



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



## **Marine Tankers take on St. Louis**

**September 21-25, 2017**

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16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106



October 1, 2017

Col Buster Diggs, USMC (ret)  
President, MCTA  
1133 Cima Drive  
San Marcos, CA 92078-1307

Dear Buster,

On behalf of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association I want to write to you to tell you how nice it was that many of the members of the MCTA joined us in St Louis this past month. Several men from both organizations approached me and thanked me for inviting the MCTA to our gathering. I am certain that the presence of the MCTA was part of the success of our gathering. We are hopeful that this gesture is the first of an eventual combination of the two organizations.

As many of us know and understand, we all come into life with an expiration date and we will all eventually pass on to the "Great Tank Park in the Sky." While some organizations do not have a succession plan and with the eventual passing of the final member, the organization passes into oblivion. The USMC VTA does not intend to have a "Last Man Standing" situation. We would like for the next generation of US Marine tankers to carry on our legacy and to pass their own legacy to the following generation of Marine Corps tankers.

With that said, we want to extend an invitation for any and all members of the MCTA to plan to join us at the end of October 2019 in Seattle for our 11<sup>th</sup> biennial reunion. As soon as we sign a hotel contract, we can publish the actual dates but until then, if your board agrees, please inform your membership of the 2019 reunion. We would love to see all of you there.

Semper Fidelis,

John Wear  
President USMC VTA

## Letter from the President

*Happy New Year!!! Can you believe that yet another year has flown by? With that realization, I would like to remind all of you that your 2018 VTA Membership Dues were due and payable as of the first of this month. Please check the instructions on the back page of this issue to find the payment instructions. We have included a self-addressed envelope in this issue. Please add a postage stamp and use it to mail your dues payment and/or your donation.*



In the photo: John Wear, President of USMC Vietnam Tankers Ass., meets with Col. Buster Diggs USMC (retired), President of the Marine Corps Tankers Assn. in St. Louis.

### A Letter From the President of the MCTA

What a pleasant surprise, John. Thank you very much for the personal letter, but it is I, on the behalf of the MCTA, that owes you a thank you. The combined St. Louis reunion was both enjoyable and an event where we all learned a few things. Our reunions will be better after attending this one.

You run a pretty smooth machine in the VTA. Check-in was superb, package and shirt distribution smooth, and the "Torsion Bar" (hospitality room) well run. Of special mention is your "Fallen Heroes" presentation at the banquet. I Have spoken to, and can speak for all, not a dry eye amongst us. You do that very well.

As you know, we "presidents" might have the pulpit to speak from, but we are just one vote with the board of directors. In the next months, we will be meeting to see where we go next towards closer affiliation. You will be kept informed.

Semper Fidelis,

Buster

In other news: *We are discussing the idea of an informal gathering to possibly be held next fall (2018) and that this long weekend would be at Ft Benning, in Columbus, GA. The USMC Tank School is located there, and the base also has a world-class Museum of the Infantry that is supposed to rival our own National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico. And lastly, several of the VTA directors attended an MCTA reunion at Ft. Benning last year, and they reported that there is a building where tanks from all around the world are rebuilt and displayed, and it is worth the effort to go there. If we do go, it will be far more casual with no formal / planned events, and it will probably be just over a three-day weekend. Please stay tuned for more as this develops.*



**"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending."**

Maria Robinson

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#### ON THE COVER:

The logo for the most recent VTA reunion in St Louis

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### The Difference between a Career Marine and a Lifer!

1. Leadership is about Responsibility—not about Rank!
2. Leadership—it's not about being in charge! It's about taking care of those in your charge!
3. it's about having a Career Marine who is a Mentor, who sees the potential in his Marines and brings it out in them.
4. Because, in the United States Marine Corps, Career Marines EAT last!!

From 1st Sgt. Rick Lewis, USMC (ret)

### Remembering Jim Spalsbury

First of all, the spelling of Jim's name was incorrect in the really terrific article that appeared in the last issue of our magazine. As I look back, Jim and I were best of friends. Besides being U.S. Marine "mustang" officers, we went through the WOSC (Warrant Officer Screening Course) together from 10 January to 25 February 1966. Then we were off to ten weeks of The Basic School. Our two rooms shared a head.

My wife (Shelby) and I became good social friends with Jim, his wife (Evelyn), and his son Jimmie. Jim also had two daughters from his first marriage. He and I went to 2nd Tank Bn. after The Basic School. There were three 1802s in our class who were all new to tanks. The third officer was Len Harrison. I am sad to say that I have lost contact with Len. Then, the three of us went to U.S. Army Tank Officers School at Ft. Knox, Ky. As I recall the Army had more tanks for the student to use than the entire USMC had in total.

I'm adding things I remember regarding Jim: First, Jim suffered from terrific headaches and foot problems. I can still hear him saying, "my dogs are killing me." While at Ft. Knox, we ate off-base quite often. Jim liked his meat "rare." He would tell the waitress: "This is how I want it done: stick a candle up the steer's ass, light it and then blow it out." He always made the waitress repeat it.

It was Jim's contention you could say anything in a reception line as long as you were smiling. His favorite was "Go scrub your ass" and he smiled the whole time. As far as I know, he was never found out. He had severe financial problems since he had child support since he had two daughters from his first marriage. Jim was a great Marine.

GEORGE B. SEARCH  
Captain, USMC (Ret)

### A Possible ID

Charlie Tubbs writes: On Page 16 of the last Sponson Box there is a photo of seven Marines in front of an old Sherman tank asking for help identifying them. In 1966, while assigned to 2nd Tanks at Camp Lejeune, a 2nd Lieutenant Montgomery (sp?) was my platoon leader. I still have the

pink I.D. card that he signed. The third Marine in from the right sure looks like him. I hope this helps with identifying them.

### Col Paul Lessard

Adam Zoltek writes: I was sorry to hear about the passing of Col. Lessard. My condolences to his family. I served under him when he was a captain and company commander of C Co., 3rd Tank BN.(Rein) up in Dong Ha and Camp Evans '66 - '67. He was a fine officer to work for. I never forgot him. Lt. Ray Kinkead was his XO. May he rest in peace

### Comments on the Last Issue of the Sponson Box

Mike Ledford writes: You really know how to put a newsletter together. I was happy to read in the last issue of the Sponson Box that you are back with your family in Colorado. I hope you are enjoying your retirement as much as I am enjoying mine. Each issue of the magazine is better than the last, and they are all very interesting. I hope Jim Spalsbury is reading his right now. I bet he is and is aware of all of us who were touched by knowing him. I sent my brother my copy to show him what my Marine brothers were and are. He was an Army motor transport driver and mechanic in Vietnam in 1972. He was in a couple of ambushes while driving convoys, but got laid low by Agent Orange. He now has MS, PTSD and a few other acronyms, but he is a fighter. He would have made a good Marine. Keep up the good work and let me know if I can help in any way.

Ed Hiltz writes: When I came home from work today, my wife had already started reading the latest addition of the Sponson Box. She read the article regarding the first ever VTA reunion. Yes, I had been planning on attending because I had paid my reunion registration fee. However, a week's vacation came available at the beach with my whole family that was the same week as the reunion. And I was >>



pressured persuaded to vacation with the family and they won out. The brand new association was kind enough to take the time to send me the framed picture (attached) which I still have hanging on my office wall. As you already know, I retired from the Baltimore Police Department 12 years ago. I was enjoying retirement for around four years, but I then went back to work at the United States Federal Courthouse in Baltimore. I plan to work maybe one more year and then finally full retirement from all work.

### St. Louis Reunion

John Hunter writes: Wanted to tell you that I thought the St. Louis reunion was a great one. I found the people of St. Louis to be very friendly, especially at the airport and at the Budweiser Tour. We also took a ride out to Wright City to Cedar Lake Winery, which was very nice, more friendly people.

