research has found little evidence of malingering.

In the aftermath of serious trauma, most people experience symptoms of the disorder. But the nightmares, concentration problems and heightened state of alert usually go away in a few weeks. In a minority of cases, certain combinations of symptoms persist. That's PTSD. Because the diagnosis relies mainly on what patients report, it is easy to exaggerate. In online forums, veterans trade tips on how to behave in their disability evaluations. Common advice: Dress poorly and don't shower, refuse to sit with your back to the door, and constantly scan the room. If an examiner asks about homicidal thoughts, a Vietnam veteran posted, say: "Doc, doesn't everyone, I mean didn't you ever think about killing someone? Hell, I think about it every time someone gets too close to me." He also urged veterans to purposely fail memory and other cognitive tests. The motivation behind such advice is not always clear. It may be aimed at helping veterans get what they deserve from a system that many see as rigged against them. Exaggeration can also be a sign of distress itself. Though VA investigations have exposed scams — including disability recipients who never served in the military — the department has focused on making the system friendlier to veterans. To get paid for PTSD, veterans must link their symptoms to trauma that occurred during their service. In 2010, the VA expanded what situations could qualify. Credible fear of being attacked — without actually suffering or witnessing violence — became sufficient.

The VA also dropped its requirement to support each case of war-related PTSD with records of the underlying trauma. Those veterans are now taken at their word. After the changes, the number of new PTSD claims rose 60% to more than 150,000 a year, and approval rates jumped from 55% to 74%. The shift raised new concerns. In a 2014 paper, Arthur Russo, a VA psychologist in Brooklyn, argued that the disability system is prone to "collusive lying," in which veterans fake mental illness and clinicians go along with it. He cited an email from an unnamed VA chief psychologist to staff members instructing them not to diagnose malingering or "make any comments that appear to question patients' reports of trauma." Gail Poyner, an Oklahoma City psychologist, said she was dismissed in 2010 from a company the VA hired to conduct disability exams because she insisted on giving veterans tests to determine whether they were exaggerating. "It's political," Poyner said. "It's not prudent to suggest that people who have served our country are not being honest." The VA issued a statement to The Times saying it encourages examiners "to conduct comprehensive, accurate and thorough evaluations" and

to use their clinical judgment in deciding whether to test for malingering.

The quest for VA disability benefits begins before service members leave the military. Jill Wilschke, a therapist who worked at Camp Lejeune, N.C., until late last year, said many of her patients had witnessed the horrors of war and were being forced out of the military because of PTSD. "People I worked with were really hurting and scared about how they would survive when they left," Wilschke recalled. But in several cases, she said, Marines whose symptoms were fading expressed concern that medical records documenting their progress would be used against them in disability exams. One with mild PTSD was contemplating putting off college because he worried attending would make him appear too healthy. Wilschke worried that some patients weren't being honest with her. Several VA mental health providers said the incentives of the disability system have undermined their relationship with patients and inhibited them from fully engaging in treatment.

In 2005, the VA office of the inspector general looked at 92 cases of PTSD and found that while most veterans received treatment when their disability ratings had room to rise, visits dropped off after their ratings topped out at 100% disabled. Frueh and other researchers have argued that the incentives of the disability system may help explain why veterans tend to report less improvement than other patients in response to treatment. In its statement, the VA pointed to several studies casting doubt on that view and said "it is counterproductive to disparage VA disability policies and treatment efforts without clear supporting evidence." Many veterans — including those receiving disability pay — make substantial progress with treatment, it said. Among the most encouraging results came in a study published last year in JAMA Psychiatry. It looked at 1,888 veterans who began a treatment known as prolonged exposure therapy. Nearly 800 went on to fall below the threshold for PTSD on a standard assessment scale. Their traumas included combat, sexual violence and painful childhood experiences.

In the VA disability system, however, the disorder is usually permanent. Of the 572,612 veterans on the disability rolls for PTSD at the end of 2012, 1,868 — a third of 1% — saw a reduction in their ratings the next year, according to statistics provided by the VA. Even some veterans whose diagnosis falls under deep suspicion have managed to keep their disability ratings. In one case that Moering reviewed in 2009, he searched military records and concluded that a Navy veteran on the disability rolls for PTSD had lied to VA clinicians about having served in the elite SEALs and concocted his combat history. The VA responded by reducing his PTSD rating from 50% to 30%, records show. [Source: Los Angeles Times | Alan Zarembo | Aug 05, 2014 ++] ■

Looking For

(Continued from page 14)

stricken with bone cancer and the effects of Agent Orange. I just wonder if any of his fellow Marines that might have known him during his time in Vietnam can reach out to me? My uncle is just about to the point where he will be with his Heavenly Father, Living in eternity and free from pain and sin. Thank you in advance for any information.

Robert Sceraceno

Email: Ba4wheeler@gmail.com

SHELDON

I was looking at the USMCVTA roster that is on the VTA website today, looking for a "Sheldon" who served with Harold (Riensch) in 1969 in tanks. Yesterday, there was a memorial service for Shirley Adams, whom we met at our Lutheran Church in Columbus shortly after we moved to the area in 2000. Later, Shirley asked Harold if he was the Marine who served with her brother, Dan McQueary, in Vietnam. Harold told her he was and that is how he came into contact with Captain McQueary, who now lives in the Bozeman area. Dan and his wife attended Shirley's memorial service and Harold and Dan got to visit for awhile after 44 years! It still amazes me how these Marines recognize each other after so many years and so many miles. Harold and I can't remember "Sheldon's" first name; someone thought

he had died, but Dan said he is alive and living in a New England state.

Laura Riensch

Reed Point, MT

Phone: (406) 326-2363

IDENTIFIED!!!



Rene Cerda called us to say that the Marine on the right is John "Buzz" Conklin.

Andy Anderson called us and right after Andy called, Chris Vargo called, to identify himself as the tanker wearing the comm. helmet. ■

PERSONAL INTERVIEW SIGN UPS

During the 2011 reunion in San Antonio, we were not able to interview all of those men who signed up for a interview session. If you were one of the few who we were not able to interview and if you would like to be interviewed during our 2015 reunion in Washington, DC, please do not wait until the DC reunion to sign up. Go ahead and contact Pete Ritch now by phone (Home) 850-734-0014 or by email at goldendog@mchsi.com. Pete will add you the new 2015 reunion interview schedule.

We will have one full day available for interviews and we have already received several requests for a time slot. We have begun to assemble a group of tankers who were on Operation Starlite for a group interview session and Bob Skeels has contacted several of his 1st Platoon, Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks crewmen who participated in a "turkey shoot" of NVA that never made it into the "official" USMC command chronologies.

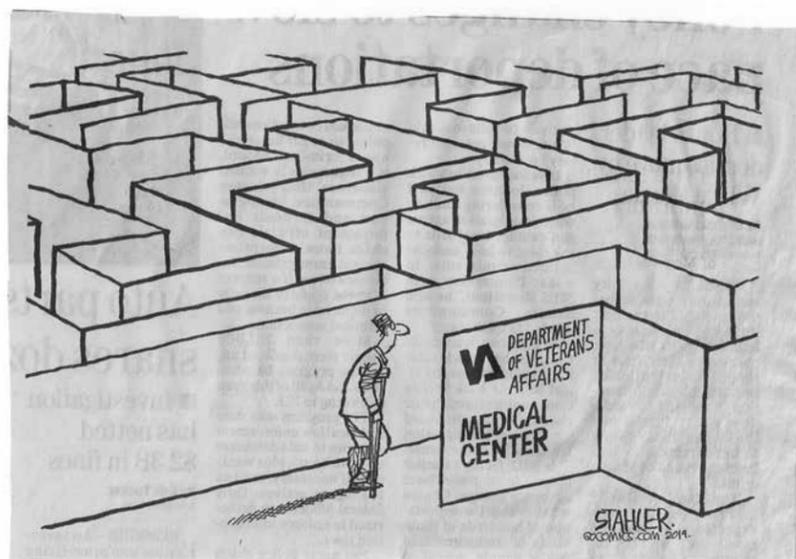
The USMC VTA History Project needs to record your stories & your photographs. More importantly, once we obtain and chronicle our experiences, not only will they be shared within the USMC Tanker Community, but they will be added to the archives in the U.S. Library of Congress, the Marine Corps Museum, and the Marine Corps University.

The goal of the USMC VTA History Project is to assure that we (and our stories) will never be forgotten.

JOKES



Maybe too much.



How to communicate in the New Marine Corps?

From: Commanding Officer

To: All Gunnery Sergeants

Subject: Sensitivity Training.

It has been brought to the Executive Officer's attention that some Gunnery Sergeants and above throughout the command have been using foul language during the course of normal conversation with their Division Officers.

Due to complaints received from some Division Officers who may be easily offended, this type of language will no longer be tolerated. We do however, realize the critical importance of being able to accurately express your feelings when communicating with Officers.

Therefore, a list of "TRY SAYING" new phrases has been provided from the officer's mess so that proper exchange of ideas and information can continue in an effective manner:

TRY SAYING: Perhaps I can work late.

INSTEAD OF: And when the fuck do you expect me to do this?

TRY SAYING: I'm certain that isn't feasible.

INSTEAD OF: No fucking way.

TRY SAYING: Really?

INSTEAD OF: You've got to be shitting me!

TRY SAYING: Perhaps you should check with...

INSTEAD OF: Tell someone who gives a shit.

TRY SAYING: I wasn't involved in the project.

INSTEAD OF: It's not my fucking problem.

TRY SAYING: That's interesting.

INSTEAD OF: What the fuck?

TRY SAYING: I'm not sure this can be implemented.

INSTEAD OF: This shit won't work.

TRY SAYING: I'll try to schedule that.

INSTEAD OF: Why the hell didn't you tell me sooner?

TRY SAYING: He's not familiar with the issues.

INSTEAD OF: He's got his head up his ass.

TRY SAYING: Excuse me, sir?

INSTEAD OF: Eat shit and die.

TRY SAYING: So you weren't happy with it?

INSTEAD OF: Kiss my ass.

TRY SAYING: I'm a bit overloaded at the moment.

INSTEAD OF: Fuck it, I'm going to the Chief's Club.

TRY SAYING: I don't think you understand.

INSTEAD OF: Shove it up your ass.

TRY SAYING: I love a challenge.

INSTEAD OF: This job sucks.

TRY SAYING: You want me to take care of that?

INSTEAD OF: Who the hell died and made your boss?

TRY SAYING: I see.

INSTEAD OF: Blow me.

TRY SAYING: He's somewhat insensitive.

INSTEAD OF: He's a fucking prick.

TRY SAYING: I think you could use more training.

INSTEAD OF: You don't know what the fuck you're doing.

Thank you for your assistance in this matter, and with a little work I believe that we can all communicate with each other more effectively in the near future. ■

Phil McMath wrote: You asked me to write something (for the Sponson Box magazine) and here I have attached an article that I wrote about a Marine buddy of mine who died recently. It has nothing to do with tanks, so it (may) not (be) newsletter material, but I thought you might want to see it.

Phillip McMath

Little Rock, AR

Phone: (501) 868-7172

A new beginning

Wounds not end for Vietnam vet

by PHILLIP H. MCMATH

Special to the Democrat Gazette

It was late afternoon on Dec. 7th, 1966, another day in Chu Lai, when 24-year-old 1st Lt. Buddy Brown Spivey of Siloam Springs was setting his 3rd platoon of D Company, 1st Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment (Delta 1/7) into a defensive position on Hill 30 above a village known as Phu Long-I.

Out of sight because of foliage, but in the near distance to the platoon's north and east, lay the South China Sea, and to its west the Song Tra Bong River slithered slowly into an estuary; while the south opened up on rice paddies lacing together villages set among brown bush and verdant tree lines along Highway 525 running across the battalion area of operations. Delta 1/7 had been busy battling jungle, heat and fatigue, as monthly it had pushed out over 800 patrols, pacified and trained locals, while simultaneously fighting a tenacious Communist enemy that seemed everywhere and nowhere.

Gradually Chu Lai became the Marines' backyard, but the Viet Cong, by planting mines, booby traps and spider holes, had converted it into a veritable devil's garden. On this day, the platoon, upon reaching this little rise, was mercifully ending a long day's patrol after already suffering two wounded earlier that morning. Erasing any hope of some fitful half-awake sleep, suddenly there was enemy fire, and Lt. Spivey and his NCOs hustled their Marines up the hill, tightening everyone into camouflaged foxholes, then Buddy went forward to check the perimeter. There was a roar and a flash—a booby trap!

Cpl. Leslie Jones of Wilson, N.C., a squad leader, saw it happen. "He was dead for sure," he remembers. Medevacs always take a million forever. "They're coming ... hang on, lieutenant! They're on the way!"

As the helicopter rattled down, Lance Cpl. David Manipole from Syracuse, NY., a fire team leader, looked at his lieutenant's face "chopped like hamburger." He had been blinded, would lose a leg and had a head full of shrapnel. Finally Buddy was lifted away, taking his first step on a very long journey. Triaged, >>

MY SCARIEST MOMENT IN VIET NAM

BY HERB WITTINGTONT

With a total of thirty-two months spent in country, the first 23 were with Charlie Company, Third Tanks. The remaining nine were with H&S Co. attached to 3/26; operating as a Battalion Landing Team. That much time in country obviously had more than a few events which burned deep into my mind. The nightmares and inability to sleep still haunt many of us as the severity of fighting for one's life leaves certain memories buried deep in a special but dark corner of our mind. Such was and is the life of a USMC tanker. It wasn't the cold miserable winter on Con Thien when standing guard duty on our tank meant sitting covered with a poncho, not being able to see six inches away at night in a drenching rain. Nor was it the time we were ambushed on the last leg returning from a lengthy trip out in the field, in spite of having only a minute or so earlier being notified by a FAC that all was clear and we were only a mile or two from reaching the highway. All hell broke loose, and before it was over the driver of a tank ahead of us died when an RPG came across the corner of his tank--too graphic to describe, needless to say.

Then there was the time we were overrun at Cam Lo, gooks running through our perimeter tossing pineapple grenades; now that was a real wake up in the middle of the night! The roar and sight of "Spookies" with their constant unabated fire producing

swirling streams of tracers is hard to forget; more memories fresh from only 48 years that return all too frequently. At dawn's first light they retreated, heading up a mountain with Phantom F4's bombing them at every step. One sight the next morning lodged in my mind was the dead gook just beyond the wire with a dead comrade on each side trying to recover and extract the body with meat hooks under each arm pit.

Another haunting memory is of the late afternoon when we had completed a search and destroy mission in a village, and we were preparing to set up our defensive position for the night. It was looking like some serious rain was heading our way, so my driver Joe and I decided to make use of the remainder of a roof from a destroyed "hootch". Gable shaped as most, the roof seemed likely easiest to carry back to our tank for protection from the rain were we to set it up as if it were a pup tent. We first tried to fold it and carry it flat. But, too bulky with too much swag, it just was not to be carried far this way. So we decided to use our heads (literally), set it up on the ground as if it were the tent, Joe under the front and myself at the rear carrying it on top of our heads. Terrible idea; the thatch on the "tent's" exterior covered our faces making it impossible to see anything while on our shoulders. So we set it down, decided the original idea of carrying it folded flat would be the only answer. Just as we reached down to begin humping it

back to our tank, out crawled two krait snakes. God had been planning on us sleeping out in the open after all.

Then there was the night when an uneasy quiet allowed us to sleep, always on the edge we all experienced throughout our time in country. No wonder many of us have never had a good night's sleep regardless of how many years have passed. From out in a valley ahead of our tank came the eye-opening thump, thump, thump from heavy mortars directed at us. Our crew all made it into our tank and closed the hatch. Moments later, a mortar landed directly on top of us, doing little more than a slight shaking of the tank. When all ended and we exited, we saw antennae and everything that had been near the top of the turret vanished. More time, more memories.

Once in the thick of the jungle during a heavy firefight, the tank I was on threw a track. For protection while we replaced a damaged tread, the TC turned the tank crosswise against the incoming from spider holes and the jungle in general. Presenting such a big target like that was unnerving, but what remained deepest in my mind from the moment was a grunt coming up to our track replacement effort with a big smile on his face. He looked at us and calmly said, "I'm going home", while holding his hand up to show a middle finger severed just below the second joint. No blood, appearing to be in no pain, just a clean amputation; he knew that was his ticket out of country. Evidently he must have been in some state of shock, as his moment of truth erased the pain with the pleasure of knowing his next destination.