I got the latest issue of the Sponson Box yesterday, read about four pages so far. When Sgt. Cecil got his Silver Star, I was getting ready to leave 3rd Tanks and rotate back to the World. I did not know it at the time, as it was a big surprise when they told me on May 25, 1966 to pack up and get ready to leave. I took a plane to Kadena. The other day, after reading the citation, I could not help but think that he deserved more. It reminded me of the story Tom Colson wrote a few years ago and, if I remember correctly, Tom got three Purple Hearts. I thought at that time that Tom also deserved more. So my question is: Was it that they were harder on VN personnel when it came to awarding medals? It sure seems like it.

And by the way, Seattle is a great choice! I have never spent any time there and I'm looking forward to going. Could you see if you can arrange for us the drive that M-48?

Mike Giovinazzo: My wife and I had a good time at the reunion. It was nice to see many of the faces from the DC reunion and meet new ones. As always, thanks for all your efforts and that of the Board, who work tirelessly so that others can enjoy the reunion. Of particular note was the excellent job done by the member who made the memorial presentation (Fallen Heroes) at the banquet.

Col. Reed Bolick: Thanks for all that you and your team did to make the St. Louis reunion a tremendous success! It was really good to meet so many fellow tankers and hear of their recollections of that time of our lives. One of the highlights was when the Iwo Jima veteran got up and sang the Lee Greenwood song at the banquet. The other was the tribute to the tank crew that was killed in action in the same spot as a French crew had died years before. The research that went into that presentation was truly remarkable! I hope that I will be able to make more of your reunions in the future. If there is ever anything that I can do to assist your efforts with the VTA, please let me know.

Jay Miller: Hello, my fellow Marines. I can't tell you enough how much I enjoyed the St. Louis reunion. It was

fantastic seeing those I knew and meeting new folks. John and the committee did one heck of a job. I hope everyone arrived home safely and are enjoying a little rest.

As I may have told you, I reside on the east coast of Florida on one of the barrier islands. "Tanker," our Golden Retriever and I are the garbage pickers for the State Park and the other mangrove areas surrounding our subdivision. Just about every day we ride some of the 12 miles of trails, which remind me of spots in Vietnam, in search of water bottles and beer cans ... and not gooks. We've been doing this for eight years and have only got stuck once before. Well, Tanker needed his ride yesterday and we went. We have crossed this little water hole hundreds of times with no problem. As we crossed yesterday, Tanker jumped in and I had to stop. Yes, I stuck my golf cart and had to have a friend drive my jeep out to me two miles for a rescue. I guess the Good Lord was telling me that I should not have complained as much as I did about that Lt. Tomlinson who stuck that tank on the beach so long ago. I thought we would have to abandon it, but was glad to learn how Harold again saved the day with a little C4.

Again, my sincere thanks to all of you who served in B Company and had to put up with me. Your service, dedication and cooperation was and always will be greatly appreciated. Hope to see you all in Seattle. Steve Falk: It was great to see and get to talk with you in St. Louis. My wife, Marcia, enjoyed her conversation with you, as well. Since returning home, I sat and done some writing and hope that you will be able to put it to use in the Sponson Box. I know you edit the magazine. Will forwarding a link to my work be sufficient? And, if so, what should I send...and when? I have done the very short piece you asked for on "Pookie." I have also written about "shit." I have a piece about a Christmas tree as well in case there will be an issue before Christmas. You also asked me to write something about my return to the classroom, which I have ready.

Jay Miller: Wishing you and all Marines a very Happy 242nd Birthday. I can't tell you how much it meant to see so many old faces at the St. Louis reunion. It was fantastic. Again, for those of you who served with me in Bravo Company, I thank you for your service, professionalism, dedication to doing the job and putting up with me. I am so grateful to have served with you and proud of the job we did together. I'm already looking forward to Seattle in 2019. Jimmy Didear: Good morning Marines. I wanted to wish everyone a great St. Louis reunion this year. I hope that you have a great turnout and enjoy everything. Take care and stay safe. Hope to make the next Reunion in the future if possible. Thank you for everything.

And by the by I will be glad '17 is soon to be over. With the accident in January, my knee surgery, and then I lost my mother in June, Then we had Harvey in Sept. I am sure next year will be better...Just kidding. As far as Harvey goes, we have some damage but not as bad as others. We were lucky.

### Hue 1968

Jim Coan writes: I finished Hue 1968 this weekend. It was unlike any war history book I've ever read because it gave in-depth explanations in our opponents' own words what motivated them. At times it was depressing, but I won't go into that. He mentioned my old buddy Jim Georjaklis. Jim and I went through Tank School at Camp Pendleton together. We would scour the beach at Oceanside together on weekends, looking for WOMEN. We came over to Nam on the same plane. He was sent to Bravo Company at Camp Carroll and was wounded shortly thereafter. I never saw him again. I had been stuck back at 3rd Tank Bn. in Gia Le as the Assistant S-3. A month later, I was sent up to Con Thien to replace Lt. Tom Barry. You wrote in an S-Box article that you knew Jim. I'd always wondered whatever happened to Jim after he got seriously wounded.

John Wear Replies: Thanks for the comments on Mark Bowden's book. As I was reading it, I felt as if I was reading a historical novel and not a history book per se. There are a "zillion" errors in the book but the over-all story that he conveys is a really good one.

I am truly amazed at the outpouring of condemnation of the book by the veteran community (in general), by the Vietnam veteran community, and even most specifically by the men who fought the Hue City battle. I find the trashing quite similar to the hysteria over the Ken Burn's documentary. We can get into the controversy later if you'd like to. As an aside, I have been having a very interesting on-going email conversation with Nick Warr, our guest speaker in St. Louis. Nick is in the "I-hate-it-all" camp. By the way, Nick had some very nice things to say about you and about the conversation that you two had in St. Louis.

With regard to Jim Georjaklis (Sp?): I first laid eyes on him when I reported to the provisional H&S Co. tank platoon on the 5th day of the battle in Hue City. His first words to me were, "Cpl. Wear, even though you outrank him, L/Cpl \_\_\_ will be the TC and you will serve as his gunner on F-32." Of course, being an obedient and respectful Marine, I replied, "Aye-aye, Sir." Later in the battle, I marveled as the Lt's bravery (or stupidity) as he would get in his open jeep and lead the tanks toward the sound of gunfire. When I mentioned the Lt's fearlessness, some of the other tankers told me that Jim was reported to have had a relative who served in the USMC in WW2 or Korea, and who had been awarded a Navy Cross and two or three Purple Hearts. They heard that Jim was out to best those valor awards. At the time, Jim had earned two Purple Hearts and (maybe) a Bronze Star /w V. I have no idea what awards that he received for his part as the tank platoon leader. in Hue but I fully agree with you that Jim's fearless personality was more of a factor than his quest for glory. Jim did take over as CO of H&S Company after the Hue battle subsided, and after H&S moved to Dong Ha. I

only saw him one more time and that was in that story in the Sponson Box about me being promoted or assigned to take over the 3rd Flame Section. It was fairly recently that I had asked around about Jim and one or two former H&S guys said that they thought that Jim had died of natural causes (maybe a heart attack) back in the 80's. It may have been RB English who told me that sad news.

### Seattle Reunion

Phillip McMath writes: Thanks so much for the good words. I have to pick and choose my retirement trips and I doubt if I can get my better-half ready for another tank ride. But I appreciate your thinking of me. None the less, congratulations and again and thanks for all your good work with the "Sponson Box!" Amazing what you have done!!! I appreciate it a great deal as I know do other Marines.

### From Sgt Grit's Newsletter ... "Cheech and Cong in Tanks"?

Guy Everest writes: To John Wear—I am attaching some emails that Rick and I sent to each other. You have my permission to use what I said if you so desire. In the last Sponson Box on Page 8, there was a letter published that was from the Sergeant Grit Newsletter. It made all of us tankers and Vietnam veterans sound like nothing but a bunch of dopers. I know when the Army came up to the DMZ area in the spring of '68. You must have been there at that time also. The doggie tanks looked in pretty good shape. I didn't see any graffiti all over the inside. And yes, while people could smoke wacky weed, it wasn't blowing out of the tanks like this idiot said. I find it very offensive, especially the way Marine tankers, and Vietnam tankers in general, what is portrayed in this article

Guy Everest: To Rick (Lewis)—There is an article on Page 8 in the most recent issue of the Sponson Box magazine with the caption "From Sgt Grit's Newsletter." Now I know you were from the 1st Tanks and with me never having been that far south, I cannot really say if it is true what the alleged Marine grunt says about the tankers. And especially about the tankers chewing beetle nut and smoking pot all of the time; plus, some other things that this "grunt" says. No, I'm not going to say I never had a little smoke in the Nam, but it was never on the tank ... and the inside (of the tank) was never so smoky that when you open the hatch, smoke would billow out. But again, I never served down south so I would like your thoughts on what this grunt says about Marine tanks, especially since I was there in '68 but didn't see what he saw

Rick Lewis replies: OK, found it. I was only at Hill 55 twice, and that was to make major repairs on my tank, and that was in '67. I never remember anybody chewing beetle-nut ... that stuff sticks to your teeth. Do you remember the gooks had black teeth from chewing it? I am sure >>

that a Marine would not go there. Now maybe the H&S tanks from Bn HQ that guarded Hill 55 at night might have been smoking pot, as they had it made in the shade. When I was there getting my tank repaired, the H&S tankers had a nice hardback hooch, nice showers, good mess hall with an ice cream machine, movies and USO shows. They wanted my crew to take the watch one night while we were up there. I told them, "No way! My crew was going to catch up on sleep." They had this S/Sgt. come after me. He shows up in pressed utilities and clean jungle boots and no weapon. This is mid-67 and things out in the bush had really picked up. So, I told him that his tankers back in the rear have no idea how easy watch was back here. First of all, they are on a high hill with dug in positions; they have at least 10 rolls of concertina wire in front of them with mines all set in, plus 200-300 Marines to back them up. I told him, "Try sitting up at night with nothing around you and no moon in Dodge City, as we called one area that the gooks owned. I told him to screw himself. It cost me an ass chewing from the HQS 1st Sgt. the next day, but at the end he said he understood what we were up against. He had been Company Gunny for 1/9 on his first tour. That was right after they moved to the DMZ and got their name "The Walking Dead."

Guy replies: 1st Sgt. (Lewis). That was another case of insubordination. I don't know how you stayed in the Marine Corps ... LOL

You kind of made my point on this story. It is apparent that the Marine takers did not chew betel-nut, especially as the person writing the story would want you to believe. And I don't remember anybody inside of the tank smoking that wacky weed. Maybe in a bunker at night, yes. But the story writer would have you believe that would be like Cheech and Chong's van, full of smoke and full of weed. So, I have to wonder about the credibility of the story. I also have to wonder why it was posted in the Sponson Box,

I also have a little trouble, or a lot of trouble, with it being the same old Marine Vietnam veterans who are nothing but a bunch of dope heads. People like the person that wrote the article makes us all out to be nothing but dopers. Well, most of us, including yourself, went on to become functional members of society along with being fairly good citizens, not some dirty unwashed pothead. Whoever wrote that article just wants to portray some of the general public's incorrect views of Vietnam veterans as nothing but a bunch of pot smoking, long-haired drop-outs from society etc.

Rick writes back: Guy, you are right about the writer of the story. You should take what you wrote and send it to John ... and reference the guy's story. Its fake news, just like the New York Times. Guy replies: That's a good thought. From what John told me, he had very

limited access email after Aug 1st. I think I'll edit or title it "Cheech and Chong in Tanks."

### A Career in the Corps?

Richard Peksens writes: After my 6-month extension in NAM, I was denied an additional extension because "more officers were waiting for field commands." When I rotated back to the states in December of 1969, I was sure that the war had been won and only required some "mopping up" activities. My experience as S-2 of 2nd Ontos Battalion at Lejeune was uninspiring. We were spending weekends sleeping aboard trucks waiting for the call to quell riots in DC, and spending the remaining time polishing boots and antiquated equipment. The final straw was when the battalion CO asked me to comparatively price goods at both the Exchange and Piggly-Wiggly, as his wife had complained about the Commissary prices! I refused, got a bad Fitness Report, and put in my resignation.

Had I known that the Marine Corps was going to find continued opportunities around the world, I would have gone to Piggly-Wiggly!



Does this corpsman look familiar? ... Doc Forsythe

### Welcome Home

From a Post on Facebook: In 1969, I was working for a supermarket after coming home from Vietnam. I was pushing a grocery carts and this cute little girl come walking up to me and asked me where the Santa Monica airport was. All I could do was stare at her in disbelief for it was one of the twins from Playboy magazine's Miss June 1968. I proceeded to tell her the story of me looking at her every night in my bunker in Vietnam. I then gave her a ride to the airport and I was invited to a party on Sunset Strip at the Pipe Wake Up because of this kind gesture. It was the most fun I ever had my life ■

## Above & Beyond

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

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\*\*Anonymous

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# Four Urgent Questions for the U.S. Marine Corps

BY JAMES HASIK  
January 12, 2016, The Buzz

In October 1957, Commandant of the Marine Corps General Randolph Pate sent Lieutenant General Victor Krulak a brief memo with a simple question: “Why does the U.S. need a Marine Corps?” Recalling his work on a study in 1946, to save the Corps from “summary destruction” by Marine-hating President Harry Truman, Krulak responded simply that the U.S. did not need a Marine Corps. As he later wrote in his book *First to Fight*, the United States didn’t need a lot of things, but the United States wanted a Marine Corps. At a recent meeting at the Brookings Institution, I had the opportunity to take in ideas from almost a platoon of senior officers of the USMC, and many less martial-looking think-tankers from around Washington. These prompted me to devise four incendiary questions about the best future for the service.

As Krulak admitted in considering that weighty question, the U.S. Air Force flies pretty well, and the Army has shown at Normandy and elsewhere that it once could take beaches. In theory, any army or navy can train and equip landing troops without constituting a separate service. The Royal Australian Navy’s helicopter carriers *Canberra* and *Adelaide* will soon carry troops of 2nd Battalion, Royal Australian Regiment, and helicopters of both Army Aviation and the Fleet Air Arm. The French *Armée* and *Marine Nationale* have a similar arrangement. But a look at comparative military organization worldwide suggests other models too. Today’s Swedish Amphibious Corps was once part of the Coastal Artillery, which was once part of the Army, before being amalgamated with the marine regiments and mine units, and reassigned to the Navy in 1901. Like the Royal Marines, they operate their own landing craft; U.S. Marines rely on the U.S. Navy for anything larger than a rubber boat.

## More of What?

American Marines know that any of these models can work, so the service maintains a healthy paranoia about how to best serve national strategy—if only, as Aaron O’Connell notes, to best serve the Marines’ Few Good Men fanaticism for being Marines. They grouse incessantly about the Navy’s failure to budget for enough assault ships, knowing that marines without ships are like paratroopers without planes. Indeed, I heard one Marine officer assert that demand from the regional commanders for conventional forces can justify a fleet of 50 assault ships. That’s easy when the four-stars have wars for which to prepare, but no budget battles to fight. To start the exercise, though, what’s not in that demand? To what specifically should the Marines be comparing their own utility, with an eye towards grabbing their share of a flat-lining military budget? And of what should they be offering to build more?