These are but a few of the memories I care to write about, others are too

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then out to the good ship *Repose* before flying over the Pacific again all the way to Philadelphia Naval Hospital, Buddy hung suspended between hope and life, despair and death for 18 months.

No one expected him to live or to do anything if he did. He would, in the words of his doctors, "be a vegetable."

Before Vietnam, Buddy had been a musician and an artist. He earned an art degree from the University of Arkansas; painted portraits, landscapes and abstracts; played saxophone in the Marching Razorback Band, which he affectionately dubbed the "Stumbling Hundred," and joked that he had "played" in Cotton and Sugar bowls. The son of an FBI agent, he had lived all over America. There is a family story of Buddy with his cousin Rex drinking beer at the Lincoln Memorial the night before the Vietnam deployment. Buddy loved cars, girls and dancing; but most of all he wanted to be a Marine, so he joined in 1964, volunteering for Vietnam and the "grunts"—the infantry.

But now Buddy made another decision. He decided not to die. Nor would he vegetate. He strapped on plastic for a leg, screwed in metal for a skull, and sported sunglasses for eyes. Then he was discharged as a captain.

This was not to be an end, but another beginning. He rehabilitated, learned Braille and obtained degrees in counseling and education. He married, had children and grandchildren. For 10 years Buddy worked with blind veterans in 14 states, then as a psychologist and social worker for the VA. Fred Steube, fellow Marine and counselor, sent Buddy the toughest patients. Steube said, "They all came back saying: 'I got no problems.'"

Buddy never succumbed to anger, self-pity or bitterness. Asked about himself, he always replied, "*Outstanding!*" or parting with a brother Marine, it was, "*Semper Fi!*" He was devout; he prayed every day. Everyone admired him. Everyone loved him. Everyone was inspired by him.

He pinned on medals and met presidents. In 1975 President Gerald Ford gave him the "Outstanding Disabled Veteran of the Year Award" in the Oval Office. Other honors piled up from the DAV, Blinded Veterans Association and others.

Yet everyone in Delta 1/7 thought he was dead until 1995 when Manipole saw a name in a newsletter. He found the number and made the call. Buddy answered.

"Hello, is this Lt. Spivey, 3rd Platoon. Delta 1/7?"

"Yes, sir." said Buddy. "Who's this?"

"Lieutenant, this is ... is ... Lance Corporal..."

Manipole could not speak. He broke down. They broke down together. Manipole called Jones, and Buddy and his two Marines stayed in close contact till Jan. 9th, 2014, when Buddy's journey finally ended. Burial with honors will be in Arlington National Cemetery next Wednesday.

There were 2,594,000 in-country Vietnam Veterans. Over 58,000 were killed and 75,000 severely disabled. Now more than half are gone, and our buddy Capt. Buddy Brown Spivey was one of the greatest.

Phillip H. McMath is a lawyer, writer and Vietnam veteran who lives in Little Rock.



Buddy Spivey (right) shares a laugh with President Gerald Ford while receiving an award in 1975

Hill 69

BY KEN ZEBAL

In September of 1965, our platoon began supporting 3/3 in a series of battalion-level operations at the two-way range north of Chu Lai. Since May we'd been operating between the South China Sea, the Song Tra Bong, Highway 1, and the area immediately west of Highway 1. However, we hadn't gone very far north to An Tan village and the Song An Tan yet. West of Highway 1 at Chu Lai had terrain that resulted in operational limitations for tankers that directly translated into an enemy advantage.

Third Platoon Charlie Company (formerly Alpha) 3rd Tank Battalion was attached to 3/3 but was sometimes CHOP'd to 2/4 for additional road sweeps or to establish blocking positions in support of battalion-level operations. During the early days at Chu Lai, road sweeps were fairly benign because anti-tank mines weren't prevalent yet and we were fighting the VC, not the NVA. The VC at the time seemed to favor anti-personnel mines, booby traps, punji stakes and sniping with an occasional 82mm mortar attack, but no real incoming (rockets and arty). Blocking positions, on the other hand, were productive because search and destroy missions were yet to become a practiced tactic. Try to think of the old jungle movies on TV when natives beat the brush forcing tigers to run towards hunters mounted on elephants. We'd wait very quiet like until the Cadillac gage system kicked-in to pump up the turret's hydraulic fluid pressure. It seemed to be screaming like a banshee in the night, so afterwards we'd just idle the tank knowing we weren't really surprising anyone. Sure, these were all fire-fights but nothing monumental or historical, just your average day-to-day tankers kill the gooks while

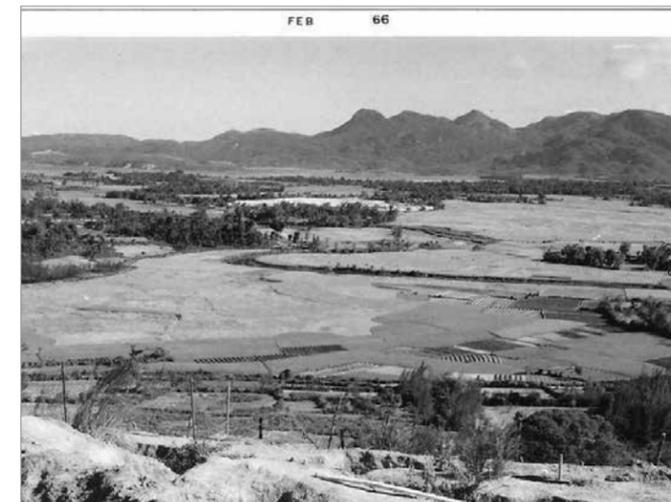
the gooks try to kill the tankers kind of outings.

Someone (3rd MarDiv G-3?) decided to establish a Combat Outpost on Hill 69. As luck would have it, 3/3 decided to make it a company-size operation with Company K and a section of two tanks attached. Since this was to be a coordinated attack, we had to conduct an approach march, ford Song An Tan, link up with Kilo's main body, and conduct a tank-infantry attack on the hill. S/Sgt Joe Wilder was our Platoon Sergeant and the Section Leader for this. S/Sgt Wilder was a very steady hand with extensive combat experience in the Korean War and with recent combat experience in OPERATION STARLITE. Kilo 6 (Capt. Daub) was a mustang with similar credentials. We knew we were in very capable hands.

Off we go rumbling towards Song An Tan looking for a fording location supported by a platoon from Kilo 3/3 with fording grease on the driver's escape hatch and ready to pump up the turret seal. The rest of Kilo rode 6x6s across the An Tan bridge and established firing positions on the far side river bank waiting for us to cross. Oh, I failed to mention it was an enemy infested area. A-35 supported by fire as 32 drove up and down the river bank, as best we could to find a fording site. Each time we found one Tony Pinnetti would leave the tank (unarmed) and wade into the river to see if it was fordable. Because the river was so wide, we needed two separate fording sites – one on either side of the river. Tony located a near-side fording site and was wading along a sand bar in the middle of the river when he found us a far-side fording site about 75

yards down river. He was soaked from the chest down but had a good time wading in the river in plain sight of his buddies on two tanks, a company of grunts, indigenous Vietnamese civilians and the ever present enemy. Finally we successfully entered the river, negotiated the sand bar, and then exited.

Luck was with us that day and there was no resistance as Kilo 3/3 with a light section of tanks went up Hill 69. However, the gooks left us a few presents. The hill had numerous anti-personnel mines and a few booby traps. Capt. Daub and S/Sgt Wilder spoke about it on Kilo's Tac Net (I'm monitoring). They decided that 32 (my tank) is to drive all over the hill and set off as many AP mines as possible before the combat engineers go up and the grunts start to dig in. Our good fortune just changed. I tell Milo and Tony what's been decided and they go ballistic. It doesn't take long before things settle down and we're setting off AP mines that the gooks intended for Kilo's grunts. After we crisscrossed the hill a couple of times, we inspected the suspension. The track looked as you might expect but it was serviceable. So, we dig hull defilade positions, a bunker, set up the watch schedule, and waited for the gooks to start their daytime sniping and night time probing. Come to find out, the new routine wasn't much different than the old routine – watch, PM, road sweeps and blocking positions.



However, we now owned the high ground with a commanding presence. We had success supporting 3/3 from blocking positions from the north side of Song An Tan and also had success in An Tan ville. One day we stopped in An Tan and Tony bought a bunch of duck eggs – fresh duck eggs. Try real hard to remember how

many times you had real food, never mind real fresh eggs, instead of eating C-Rations out of a green can or, on special occasions, some yummy fluff-dried eggs.