Whether characterizing themselves as amphibious or expeditionary, as America’s 911 or crisis-response force, Marines

emphasize that they’re a bit more ready most days than the National Guard. As such, the Guard is not the organizational rival. Plenty of Marines might be quite happy if the Regular Army and Air Force would focus on preparing for the Big War, so that Marines can claim authority over the small ones. Their post-Benghazi establishment of the special tiltrotors-and-infantry air-ground task forces was brilliant. Everyone seems to want them. The Army and the Air Force could have accomplished the same, but didn’t, if only because they still don’t play together quickly and seamlessly. All Marines do, and this can recommend future strategies.

## On What Kind of Ships?

Second, if the Marines could budget for the ships they ride, how would the design of the individual ships differ from the pattern today, and how would it differ the overall composition of the fleet? Over time, I have garnered a few opinions from Marine officers, and most loudly about boats. The helicopter carriers *America* (LHA-6) and *Tripoli* (LHA-7), plenty insist, should have been designed with well decks. Sometimes I wonder if the Corps doth protest too much. While future Americas will be their own subclass with well decks, I am still trying to understand how this dispute arose, for the whole point was to increase hangar bay and fuel capacity for the Marines’ own rotorcraft and jump-jets. It’s a unique organization strength—getting away with complaining about getting what you want.

Even so, this is a conventional question, around since the development of the helicopter carrier in the 1950s. In contrast, in the November 2014 issue of *Naval Institute Proceedings*, retired USMC officer J. Noel Williams recommended something very different. In “A Fleet for the Unmanned Era,” he proposed the “frigate helicopter dock”—a ship very similar to, just larger than, the Royal Danish Navy’s innovative *Absalon*-class support ships. Each of the 6,000-ton Danish ships carries its own medium-range missiles and five-inch cannon, but has

room for a few helicopters and landing boats, as well as 200 troops. At a proposed 10,000 tons, Williams’s concept might be properly a “cruiser helicopter dock,” though as *Defense News* editorialized, nothing says flexible like frigate. The added tonnage is not merely because Americans like to supersize all things, but so that the ships could carry Osprey tiltrotors and larger landing craft. As an added benefit, the well deck could handle all sorts of boats, manned and otherwise, for littoral operations. As the Navy works to distribute its lethality, the Marines would distribute their presence, and flourish not by having more amphibs, but by making every ship an amphib. Moreover, as Williams stressed, the huge investment in American lives represented by a Marine unit afloat merits protection that today’s otherwise benign assault shipping does not afford.

## Fewer Marines for More Ships?

So, how to pay for this construction plan? If the Marines—or the Navy for that matter—controlled the budget for the troops and ships, might they trade off the former for the latter? The Navy is ruining the material condition of its ships by endlessly responding to Washington’s demands for Cold War forward presence on half a Cold War fleet. Marine ground and air units, however, are not as overcommitted. When the Corps insists that national war plans require enough shipping to move simultaneously two brigades—effectively two (ground) regimental combat teams, two composite air groups, and two logistics regiments—it’s natural to ask why the Corps maintains enough force structure for seven or eight of those.

There are some easy answers to that last question. In the Second World War, after their Marines were busy fighting ashore, the Navy would want its transports to regroup, refit and find other Marines to assault another island. A plausible scenario like that is hard to imagine today, but Marines not on ships are still available to fight as infantry formations, supporting those war plans elsewhere in the world. That the force structure is not in the Army is partly because the USMC is in-

stitutionally valuable on its own, and partly because, as General Krulak observed, Americans seem to want it that way. But that doesn’t mean that Americans want or can even best use their Marine Corps exactly as it is.

## A Smaller-War Corps?

For a fourth question, consider what the Marines so proudly do year-in and year-out. As another Marine officer noted, crisis response has meant non-combat operations nine times in ten, and frequently humanitarian relief. Marine Expeditionary Units are comprised of (infantry) battalion landing teams, composite air squadrons, and logistics battalions, but they almost never fight together as such. In light of the preceding three questions, how might the Corps reorganize for the raiding and rescues it most often undertakes?

This could mean, as Scott Kinner recommended in that same issue of *Proceedings*, a “custom-built Corps,” even more matrixed than today. Alternatively, it could mean a Marine Corps organized permanently around its MEUs, and more focused on distributed operations. Or, for those less combative missions, perhaps each Marine division should have an engineer regiment, rather than just a battalion, so that MEUs could travel with more engineers, and perhaps even Seabees, traded for less infantry. To cover the globe, the Corps might want more, smaller MEUs, even before they’re cruising about on Williams’ frigates. Few in the United States seem enthused about committing divisions of troops to the Middle East, and a small-war approach might actually be, as Robert Newson of the Council on Foreign Relations advises, more cost effective. Such a reorganization could be more not just strategically effectively, but organizationally competitive, in sharpening the Marines’ proposition within the useful aspects of inter-service rivalry.

James Hasik is a senior fellow at the Brent Scowcroft Center on International Security. He thanks the Brookings Institution for the invitation. This article first appeared in the *Defense Industrialist*. ■

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# What Members Are Doing

## Hue 1968 Book Signing in Denver



John Wear (right) interviews Mark Bowden (left), the author of *Black Hawk Down* and *Hue 1968* at a book signing event at the University of Denver in October 2017.



Ron Knight's daughter was getting married in October and she purchased matching socks for the bridal party. This was the label on Ron's pair of socks.

## Greg's Way Cool Ride



Greg Martin just acquired a 1955 Oldsmobile to serve as a "Chick Magnet." Good luck Greg!!! Hopefully, we'll see this beauty when we reunite in Seattle in 2019!

## Marine Corps Ball 2017, Santa Maria, California



(L to R) Capt. Rich Horner, Esther Moreno, Rebecca Horner and VTA member Armando Moreno. Capt. Horner was awarded the Silver Star during the Battle of Hue City, Feb., 1968.



Catherine Matzenauer Tunget writes: This is my family—four generations of Tunget men! Three of these amazing men having bravely served our country! My son Ashton's too young yet! (L to R) Tom Tunget (Sgt., U.S. Army); Justin Tunget, (CPO, U.S. Navy); and Lt. Colonel Everett Tunget (USMC, Ret.).

Ev Tungent writes: A few months ago, I was at NAS Whidbey Island to witness the "pinning" ceremony for my grandson's promotion to CPO. He's a Chief Machinist's Mate in an electronic warfare squadron which has recently transitioned from A-6's to FA-18's. In his 12 years of service, he has had two tours in Iraq and one on the USS Harry Truman in the Eastern Med. Obviously, I'm very proud of him for his service to our country but especially proud of him that he is proud of that service!

He wrote the following to put his service in proper perspective to the life style of his contemporaries: "My friends go to college, I go to war. At the same hour they wake up to decide not to go to school or work that day, I've been at work for hours. Their alarms wake them up, but my alarms send me to cover. They make plans based on how they feel while I do as the schedule that was put out for me demands. They can't wait to leave their homes and I can't wait to get back. However, when we look back on our respective lives they'll like theirs. In contrast, I'll be damn proud of mine!" ■

## V. A. News & Updates

For more VA information please go to our website  
[www.USMCVTA.org](http://www.USMCVTA.org)

**VA Burial Benefits:** The VA offers two different types of Burial Benefits when a Veteran passes away-

**Service Connected Burial Benefit-** If a Veteran passes away from a service connected condition or a presumptive condition that was not previously claimed, the VA will pay a one-time payment of \$2,000.

**Non-Service Connected Burial Benefit-** If a Veteran is in receipt of a monetary award from the VA (VA Disability Compensation or Non-Service Connected Pension) or passes away at a VA Medical Center or VA Contract Care Facility while enrolled in VA Medical Care, the VA will pay a one-time payment of \$300 and possibly reimburse the person who paid for the funeral the cost of transportation of remains from the place of death to the funeral home as long as the amount is broken out in the itemized funeral bill.

**Plot Allowance-** The VA will pay a \$749 Plot Allowance for internment costs of the Veteran as long as the Veteran is eligible for receipt of service connected or non-service connected burial benefits. The VA will pay the \$749 Plot Allowance to a State Veteran Cemetery for internment of a Veteran regardless of eligibility of the Service Connected or Non-Service Connected Benefit.

**Survivor's Benefits-** There are two different Survivor Benefits that a Surviving Spouse/Child under 18 (or unmarried child enrolled in school under the age of 23)/or Adult Helpless Child of the Veteran may be eligible for:

**Dependency Indemnity Compensation (DIC)-** DIC is paid to an eligible spouse/dependent if the Veteran passed away from a service connected condition, a

previously unclaimed presumptive condition, or from any condition if the Veteran was rated 100% (or Individual Unemployability) for 10 years or longer. Note- The Spouse had to be married to the Veteran for at least one year prior to the Veteran's death and will lose the DIC award if they remarry before the age of 57. If they do remarry before age 57 and lose the DIC Award and that subsequent marriage ends in divorce or death, the Surviving Spouse may file for DIC again due to the Veteran's passing.

- Basic DIC Rate is \$1,257.95/Month

- If the Veteran was rated 100% (or I.U.) for 8+ years and married to the same spouse for at least 8 years, the Spouse will receive an additional \$267.12/month

- If the Surviving Spouse is entitled to the Aid and Attendance Rate (Based upon the need of help with activities of daily living), the spouse will receive an additional \$311.64/month.

\*\* Note- If the Veteran was a DOD Retiree and paid into the DFAS Survivor Benefit Plan (SBP) (6% of the monthly retired pay which allows the Surviving Spouse to receive 55% of the Veteran's Retired Pay at the time of their death) and also qualifies for DIC based upon a service connected cause of death, the current Federal Law does not permit payments of both SBP and DIC. The current Federal Law only allows the payment of the greater amount and possibly the SBP/DIC Offset which is currently \$310/month.

**Survivor's Pension-** This is the only other type of Survivor Benefit. To be eligible, the Veteran had to have wartime service, had to have at least 90 days >>>

of active duty service before 1980 or at least 2 years after 1980, been married to the surviving spouse for at least one year prior to the Veteran's passing, and then meet the financial requirements of having less than \$80k in assets (not to include the spouse's primary residence). Assets include additional houses, excessive property, amounts in checking/savings accounts, IRAs, stocks, bonds, mutual funds, trusts, etc... If below the \$80k threshold, the VA will determine the Pension Rate that the spouse would be eligible for. Once the rate is determined, the surviving spouse's annual income- which includes all sources of income to include Social Security (which will be adjusted by subtracting recurring monthly medical costs) must be below the Maximum Annual Pension Rate for that specific level of Pension. Note- If a surviving Spouse remarries after the death of the Veteran, they will lose the Pension and can never claim it again regardless of what happens to the subsequent marriage.

- Basic Pension Rate- If the surviving spouse can live on their own and take care of themselves.

Maximum Annual Pension Rate is \$8,656.00/year

- Housebound Rate- If the surviving spouse can live on their own and take care of themselves but are indoors all day and need help to leave their residence.

Maximum Annual Pension Rate is \$10,580.00/year

- Aid and Attendance Rate- If the Surviving Spouse requires assistance from someone else to

Take care of activities of daily living (Bathing, dressing, feeding, etc...) then the cost of Home Healthcare, Assisted Living or Skilled Nursing can be counted as recurring monthly medical expenses. This is the only level that these costs will be counted as medical expenses. Maximum Annual Pension Rate is \$13,836.00/year

The VA will never pay above the Maximum Annual Pension Rate for the level that they qualify for. For example, if a spouse is entitled to pension at the A&A Rate and the cost of assisted living is more than his/her income, the VA will pay \$13,836.00/year or \$1,153.00/month.

#### VA Rating Criteria ♦ Review & Update | Dental and Oral Conditions

If you've ever wondered how VA rates disabilities for compensation, you'll be interested to know that after more than 70 years they are doing a review and update of the rating criteria for all 15 body systems. Previous updates have been done as needed, but this is the first comprehensive review of the VA Schedule for Rating Disabilities. <https://www.benefits.va.gov/WARMS/bookc.asp>. The first of these updates, for Dental and Oral Conditions, went into effect 10 SEP. This update includes updated medical terms, new diagnostic codes for conditions previously rated under other conditions, and added disability levels. No existing dental or oral conditions were removed.

Often referred to as the "VASRD" or rating schedule, directs claims processors on how to assess the severity of disabilities related to military service. While VA has routinely updated parts of the VASRD, for the first time since 1945, VA is updating the entire rating schedule to more accurately reflect modern medicine. Since 2009, subject matter experts, including physicians, reviewed each of the 15 body systems that make up the VASRD. This effort is part of VA's continued commitment to improving the delivery of disability compensation benefits to Veterans and modernizing our systems.

If you have a claim or appeal pending for a dental or oral condition before Sept. 10, 2017, VA will consider both the old and new rating criteria when making a decision. All claims for dental or oral conditions received by VA on or after Sept. 10 will be rated under the new rating criteria. If you are already service-connected for a dental or oral condition and submit a claim for increase, your disability rating may increase (or decrease) based on the new rating criteria. However, VA will not change your disability rating just because of the update to the rating criteria. In the coming months, more body systems will be updated until all 15 are modernized, ensuring VA provides the most accurate ratings for disability compensation claims based on modern medicine. [Source: VAntage Point | September 8, 2017 ++]

#### VA Individual Unemployability Update 04 ♦ No Cuts in 2018

Months after Veterans Affairs officials dropped plans for a controversial benefits cut, the families of those who would have been affected still fear they could lose thousands in monthly payouts. Confusion over the short-lived plan this week forced department leaders to issue a letter to veterans groups clarifying they will not change the Individual Unemployability program in fiscal 2018, and are looking for other cost-saving solutions in the future. "The department does not support a termination of [the program]," VA Secretary David Shulkin wrote in a letter to

veterans groups Thursday. "We are committed to finding ways that empower disabled veterans through vocational rehabilitation and employment opportunities."

Advocates praised the move, noting they have been inundated with questions about the potential cut, even months after Shulkin said the department was abandoning the proposal. At issue is a provision in the federal budget plan unveiled by the White House last spring. Included in plans for a \$186.5 billion VA budget for fiscal 2018 was a provision to dramatically change eligibility rules for the IU program, which awards payouts at the 100-percent disabled rate to veterans who cannot find work due to service-connected injuries, even if their actual rating decision is less than that. The program is essentially an unemployment benefit for veterans not officially labeled as unable to work.

Administration officials had considered stopping those payouts once veterans become eligible for Social Security retirement benefits, arguing that retirement-age individuals should no longer qualify for unemployment payouts. Veterans ineligible for Social Security would be exempt. The move would have saved \$3.2 billion next year alone. But it also would have taken away thousands of dollars annually from up to 210,000 veterans over the age of 60, a move which veterans groups decried as devastating. After a public outcry, Shulkin publicly dropped the idea in June. "The budget is a process, and it became clear this [plan] would hurt some veterans," he told lawmakers during a Senate hearing. "I'm not going to support policies that hurt veterans."