Several unusual events related to Hill 69 still come to mind. The first is little bit. Little bit was a 3 or 4 year old Vietnamese girl who seemed to station herself at the edge of the 'ville every time we left the hill. She'd just stand there and look at us but not smile or wave with her little dirty face in dirty black pajamas. We figured she was providing the local VC with intel on the number of tanks and grunts or something. Being Marines (we usually love kids and dogs) after a day or two we began tossing her a soap bar or a can of C-Rats, and lo and behold after a few days she started falling out all clean and squared away in bright, shiny and colorful little girl Vietnamese pajamas and she waved at us too – but still no smile. No doubt her mama-san took what we provided and sold them. Another memory is the night they tortured the village chief. Not



sure what the VC did to that poor guy but he screamed and wailed away for hours on end and they did it on a few different nights too. My final strong memory is hanging out in our bunker listening to AFRS on a small AM radio powered by a used BA-4386 battery (taped to it) and seeing a bright green Bamboo Krait in the overhead right above us. Yee Haa – that got my motor running. I told Joe, Milo, Marty and Tony and you would have thought we were trying out for the Olympic 100-yard dash.

When the monsoon season came, some things changed. The constant rain and drizzle turned our hull defilade positions and bunker into swimming holes and negotiating

(Continued on page 34)

Hill 69 became interesting. The red clay turned into red goop such that the tank would slip and slide going down and we'd have several failed attempts before lucking out



and making a new trail. Being resupplied was now more of an ugly, time consuming and messy process than an event. As many of you can recall, PM'ing the vehicles and weapons during the rainy season was a disaster. We were either damp or wet all the time and our feet began to look shriveled up. Anyone remember immersion foot and still got those little scars?

Finally, we got the word to depart Hill 69 and report back to the CP which had moved during the months we'd been on Hill 69. Once again, some things had changed. We found the fording site, entered the river, and began negotiating our way



along the sand bar towards the exit site. However, since this was monsoon season and since the river was now swollen and because we were now going upstream, Milo had to manage a

really big bow wake. Well, things didn't work out in our favor that day. The river was just too deep, we didn't have fording stacks on the exhaust and, although we closed the turret air inlets, when the fender mounted air cleaners ingested water the engine stopped. So there we were, on a dead tank in the middle of a river in enemy territory.

S/Sgt Wilder reported the situation, Battalion Maintenance showed up in a retriever. They ran out almost the whole length of cable and pulled us out of the drink. Then 35 found better fording sites and 32 was towed directly to FSR – which was way, way in the rear. FSR's shit-fisters pulled the pack, we took out the batteries and a full combat load of ammo and the radios and then cleaned and oiled everything that could possibly be cleaned and oiled both in the turret and in the engine compartment. Our Platoon Leader (Lt. Glover) was beside himself, and then it got worse. One day the Company Commander showed up. The Captain shook hands all around, smiled at the Lt. who was mortified to be seen with us, and then read us the Marine Corps Order for Submarine Pay. He said we didn't qualify but that we sure gave it a good try. I thought Lt. Glover was going to implode, but instead he just walked away and wouldn't even look at us.

Hill 69 Redux

In the early spring of 1966 after things had dried out, we were attached to 1/5 and went on an operation to take Hill 54 which was north of Hill 69. We were also then administratively transferred to 1st Tanks and had redone the tac marks on 201901 for a third time.

By this time the combat engineers had rigged up some floating pontoon sections to create a ferry-like system for crossing Song An Tan just East of An Tan ville. We'd drive onto the floating bridge, they'd start up the outboard motors (I kid you not) and across we'd go. Once on the other side we'd just drive off. Grunts, on the other hand, would just ride six-by's across the bridge and marvel at the technical solution created by Combat Engineers.

As we approached Hill 69, it was pretty easy to observe that it had grown. It was inhabited by all of 2/4 and was now a major complex full of GP tents and a mess tent – it even had an in-line 8-holer with a roof and doors and everything. These days, if one were to look at a 1:50,000 map, it'd show the Hill 69 complex (destroyed).

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My Scariest Moment in Vietnam (Continued from page 31)

painful to reminisce over. Each and every one of us tankers have many of the same memories that still haunt us at night. The losses of best personal friends are the hardest to write about, let alone forget. How can we decide which is the scariest moment while in country?

Probably my scariest is one night sitting out on some forgotten hill on which we had set up a defensive position earlier in the day. Directly in front of us that night, an ambush along a river bordering a mountain was sprung when gooks on the other side or the river were spotted. They called on my tank to deliver some rounds to the enemy. Let me tell you, delivering rounds in the middle of the night at roughly 2,500 yards, directly OVER our own Marines, was one hell of a

frightening event. In spite of having fired some spotter rounds earlier in the afternoon to create an azimuth card and establish some likely grid patterns; having the numbers written on an empty C ration box lid gave me no comfort in any shape or form. Even insisting that my first rounds were going to be high intentionally, just in case, there was an overbearing thought of potential flaw in what I had written down earlier when firing for effect to establish potential targets. Thanks to God was HEAVY on my mind when we realized our numbers were right on. The thought of failing at our mission, and the inevitable realization that such would cost lives of our own Marines has yet to escape my memory. Never will I forget to appreciate Gunny Rowe's approval for us to send off some practice rounds earlier that day.

That is plenty for my first record of time served in Viet Nam. It would do all of us good to hear some of the same from others. If writing is not your thing, tell it to someone who can transcribe it and write it up for you. This won't purge you of some painful memories, but it does feel better having shared them with others who can relate to what we are discussing.

Don't get me wrong, all of us have some fond memories of the funny things that happened to us at one time or another. In the future I hope to write about the humor we also shared. Once I told John that I had begun an article entitled "PTSD From the Inside Looking Out". That one still sits here incomplete. Maybe one day.

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Nothing in Life Ever Turns Out the Way I Expect It To

As a young man I watched every movie I could about the military. I remember watching a movie about some cadets at West Point. They got themselves into trouble and their instructor asked them why they did it. I don't remember what it was. One gave an excuse and his instructor didn't like it. He caught all kinds of hell. The next one said "No excuse, sir." The instructor liked his honesty and was very lenient on him.

I kept that in my little mind for years later. I just knew this would come in handy when I was in the military. It was a classic phrase. It was great. I couldn't wait to use it.

Years later in Marine Corps boot

camp, I was ready with my statement that I knew the drill instructor would respect, and he would respect me for being so very honest. I couldn't wait to get into trouble, so I could use my classic phrase. I couldn't wait. This was my phrase. I couldn't wait to spring it on an unsuspecting drill instructor; I just couldn't wait.

As we were standing at attention one day in boot camp, the drill instructor was at the other end of the squad bay chewing out a recruit. Everyone knows you can hear a drill instructor miles away. I heard him ask the recruit why the hell he was stupid enough to do something so dammed stupid.

The recruit replied "No excuse, sir." He used my phrase. How could he? It was mine. I held it inside for years just waiting to use it wisely. I couldn't believe it. I was crushed. For years it was inside me just waiting for the great moment to jump out. How could this possibly be?

Soon I heard the drill instructor in a very loud voice say, "You dumb son of a bitch! I'll give you No Goddamn Excuse! Who the hell do you think you are? You dumb piece of shit! Get down and give me twenty fuckin' push-ups, you stupid piece of maggot puke!"

From the other side of the squad bay I thought to myself: "Life is great! Thank God I wasn't the first in our platoon to use that stupid phrase. I was very lucky!"

--Author Unknown

NIGHT OF THE TIGERS

BY: BILL "LURCH" LOCKRIDGE

"Tiger" was the code name for a Marine M-48A3 Patton tank that was used in transmissions over radio nets during the early years of the Vietnam War by 3rd Tank Battalion (3rd TK BN), Third Marine Division (3rd MARDIV). Categorized as a medium tank, the M-48A3 was a diesel-powered version of the earlier

M-48A2C tank, which used gasoline for fuel – an explosive component when hitting vehicle landmines or being struck by anti-tank weapons.

From an historical perspective, the M-48A3's origins dated back to the M-47 "General Patton" tank, which replaced the Army's M-26/46 Pershing series. The first production of the M-48 rolled off the Chrysler line in 1952. This version

of the M-48 was produced primarily for combat in Europe against Soviet tanks. Through many design changes, the M-48A3 became the mainstay of armored tanks for the Marines and U. S. Army in Vietnam.