But concerns about a potential cut have lingered. Leaders from veterans groups said they have received numerous letters and calls in recent months from veterans who still believe the cuts are under consideration. Shulkin's latest letter is designed to end that speculation. In it, he promises to continue working with veterans groups on future changes to the program. Administration officials have said they want to re-examine the IU program in the future but don't want that debate to take away from other budget priorities. The federal government is currently operating under a three-month extension of the fiscal 2017 budget. Congress must find a long-term solution or a short-term fix for the funding fight by mid-December, or trigger a partial government shutdown. [Source: MilitaryTimes | Leo Shane III | October 13, 2017 ++]

#### VA ID Card Update 11 ♦ Must Obtain New Photo Cards Online

Honorably discharged veterans of all eras who want a new identification card from the Department of Veterans Affairs will be able to apply online by registering with the VA and uploading a photo, officials said. Officials had previously told Military.com that the process will include an online application, but offered no further details. A 2015 law requires the VA to issue a hard-copy photo ID to any honorably discharged veteran who applies. The card must contain the veteran's name, photo and a non-Social Security identification number, the law states. To apply for the card, veterans must register with [www.Vets.gov](http://www.Vets.gov), a process that authenticates users through the ID.me system, VA officials told Military.com on 16 OCT. Doing so requires users to upload a copy of a valid government photo ID, such as a driver's license or passport, and provide their Social Security number, among other information. To complete the card application process, users will then upload a recent photo to the VA site that can be printed on the ID card, according to a lawmaker who introduced the legislation requiring the IDs. The cards will be directly mailed to the veteran. No further information was available as to when in November applications will open, the turnaround time for the IDs or a specific address on the VA website where veterans can apply.

The ID cards are meant to offer a way for veterans to prove their service without carrying a copy of their DD214, which contains sensitive personal information such as veterans' Social Security numbers. The new IDs will not, however, qualify as official government-issued identification for air travel or other uses. "Every veteran — past, present, and future — will now be able to prove their military service without the added risk of identity theft," said Rep. Vern Buchanan, a Florida Republican who introduced the ID card legislation in 2015. "These ID cards will make life a little bit easier for our veterans."

Vets who receive health care from the VA or have a disability rating can get a photo ID VA health card, also known as a Veteran Health Identification Card. Military retirees also hold an ID card issued by the Defense Department. Veterans are able to get a proof of service letter through the VA's ebenefits website. And some states will include a veteran designation on driver's licenses if requested. The new VA ID card program begins as the military exchange system opens online shopping to honorably discharged veterans of all eras. That benefit, which will officially launch on Veterans Day, requires veterans to first be verified before they can shop. The benefit does not allow shopping at brick and mortar exchange stores or the commissary and does not include base access. [Source: Military.com | Amy Bushatz | October 16, 2017 ++] ■

## To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

"On thy grave the rain shall fall from the eyes of a mighty nation!"  
Thomas William Parsons

#### George F Kassick

Kassick, George F., 69, Mineral Point, PA. Died Dec. 6, 2016, at Conemaugh Medical Center. Born Jan. 5, 1947, in Johnstown. Marine Veteran of the Vietnam War, he received the Purple Heart. Retired from Open Hearth Dept., Bethlehem Steel Corp. Member of Praise and Worship Center, Prospect; American Legion and Conemaugh Eagles. George had a great personality and enjoyed making people smile. His family was his greatest treasure.

From Dick Carey: George was Louie Ryle's loader and then mine when we were with Bravo Co, 3rd Tank Bn, 67 / 68.

From Roger Luli: I was George's ("Frog") platoon commander in 1967-1968. We served on Bravo-21; we were known as "The Dirty Dozen minus 8." I have a picture of us on the tank and I have pictures of the rest of the crew as they look now. With your permission, I would like to I pose the now pictures on the tank. I will send a preview to you before I share it with my fellow tankers in September. My sincere condolences on George's passing

#### Edward Stanley Wojciechowski



Edward Stanley Wojciechowski Jr. 69, born in Jersey City, New Jersey on April 6, 1944, passed away September 13, 2013 at the Seattle VA Hospital in Seattle, Washington. "Wojo" served his country with the United States Marine Corps and was an early member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, National Rifle Association, Moose Lodge and Fraternal Order of Eagles in Port Angeles, Washington. He loved to fish and hunt. He is survived by son Edward J. (Cynthia) Wojciechowski of Rancho Santa Margarita, CA; daughter Crista Marie; sister Louise Burnstad of Florida; brother Steve Wojciechowski of Arizona; grandsons Michael and Mark Wojciechowski of Rancho Santa Margarita, CA.

We are remiss in posting this in a timely manner...

#### Terrence "Terry" M. Dunphy



Dunphy, Terrence "Terry" M., 60, of Barrington, Vermont, passed away Monday, May 6, 2008, in Evergreen House Health Center. He was the husband of Gail (D'Orlando) Dunphy. Born in Wakefield, he was the son of the late Raymond and

Catherine (Coleman) Dunphy. Terry was an employment interviewer for the Department of Labor and Training and was also a Vietnam Veteran during which he served two and a half tours in Vietnam with the Marine Corps as a corporal tank crewman. He received the Navy Commendation Medal with a Valor device. He also coached Little League, Basketball, and Soccer for many years. He also was a long-time member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

We are remiss in posting this in a timely manner...

#### Colonel Melvin Paul Sams USMC, (Ret.)

August 19, 1942 - January 19, 2008

Retired Marine Colonel M. Paul Sams, 65, of North Kingstown, died unexpectedly at home on January 19, 2008, with his loving wife Mary by his side. He was the son of Melvin and Eleanor (Cross) Sams. He was born August 19, 1942 in Greensburg PA.

Colonel Sams served 24 years in the United States Marine Corps, receiving many honors. He entered the Marine Corps as a Second Lieutenant in 1960. During his three tours in the Vietnam War, Col. Sams served as an advisor to the Vietnamese Marines, a U.S. Marine tank company commander, and a force reconnaissance officer. He served as Commanding Officer of the Marine Barracks, Quonset Point, R.I. from 1969 to 1972. He served tours at Headquarters Marine Corps, Recruiting Station Chicago, and Marine Corps Base Quantico Virginia.

We are remiss in posting this in a timely manner... ■

## When the War Came Home

By ANDREW WIEST—VIETNAM '67

MAY 23, 2017 for The New York Times

If you visit the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, go to Panel 20, Line 3. It is near the top, so you might have to crane your neck. There you will find the name Donald M. Peterson. “Pete,” as he was known to his buddies, was the lone American to die in a small-scale battle that took place in the Mekong Delta on May 15, 1967 — a battle recounted in a column in this series last week.

The battle never made the papers and was not covered on the nightly news. Peterson’s is just one of the 58,315 names on that wall. But that single name meant everything to a tiny family back in California.

Jacque McMullen had grown up as a military brat, following her stepfather from base to base before landing in Santa Maria, Calif. Smitten by one of the first boys she met in her new high school, Jacque asked Don Peterson to the Sadie Hawkins dance, and the two quickly fell in love. There were football games, surfing and cruising before high school ended, and then it was time for a grown-up future together. The couple wed in the spring of 1966; Don was 19 and Jacque 17.

They found a tiny apartment and had barely started their new lives when the news arrived: Jacque found out that she was pregnant the same day that Don received his draft notice. In May, 1966, Don reported for training at Fort Riley, Kansas, where he and Jacque shared a house with two other young trainee couples.

Don used his final leave to take Jacque to live with her parents, who now lived in Alabama. Jacque barely made it home before she went into labor, giving birth to James by C-section in late December. Don was able to hold little James only a single time, and then it was off to war. Strictly against doctor’s orders, Jacque went with Don to the train station, hugged him goodbye and said: “Don’t run out and be any kind of hero. Keep your head down. We need you.” As the train pulled out of sight, Jacque dissolved into tears and buried her head into her stepfather’s shoulder.

On May 15, 1967, Don Peterson’s squad was caught in a Vietcong ambush. Don’s comrades were being shot to pieces. They were all going to die unless somebody did something. Don shouted, “You guys run like hell, and I’ll cover you!” He then waited an instant before jumping to his feet and firing his M-16 on full automatic to give his fellow soldiers a chance to live. Seconds later he was hit in the chest by enemy fire and killed. Back in California, where she’d recently returned, Jacque Peterson was curled up in bed with little Jimmy, having just celebrated her first Mother’s Day.

A couple of days later, Jacque was drinking an A & W root beer at a friend’s house when a knock came at the door. Jacque had better rush home, a neighbor said; there were a bunch of military guys at her apartment. When Jacque got there, she found three immaculately clad military men seated on her couch. One stepped forward and said, “Mrs. Peterson, I am sorry to inform you that your husband has been killed in action in Vietnam.” Jacque was sure that the news was wrong. They had the wrong Peterson. Her husband, Don, was still alive. It all had to be a mistake.

It was about two weeks after the battle of May 15 that Jacque got the call that she should come down to the mortuary to identify Don’s body. She dropped Jimmy off with a friend and went inside, shaking uncontrollably. The funeral director told her to take all the time she needed. She inched over to the open coffin, and there he was. Her Don. She couldn’t cry; she just sat there talking to Don about everything

— their son, their house, their future. Four hours later a friend came in. Jacque had to go; Jimmy needed her. Jacque was only barely able to bring herself to leave Don’s side, turning to say, “I’ll be right back,” as she left.

Three days later, Don Peterson was buried with full military honors in Arroyo Grande, Calif. After receiving her folded flag at the end of the ceremony, Jacque sat alone in her apartment for hours cradling little Jimmy. She was 19 and a war widow, and had a 5-month-old son. What was she going to do now?

In frantic hope of finding a future for herself and her young son, Jacque met and married David Bomann, who promised to love Jimmy as his own. The couple decided that David should adopt Jimmy and that for the good of the future, the memory of Don Peterson had to be set aside. The Bomann family grew and prospered, moving to a tiny vineyard.

Jimmy loved his dad, but by the time he was in high school he began to suspect something. He didn’t look much like his two younger siblings, and he got the feeling that his dad didn’t treat them the same as him. Eventually he confronted Jacque with his suspicions, and she took him up to a footlocker in the attic and introduced him to his biological father, Don Peterson. That day changed everything. Jacque realized that she had tried to replace Don Peterson in her life, to fill the gaping wound in her soul. But it was a wound that would not heal. Her marriage crumbled, while Jimmy went in search of a past denied.

Jacque and David later divorced, and she threw herself into her new future as a single mother. She held down two jobs, put herself through nursing school and raised three children on her own. As a mother and a nurse, Jacque Bomann finally found herself, but life remained sadly incomplete. For his part, Jimmy had something of a rebellious streak, and was in and out of trouble for a few years. He got to know the Peterson side of the family and later even attended reunions with his father’s military buddies to hear stories about his dad from those who knew him best. Jimmy now has a family of his own, and a successful career in the music world, but he still can’t help feeling cheated that he never got a chance really to meet his dad.

Today Jacque Bomann is a retired, doting grandmother. She has had a happy life, she says, but sometimes she reflects on what might have been. She wonders how a war so far away affected her life so thoroughly.

“He was my best friend,” she told me recently, thinking of Don. “We had great plans. He was the man of our little family and was doing such a great job. To this day I resent having to play out this life thing all by myself, without him. It’s not fair. In a little corner of my heart I am so sad I am alone. When I openly talk about Don, I seem to sit in that corner where all my feelings truly are. My husband’s memory keeps me happy.”

Standing at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial wall, trying to take in the meaning of it all while gazing at the seemingly endless list of names, marching off into the distance in carefully regimented rows, can be overwhelming. Yet each name stands in lieu of the memory of a man who desperately wanted to live and to love. Each etched name marks the shattered hearts of parents who opened the door one morning only to see a casualty notification team that bore the tidings of their son’s death.

Of the total number of American dead in the war, 17,215 were married. Each of those names stands for a widow left to face the future without her beloved husband and for children who would never have the opportunity to know their father. Their dads were not confidants, baseball coaches or shoulders to cry on. Their dads, like Don Peterson, are now just granite names.

Andrew Wiest is a professor of history at the University of Southern Mississippi and the author of “The Boys of ‘67: Charlie Company’s War in Vietnam.” ■

## Short Stories

### Caves

BY JOHN HUNTER

John, this is my response to Mark Suthers story about the cave some of the communications guys dug under their tent in Chu Lai. This is one of those stories where I know most of the people involved, Tom Snyder, Mark Suthers, Lt. Lemon, Lou Cavelli, Capt. Bertrand, Lt. Warner, Gunny Fierros and Doyle Harp. Tom was part of the 3rd. Platoon, so I knew him very well. I was not part of the digging crew, in fact this is the first I have heard of the tunnel. When 1st Tank Battalion arrived in Chu Lai, we also tried to dig a well for water, as I remember; we got no water, except for a little sweat.



In the photo: Stan “Willy” Williams, Rick “Smitty” Smith and “Hammer.”

What made me want to respond to Mark’s story was his comment about Marines doing stupid things, I wrote a story a few years ago about Jesse Salinas and myself taking a truck ride and staling the truck in a stream, but I have already told that story.

Last year, when I was having some work done on my Jeep Cherokee, I went across the road to have breakfast. I met a WWII Marine named Ray “Pete” Piper. After talking to him for a while, he told me he had written a book on his war experiences titled “The Forgotten Battalion.” Pete was part of the 2nd Division, which was stationed at Camp Pendleton at the time. He was assigned to the 3rd Battalion, 1 Battery, 10th Marines. I Battery consisted of what was called a 75 mm, pack Howitzer, meant to be portable, and easily transported. It was mounted on two wheels, and was pulled or towed; most of the time it was pulled. The strange thing was he told me they never fired them in combat. He spent most of the war as a “grunt,” the good old rifleman.

These are a list of the engagements Pete participated in during the war:

Talagi, Gavutu, Guadalcanal, British Solomon Islands, Tarawa, and a second time in the British Solomon Islands,

Saipan, and Guam. This all happened from July 1, 1942, to October 20, 1944; that is why they called themselves the “Forgotten Battalion.” They thought someone forgot where they were.

When I read the following paragraph in his book, I thought to myself, you mean Marines screwed off in WWII like we did in Vietnam? Pete’s words:

“By the time Gavutu was pretty secure we stated to clean up a little; by that I mean we were washing out dungarees in the ocean and managed to wash our hair and bodies a little bit. Some of us went swimming and fooling around; a couple of us found a little row boat with only one oar. The Japs probably threw the other one overboard. Anyway, we started out in the ocean, but with only one oar you can’t navigate very well and we drifted out a little too far. We kept drifting farther and farther into the channel. Then, the current started to carry us to one of the other islands, when out of nowhere a sea plane came taxing up and wanted to know if we needed help. He put a rope on our boat and pulled us back to Gavutu. You can guess what happened. We got our asses chewed out good. I guess that’s all part of being a Marine, they don’t know any better. That was some boat ride!”

So, evidently, screwing off Marines, as Hank Williams Jr. would say, “It’s a Family Tradition.”

### Stories from Jim Cowman

TICH TAY SHOWERS

The 1st Tank Bn. civic affairs section was assigned the small village of Tich Tay. This village was located near Chu Lai. The battalion did the usual “good” things for the village, improved the school, provided med caps and dent caps, provided security, etc.

One of our brainstormers had to do with the construction of shower facilities near the small hospital/dispensary we had constructed in the ville. These showers were 55-gallon steel drums, mounted on a short scaffold with some sort of rope pull device to release the water. The drums filled by rain or manually from the river nearby. Soap was provided and promptly stolen. Of course, the sun would warm the water.

The 55-gallon drums were stolen faster than we could replace them. We wondered why the locals valued the drums so much. We gave up on the shower caper when we found out that the 55-gallon drums made excellent ovens to dry fish in. Showers and cleanliness could wait. Dried fish were most important!