Later, after a bewildering number of versions, the M-48 would eventually lead the way to the successful M-60 Patton tank.

The Marines were the first American Forces to bring tanks to Vietnam. On 9 March 1965, Marine Corps Staff

Sergeant John Downey drove his M-48A3 tank off of a landing craft onto Red Beach 2 at Da Nang, and was shortly followed by the rest of the 3RD Platoon, Company B, and 3RD TK BN. They were immediately deployed to bolster the defenses around the Da Nang airfield. Upon learning that "USMC tanks were in country", our government and Central Command – the U. S. Military Assistance



Command, Vietnam (MACV) - in Saigon thought such heavy armor was an over-kill and "not appropriate for counterinsurgency operations." Certainly, they would not be able to negotiate the combination of soggy terrain and poor weather conditions, particularly during the monsoon season of South Vietnam. None-the-less, we had them – as part of our initial landing force -- and they were there. Over the coming years, MACV's reasoning would fade as the M-48A3 gained a

solid reputation as a worthy weapon to be used against enemy troops.

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

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

their platoons were assigned to support various infantry components that were out in the field.

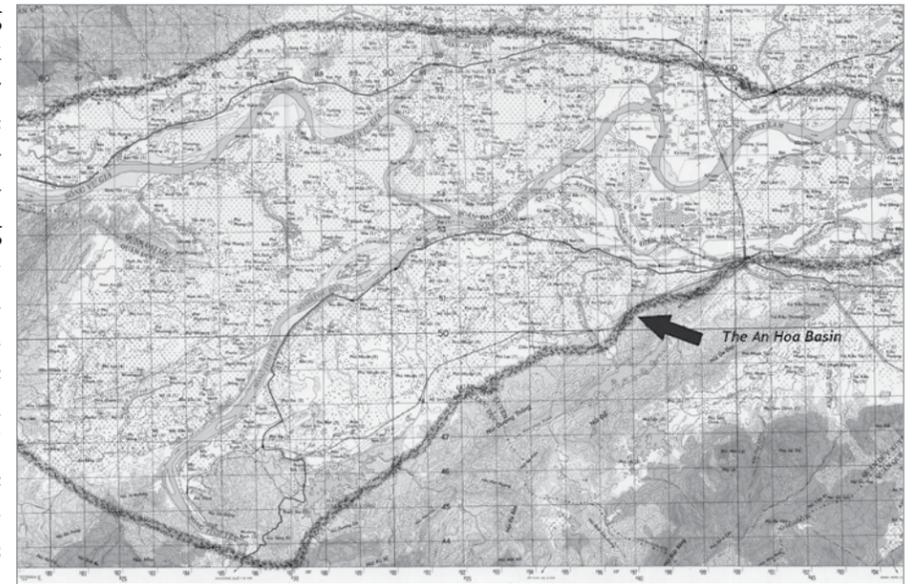
In the late spring of 1966, 3rd Battalion, 9th Marines (3/9) was collectively operating out of An Hoa about 25 miles southwest from Da Nang. Their responsibility was to defend the small airfield and village which supported the only active coal mining operation in South Vietnam. An Hoa also had a hydroelectric power plant and a fertilizer plant operating

there, too. In addition to protecting An Hoa, their mission included interdicting and stopping Viet Cong Main Force elements – particularly the notorious R-20th VC (Doc Lap) Main Force BN -- from advancing northward to attack the Da Nang Air Base. Prior to the 3/9's arrival, many of these enemy forces -- including the R-20th BN -- freely moved within the region which also embraced the well-known "Arizona Territory," an area given the name for its wild-west characteristics and danger.(5)

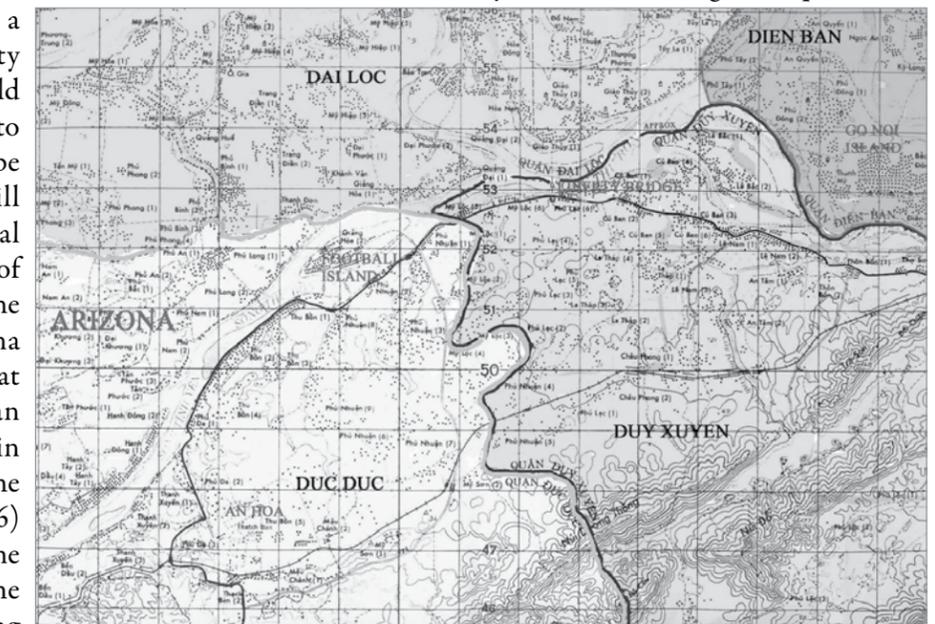
At that time, the only way into An Hoa was by air or by driving through the Song Thu Bon River - preferably during the dry season. Later, the following year, a bridge -- "Liberty Bridge"-- would be constructed to allow convoy type re-supply from Hill 55 which lay several miles to the north of An Hoa.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

Battalion 3/9 requested tanks from 3rd MARDIV to primarily support and augment the defenses of the airfield; and too, to conduct offensive operations

with their infantry line companies. The 3rd TK BN got the mission and redirected my platoon, 2nd Platoon, Company B, which was just completing Operation Liberty while attached to 1st



BN, 1st Marines who were operating in and around the vicinity of Hoa An on the coast of the South China Sea. Our tanks were literally worn out from



continuous use in the sandy terrain which ran from Marble Mountain south through the "Horse Shoe" to Hoa An. So, before deployment to An Hoa, we were directed to return to BN HQ to refit out with five brand new M-48A3

tanks, each equipped with the new and improved Infra-red (IR)/White Xenon searchlight, which were bore sighted with the main 90mm guns. The Xenon searchlight producing over one million candlepower could "reach out" to over 2,000 yards. Close in, should someone look directly into the light, particularly when it was in "spotlight" position, it could cause severe eye injury or the individual would suffer temporary flash-blindness.

Weighing in at 52-tons under a full load – the turret alone weighed 18 tons – it could reach a top speed of 40 mph. Performance wise, it burned one gallon per mile and two gallons per mile off-road. Total fuel

capacity was a little over 300 gallons, which gave it a range of approximately 258 miles that varied of course by terrain characteristics. The transmission had three gear positions, high, low and reverse. Low gear was used primarily when crossing wet paddies, streams and rivers or high-grades. It also had at that time a state-of-the art fire control system that utilized a stereoscopic range finder, a mechanical ballistic computer (nothing like today's truly computerized/laser firing >>

systems that allow you to fire on-the-go and are much more accurate), and an M20 periscope sight that the gunner used to set on his target before firing a main gun round. This system would take range data, merge it with the muzzle velocity of the type round to be fired, and elevate the 90mm main gun sufficiently for the round to overcome the downward pull of gravity while on its way to the target.

Typically, we carried (64) 90mm rounds that consisted of HE (High Explosive), WP (White Phosphorus), canister that contained 1,200 pellets to be used against enemy troops in the open, and a few HEAT (High Explosive Anti-Tank). It was said a good crew could put the first round on target 90% of the time. In Vietnam, we were probably closer to 98% because the distance to targets was typically less than 500 yards. In addition, we had a coax .30 caliber machine gun and a cupola mounted Browning .50 caliber machine gun. Secured around the floor of the turret we carried 10,000 rounds of .30 cal. and 3,000 rounds of .50 cal. ammunition. Each crewman carried a .45 cal. pistol, and for close-in protection we had an old .45 cal. grease gun in each tank. We also had an assortment of non-assigned weapons such as M2 carbines, Thompson submachine guns, captured AK47's, and an M79 grenade launcher that allowed us to inexpensively "dust the brushes" when moving into unknown territory or while setting up for night bivouacs. Clearly, we were ready for bear, and could light up the night or go IR with our new Xenon searchlights.

Departing BN HQ, we drove south to Hill 55 to spend the night at our Company HQ. While there, we discussed the river crossing with our company commander that would

have to be made the following day. Small fording stacks were strapped to the engine armor plate of each vehicle in case we needed them to negotiate the water crossing. Aerial maps were studied and several crossing points were noted. Our first choice was at the end of a bend in the river that flattened out with sandy beaches on either side. It was about 200 yards across, but would require a diagonal up-stream approach in order to successfully reach the opposite beach.

The M-48A3, had a crew of four: the driver sat up-front under the main gun; the gunner was situated below the tank commander (TC) to the right of the main gun breech; the loader stood to the left of the breech, but normally rode outside on top of the loader's hatch; and, the TC held position in the cupola – a small turret that housed a .50 cal. machine gun that out of frustration of not working well in such tight quarters was eventually sky-mounted to the top of the cupola with a semi-circle of sand bags for added protection.

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

It was determined that the fording stacks would not have to be used, but the drivers would have to "button-up" their hatches and be directed by the TCs who stood waist high out of the

cupola. The TCs would eye-ball the signal flags, monitor the water flowing over the front slope plates and down along the tank sides to make certain they were on course and remained in reasonable safe freeboard condition from water depth. The gunners and loaders were assigned to topside positions in the event the TCs had to announce "abandon ship". Should that condition happen, the TC and his topside crew would quickly move to aid the driver in escaping.

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

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

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

As usual, mines and booby traps were ever present in our TAOR. One morning a jeep coming back from Phu Loc Hill, which overlooked the confluences of Song Thu Bon and Song Vu Gia Rivers, hit a land mine and all occupants were seriously wounded and one was killed. Supposedly, the road had been swept that morning but somehow

the engineers had missed the mine. The area where the incident occurred was particularly subject to mining. The road, made of dirt, traversed a series of stepped rice paddies that were about a mile wide and extended two to three miles on both sides in either direction.

For some unknown reason, the next day I decided to join the engineers who were assigned to sweep the road. Beginning in the earlier hours, they began their work with me following a good fifty yards or more behind. As they passed the crater from the mine explosion the day before we came to a

culvert which ran under the road. I noticed dozens of footprints coming out of the paddy crossing the road and down into the other side. I asked the engineers about these tracks, but no one had an answer except to say that they had not noticed them the day before.

Returning to Battalion, I asked the S-3 (Operations Officer) if we had had any patrols out in that area the night before. He said we hadn't. I said, "Then some large body of troops must have crossed that road last night and marched right down the center of those rice paddies."

An idea was forming in my mind about using our tanks to night ambush the area, but a few technical and tactical issues had to be worked out before presenting the plan to the BN Commander (BN CO) and his staff. Those issues were: (1) how to deploy

tanks into a night ambush site without the enemy discovering us – tanks make a lot of noise when operating in the field; (2) how many tanks should be deployed; (3) what primary sites should be selected with appropriate alternate locations if needed; (4) how



long could we operate our new Xenon searchlights on battery power before having to start our engines; (5) how could we minimize tank-to-tank radio communications, which would also cause battery drain; (6) how many infantrymen would we need for security; and, (7) size-wise, what would we require for a reaction force to come to our assistance if we made contact? The Night of the Tigers was about to unfold.

First, we determined that three tanks or our heavy section, when spread out in a forward facing fan of fire over the targeted zone, would be sufficient. The tanks would be spaced approximately 25 yards apart with my tank in the center. To protect our rear, two four-man fire teams would go out with us. To reduce battery draw from our radios, we would tie pieces of string attached to the wrists

of each tank commander. Since I was in the center, I had one string on each wrist. The string had enough play in it to allow us to move our arms while using night-vision binoculars. The idea was, if anyone saw something in their respective area of observation, the strings would be pulled to signal radios up. Our rear tank phone lines tied in with the infantry.

Next, and perhaps most critical, came testing our Xenon searchlights without engines running. How long could we operate them from battery power only? From the tests, we calculated that each tank could operate for a little over

three hours without having to power up engines. So, once in position, a selected flanking tank would use its IR light while the other two tanks simply observed their areas with night vision binoculars.

We had an amtrack platoon attached to 3/9, so it was easy to visit them and ask for their support. We needed them to cover the noise of moving our tanks at night. The idea was not only to use them for that purpose, but also to have them carry a reaction force out if needed.

The plan called for four amtraks and a platoon of infantry (The reaction force) to deploy with us – three amtraks up front followed by three tanks and the fourth amtrack taking up the rear. Once underway, as the sun was setting, at a designated time (when darkness was complete) this convoy of vehicles would drive past by our primary turn-off point to the ambush site, and the tanks >>

would quickly peel off the road, take positions, and cut their engines off.

Without raising suspicion, several of us went out on foot patrols over the course of two to three days to select potential ambush positions.

Having completed our homework we presented our plan to the BN CO and his staff. He eagerly approved it.

Next morning preparations were made. All was ready for the coming night events.

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

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

searing light penetrated the night and three .30 cal. machine guns opened up with devastating interlocking fire. The infantry behind us opened up too. It was a turkey shoot. When we switched from floodlight position on the searchlights to spotlight position, the enemy dropped to the ground. Curiously, when moving back to floodlight they would stand-up and get shot. Since they were so close I ordered 90mm canister rounds to be fired – it only took a few. The field was littered with enemy bodies and supplies.

As the ambush was kicked off, the reaction force was called and they came out to help us police the site. By 0100, the ambush position was cleared and we started our return to An Hoa. As we gained the road I informed the reaction force commander that I wanted to move to our alternate site. Somewhat surprised he agreed, and we pulled off and set up again.

Within an hour we had contact. We watched as six enemy troops advanced towards our position. They were probing the rice paddies for either survivors or lost supplies. When they were out about 50 to 75 yards we switched on our white searchlights and, to our surprise, they simply put their hands up in surrender. We brought them in, tied them up, and gave them some water. One of them was a female whom we were to later learn was a VC cadre officer.

At dawn the next morning we mounted up and returned to An Hoa with our prisoners. However, that was not the last Night of the Tigers. We went out three more times and had two more nights of solid contact.

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

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

By the middle of September, 1966, our platoon of twenty-two Marines had recorded 244 confirmed enemy KIAs, 58 Possible KIAs, 19 WIAs, 5 Possible WIAs, and captured 56 enemy troops. Additionally, we destroyed four ammunition bunkers; captured one bunker that contained 271 Chicom (Chinese Communist) hand grenades and 19 Russian claymore type mines; and, we destroyed two enemy 57mm recoilless rifles.(7) We also disposed of a two-man sniper team with three quick rounds of 90mm WP, who unfortunately had attempted to disrupt our beer party (a party that was held on Phu Loc Hill) after we had completed an operation, and our two-beer per day per person ration had been airlifted in to us by helicopter. Also, early one morning through direct tank fire, which was followed up by several salvos of 105mm artillery rounds, we knocked out an entire sniper platoon that was caught on a small island hamlet which was surrounded by rice paddies as they prepared their breakfast meals. One of the enemy who was killed was a Caucasian who was later believed to be an East German advisor attached to the unit.

Fortunately, the platoon suffered no personnel lost, and no one had been seriously wounded during our entire time while on operations. However, earlier in our beginning days we did lose one tank by land mine detonation.

Individually, our platoon members received three Silver Star Medals, one Bronze

Star Medal, and three Purple Heart Medals. ■

Poems

TO MY BUDDIES LEFT BEHIND

BY JACINTH ALLARD

(The niece of Vietnam Veteran, James Emerson)

To my brothers-in-arms, some things I'd like to say, but first of all to let you know that I arrived okay. I'm writing this from Heaven and am dwelling with the Lord. Here my fighting days are done and am living with eternal peace. Don't be sad that I'm not in sight, remember that I'm still with you morning, noon and night.

The day I left I know you were scared and sad, but my time on earth was through. God embraced me and said "Welcome home !! It's good to have you back, I missed you. As for your comrades they'll come later, when their time is due. I need you here, now you are part of my plan. There's so much we have to do together to help our fellow man."

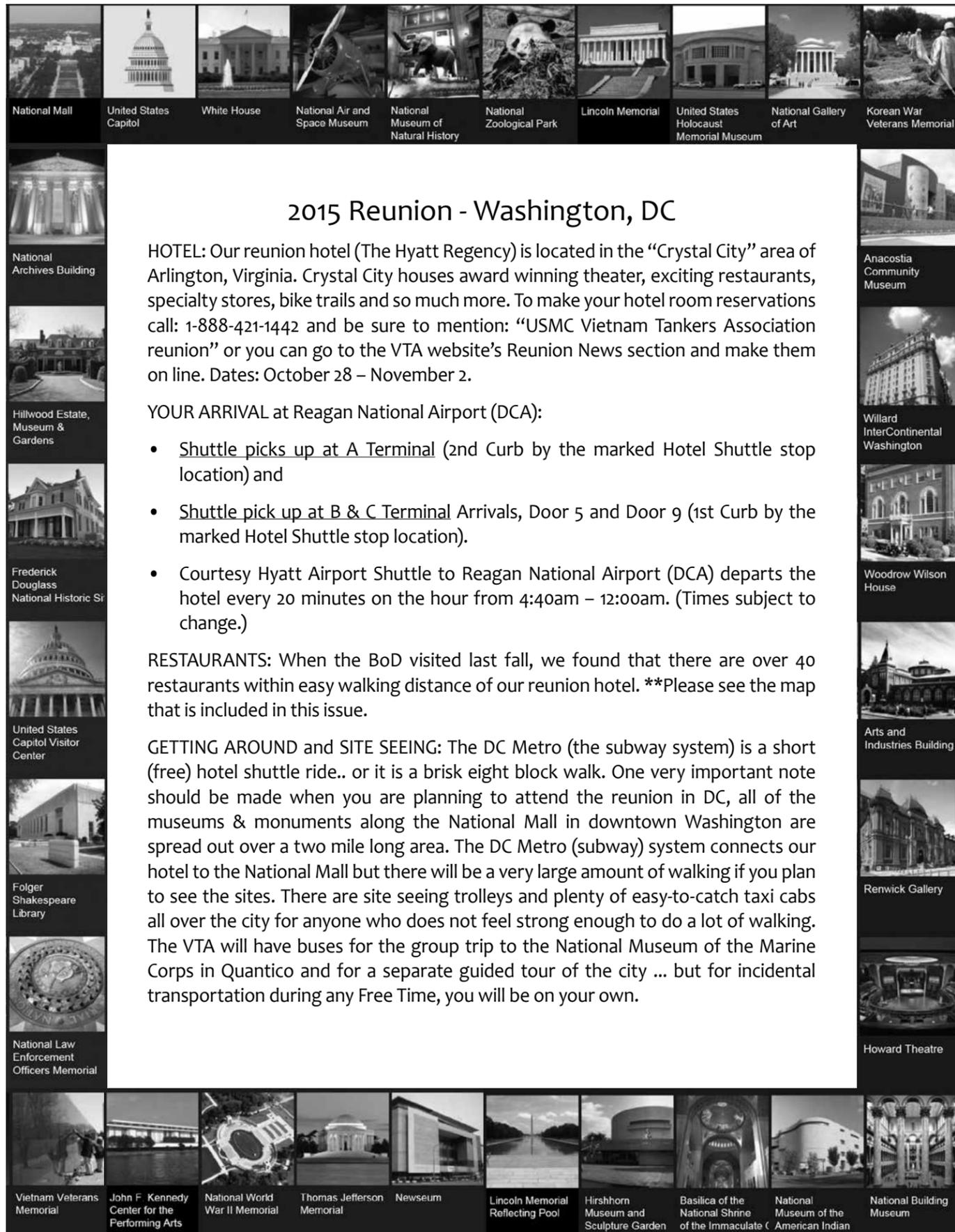
God gave me a list that must be done and the most important was to watch over you. When you lie in bed at night, duty done, that's when we are closest to you, to guard your rest. It's not always easy and at times

we fail, but be assured we are there. When you think of my life and the time we spent, you will at times be sad and tears will flow. It's only natural and don't be ashamed, it shows that you care, and are human.

I wish I could tell you all the things that are planned for you but you wouldn't understand, but trust in the fact that I will be there to help you along the way. There are many hills to climb but together we can do it, one day at a time. Always remember that as you give unto the world, the world will give unto you. If you can help but one lost soul each day, it's a day well spent.

So if you're walking down the street and you meet someone feeling sad and low, lend a hand and help pick him up as on your way you go. Don't forget I'm only a half a step behind and will catch you if you fall. When it's time for you to leave your earthly body you're not going but coming with me. Farewell for now, buddy.





2015 Reunion - Washington, DC

HOTEL: Our reunion hotel (The Hyatt Regency) is located in the “Crystal City” area of Arlington, Virginia. Crystal City houses award winning theater, exciting restaurants, specialty stores, bike trails and so much more. To make your hotel room reservations call: 1-888-421-1442 and be sure to mention: “USMC Vietnam Tankers Association reunion” or you can go to the VTA website’s Reunion News section and make them on line. Dates: October 28 – November 2.

YOUR ARRIVAL at Reagan National Airport (DCA):

- Shuttle picks up at A Terminal (2nd Curb by the marked Hotel Shuttle stop location) and
- Shuttle pick up at B & C Terminal Arrivals, Door 5 and Door 9 (1st Curb by the marked Hotel Shuttle stop location).
- Courtesy Hyatt Airport Shuttle to Reagan National Airport (DCA) departs the hotel every 20 minutes on the hour from 4:40am – 12:00am. (Times subject to change.)

RESTAURANTS: When the BoD visited last fall, we found that there are over 40 restaurants within easy walking distance of our reunion hotel. **Please see the map that is included in this issue.

GETTING AROUND and SITE SEEING: The DC Metro (the subway system) is a short (free) hotel shuttle ride.. or it is a brisk eight block walk. One very important note should be made when you are planning to attend the reunion in DC, all of the museums & monuments along the National Mall in downtown Washington are spread out over a two mile long area. The DC Metro (subway) system connects our hotel to the National Mall but there will be a very large amount of walking if you plan to see the sites. There are site seeing trolleys and plenty of easy-to-catch taxi cabs all over the city for anyone who does not feel strong enough to do a lot of walking. The VTA will have buses for the group trip to the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico and for a separate guided tour of the city ... but for incidental transportation during any Free Time, you will be on your own.



2015 Washington, DC Reunion Schedule

Wednesday	October 28	0900 - 2330	<p>Arrival Day – Pick up Reunion Welcome Packet just outside of the “Slopchute” hospitality room (3rd Floor) **Sign up for VTA History Interviews and For photo scanning for the website** Slopchute Open Lunch & Dinner on your own Reunion Kick-off and VTA Business Mtg. Enter to win a FREE stay! Ladies Coffee (Hospitality Room) Lunch on your own Load buses to MCB Quantico Be sure to wear your reunion T-shirt for group photo. Tour NMMC and Reunion Group Photo Buffet Dinner NMMC Board buses to hotel Slopchute Open Operation VTA History Day **Interview Schedule Posted in Slopchute** ...Or Tour city on your own Lunch on your own Photo scanning for the website Slopchute Open Dinner on your own Load buses Guided Tour of the city Stay in city or return to hotel Lunch on your own Slopchute Open Pizza Party (Slopchute) Auction Slop chute Open Open Day Lunch on your own Slopchute Open Reunion Banquet – Cash Bar Presentation of Colors & Remarks Dinner Served Please note: Dress for the Banquet will be a shirt with a collar, dress slacks and shoes...Coats & ties are optional. Birthday Cake cutting & desert served • 5 minute - Head Call • 30 Minutes - Guest Speaker • 30 minutes - Fallen Heroes • 5 minute – San Antonio Reunion Review & 2017 Announcement Slopchute Open – Last Call...</p>
Thursday	October 29	0900 – 1100 0900 – 1100 1100 – 1245 1300 – 1315 1415 – 1900 1900 – 2030 2030 – 2045 2200 – 2330	
Friday	October 30	0900 – 1500 1200 – 1500 1500 – 2330	
Saturday	October 31	0800 – 0815 0830 – 1300 1300 1330 – 1700 1730 – 1830 1830 – 2200 2200 – 2330	
Sunday	November 1	All Day 1000 – 1700 1730 – 1815 1830 – 1845 1845 – 1930	
Monday	November 2	2130 – 2400	Departure Day

Reminder: November 3 is National General Election Day - So get out and vote!



OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM
2015 Washington DC Reunion
 Hyatt Regency Crystal City
 October 28 – November 2

IF YOU MAIL IN YOUR COMPLETED REGISTRATION FORM WITH YOUR PAYMENT CHECK BEFORE AUGUST 31ST THEN YOU WILL BE ELIGIBLE TO PURCHASE OUR \$20 REUNION T-SHIRT FOR HALF PRICE.

PLEASE PRINT ALL INFORMATION

Member's Name: _____

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

Address: _____ Unit#: _____

City: _____ State: _____ Zip: _____

Day Phone: _____ Evening Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

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

Are you a first time attendee? YES _____ NO _____

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

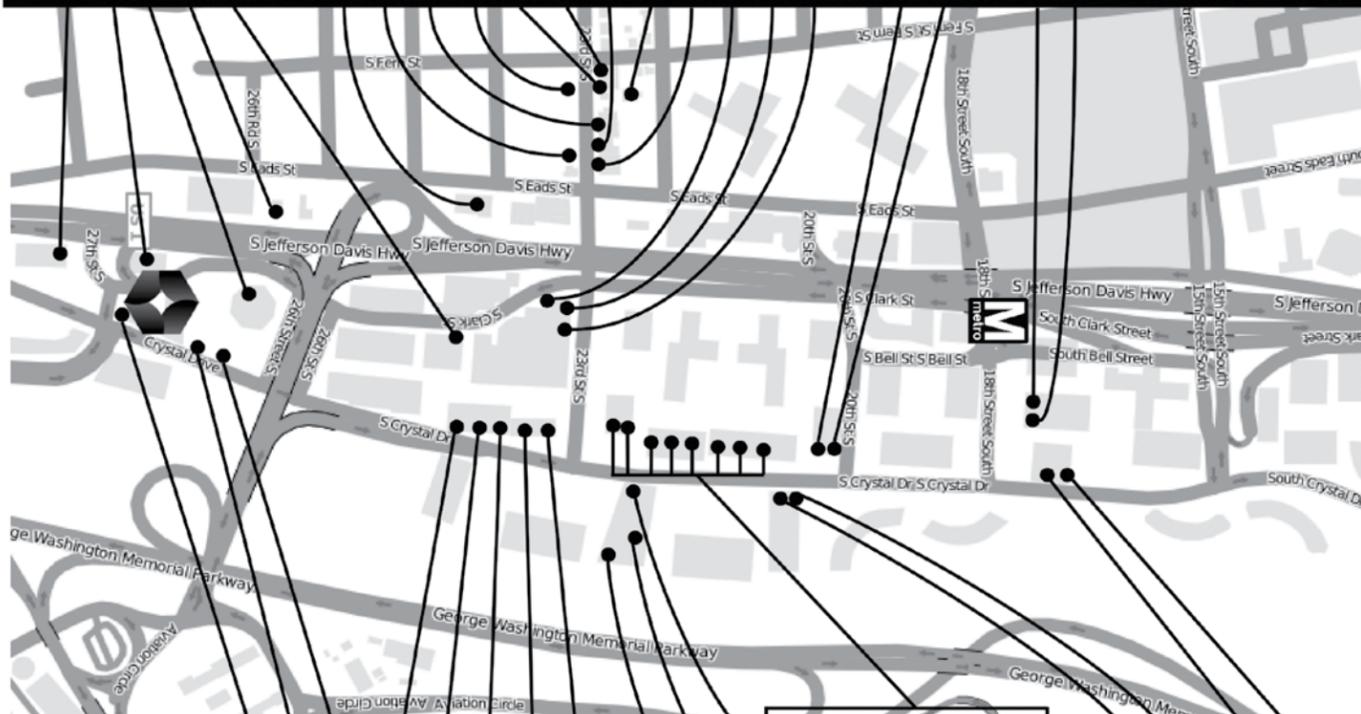
Your USMC VTA membership dues must be current in order to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent please mail your dues with this registration (or the dues will be collected at the sign-in desk). No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions,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

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the Washington DC reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to August 31, 2015. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer

Please fill out the back side of this form to determine total fees.

Restaurants
within
Walking Distance

- King Street Blues
- San Antonio Bar & Grill
- McCormick & Schmick's
- Bailey's Pub & Grille
- Charlie Chiang's
- Legal Sea Foods
- Chill's
- Hearthstone Pizza Bistro
- Athena Pallas Greek Restaurant
- Café Italia
- Tortoise & Hare Bar and Grille
- Urban Thai
- La Bettola Italiano
- Crystal City Sports Pub
- Portofino
- Kabob Palace
- Subway
- McDonald's
- Peter's Deli
- Clark Street Grill
- Uptown Café



- Hamburger Hamlet
- Morton's Steakhouse
- Noodles & Company
- Cosi
- Good Stuff Eatery
- Neramitra Thai
- Chick-fil-A
- Corner Bakery Café
- Cold Stone Creamery
- Ted's Montana Grill
- Kora
- Jaleo
- Chipotle
- FroZenYo
- Ruth's Chris Steak House
- Buffalo Wild Wings
- California Tortilla
- Black Lime Mediterranean Café
- Jimmy John's
- Seattle's Best Coffee
- Starbucks
- Bozell's Italian Deli
- Cinnabar, Lobbibar, and Perks



HYATT
REGENCY
 CRYSTAL CITY AT REAGAN
 NATIONAL AIRPORT

Your total reunion fees

My Registration Fee: \$160.00

T-Shirt: \$ 10.00

Number of guests _____ X \$160.00 = \$ _____

(Registration Fee for each guest is \$160.00)

Guest T- Shirt _____ X \$10.00 = \$ _____

Grand Total = \$ _____

Optional: Would you like to donate a few dollars
to help with the beer & soda fund? \$ _____

GROSS AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____

You must make your own hotel room reservations by October 1st to get the low room rate!

Call: **1-888-421-1442** and ask for the “**US Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers Association Reunion**” for the special room rate of \$109.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$199 per night.

CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration half-price T-shirt offer which has an August 31st deadline.

Submit this form along with your payment by August 31st to get a half-priced Reunion t-shirt worth \$20.

Send check or money order made out to: **USMC VTA** and the completed registration form to:

USMC VTA
c/o Ron Knight
6665 Burnt Hickory Drive
Hoschton, GA 30548-8280



AGENT ORANGE: Painful legacy

Agent Orange, a combination of herbicides and defoliants, was used by the U.S. military, particularly during the Vietnam War. The substance caused extensive medical problems, including cancers and birth defects, among people exposed to it.

In 1991, the **Agent Orange Act** made veterans exposed to the chemical eligible for compensation and medical care. The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs recognizes a "presumptive" link between Agent Orange and a range of illnesses:

- Type II diabetes
- Hodgkin's disease
- Soft-tissue sarcoma
- Peripheral neuropathy
- Spina bifida in children of veterans
- Various other forms of cancer, including prostate and respiratory cases

Added to the list in August 2010:

- B-cell leukemias
- Parkinson's disease
- Ischemic heart disease



Perhaps no two people embodied the moral complexities and the agony of Agent Orange more graphically than Admiral Elmo R. Zumwalt Jr. and his son Elmo R. Zumwalt III.

Admiral Zumwalt led American naval forces in Vietnam from 1968 to 1970, before he became Chief of Naval Operations. While in Vietnam, Adm. Zumwalt ordered the extensive and intensive spraying of Agent Orange to deny the enemy any natural cover and concealment. The Admiral's son was in Vietnam at about the same time as the father, commanding a Navy patrol boat in the Mekong River Delta. Years later, doctors found that the son had lymphoma and Hodgkin's disease. He died in 1988 at the age of 42. The Admiral's grandson, Elmo IV, was born with congenital disorders directly attributed to his father's exposure to Agent Orange.

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

Please check your address label... if the last two digits of "EXPIRES" is less than "15" then your 2015 membership dues are now payable. Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30* and mail to:
USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611

*Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.