Before Christmas, the Tank Bn. moved north to Da Nang and I am sure the lumber in the scaffolding and the dispensary went into the villages’ cooking fires. >>

## Bullet Hole Decals

In early 1967, the 1st Tank Bn. was firmly in place near Da Nang. Alpha Company was left in Chu Lai while the other gun companies supported Marine infantry units in the Da Nang TAOR.

The battalion had a maintenance facility with a concrete pad. Ceremonies and formations were held on this pad when visiting dignitaries rated such a performance. During one such change of command function, a visiting VIP alertly commented on the battle damage visible on several of the tanks. These M-48A3 tanks had recently been fitted with a "vision ring" or "doughnut" as it was called. This vision ring device enabled the tank commander to see in all directions with his hatch "buttoned up." The vision ring had eight or so vision blocks in it. The glass of those blocks was nearly seven inches thick.

What the tank crews had done was obtain some decals that resembled bullet holes in glass and they placed several of the decals on the vision blocks. The alert VIP spied the decals, commented about the vicious close combat and then left. The tank crews laughed for days.

## Mattress on Your Backs

Participants in the Vietnam conflict rated an R&R trip sometime during their tour of duty. A week's R&R was a nice break, and servicemen spent their week in exotic places like Hong Kong, Australia or Hawaii.

The standing and best joke about meeting one's wife on R&R went as follows: The serviceman would write his wife or girlfriend and tell her that when he got off the airplane, she better have a mattress strapped on her back. Most girls wrote back and said that the mattress would be in place but he had better be the first one off of the plane!

## Am I in Heaven?

BY: JIM COAN

My Alpha Company tank platoon was assigned to help defend Con Thien during the fall, 1967, siege by the North Vietnamese Army.

The three hillocks on the northern portion of the Con Thien perimeter all had artillery forward observer teams from 2/12 residing in the bunkers atop them. It seemed like those OPs attracted the majority of incoming. Periodically, a direct hit by an enemy 57mm recoilless rifle round would destroy the OP bunker and wipe out that FO team. A new bunker would be hurriedly built and reoccupied by a new FO team.

Many years later, I met up with one of those stalwart artillery FOs. He related this story to me. One early morning, he and another corporal atop OP-2, the center hillock that faced directly north, had a recoilless rifle round impact on the hillside directly below their bunker. The FOs could tell that the round had come from the east of them. They searched frantically for the telltale back blast smoke,

but they were looking directly into the rising morning sun. Meanwhile, the artillery battery CO was hollering for a range and azimuth of that enemy weapon. Just then, a second incoming round whizzed over the bunker roof. Again, nothing could be observed that would give away the NVA recoilless rifle crew's location. Both sun-blinded FOs knew their number was up. They were being bracketed. A few seconds later, a third round scored a direct hit on their bunker.

Lying flat on his back, knocked out cold by a falling roof beam, my friend gradually began to regain consciousness. Slowly opening his eyes, his vision blurred by a cloud of dust particles floating in the air, he saw a face looking down on him with what appeared to be a halo over that other person's head. "Am I in heaven?" he asked.

"Nahh," replied the other Marine. "You're still down here in hell with the rest of us."

## A Tense Moment

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

It was probably early September '68 and we were up in the hills out west somewhere between Khe Sanh and LZ Stud. I don't remember how many days we were out but it was hot, and resupply that was based on weather, cloud cover, our location, and the needs of other units was sporadic at best.

The trails up there were few and it would be another week or so before we came across what looked like a park trail. For now, the vegetation was thick and the going was slow and monotonous. Even though the sun was partially hidden by the treed canopy, it still bore down hot and heavy, and it exhausted everyone as we made our way forward and upward.

We stopped for a breather with our packs against trees, rocks and the ground. If sweat and grime was currency we were some wealthy grunts. During a day's "hike," the body burns up lots of water and those who know better bring plenty and consume it wisely.

While stopped, a swig of that precious liquid was better than any beer ever tasted.

Fear and thirst seem to be related. When combined with the elements, it takes a strong will to ration resources. One guy was out of water and very thirsty. Maybe it was fear or the heat; or maybe he was just too new to know better. He sat and watched as others put canteens to their lips for that brief moment of relief. Another pulled his down and passed it over to the parched Marine. As fine a gesture a man could make. "Thirsty" took hold of it and drank it down, all of it.

The benefactor, with his eyes ablaze, looked at the glutton and raised his rifle in the direction of death and ... everything and everyone, stopped.

No shots were fired but we understood. The following morning it started raining and it lasted for four days. For young men to come this far down the line of humanity was, and still is, troubling. >>

## AN HOA TANKS

BY EV TUNGENT

This is from Lurch's CO, Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Bn., Ev Tungent, who talks about Lurch's "command presence."

When I assumed command of Bravo in April '66 while we were still at Marble Mt., I recall being impressed with the mess hall we had. It was a "strong back tent" just like the many ones next door to us in the Cantonment Area used to temporarily house units awaiting assignment. Well, it used to be one of the Cantonment Area "strong backs" and Cowboy Smith felt they had so many that one wouldn't be missed. As the story goes, one day Cowboy took the 2nd Plt. over to the Cantonment Area, placed everyone at strategic points around the frame, then bellowed out: "Pick it up!" They then proceeded to walk it quite some distance into our area, and, "Voila," we had a "strong back" mess hall!

That mess hall gained some additional fame when 2/4, commanded by Lt. Col. "P. X." Kelly (later CMC General Kelly), was moved up north from Chu Lai and staged in the Cantonment Area awaiting further assignment from Division. They had been moved up by ship and all their garrison equipment was sitting aboard the ship in Da Nang Harbor. Our company cook, Sgt. Gladden, came to me and said that if 2/4 would give him their cooks and some mess-men, he could feed them hot chow in our mess hall while they were there. I said, "You know you're talking about feeding some 1,100 men, don't you?" He vowed he could draw the rations from Navy Supply in Da Nang and, with 2/4's help, could pull it off. I went over and presented the offer to Lt. Col Kelly and his XO, Major Ernie DeFazio. They happily agreed and we fed that Battalion three meals per day (and night) for over a week. Lt. Col Kelly wrote Sgt. Gladden up for a Navy Achievement Medal which I gladly forwarded to 3rd Tank Bn Headquarters.

In re: to Bill's Silver Star, he might never have received it, at least for his actions in the An Hoa Basin Area, if we hadn't gotten tanks across the Song Thu Bon a few weeks before. When I was asked by the new CO of 9th marines, Col. D.J. Barrett, if we could get tanks across the river to support operations out of An Hoa, I told him there was a possible fording site I wanted to check out. Long story short, I took Bill with me and we waded the river, poking the gravel bottom with tank bars for over 200 meters from the north bank to the south bank, learning that we indeed did have a good fording site. As an aside, I always felt that Bill and I should have received a separate award for that little escapade. We were walking across a river whose south bank was a bit unfriendly and from which we did receive small arms fire on our way back to the north bank! Oh well!

Not long after our fording site recon, we crossed the Song Thu Bon with 4 tanks of Bill's 2nd Plt., the Headquarters tanks, including the Flames and the Retriever, some Am-tracs with an infantry company from 1/9, and met 1/3, which had been heli-lifted into the eastern portion of the

An Hoa area to conduct a sweep of the area toward Hoi An, an operation called Macon. Not much of a successful operation, but we did have tanks across the river. When we got back to the fording site, I left the 4 tanks of Bill's 2nd Plt on the south bank and re-crossed the river with everything and everyone else. As I remember, Tom, it was your tank which was back at the Hill 55 CP being repaired. I told Bill that we would get his other tank to him as soon as possible. When the tank was ready, I contacted Bill by radio and arranged for him to be at the fording site on the south bank to receive Tom's tank and be up to full strength.

I was in my tank intending to "talk" Tom across the river to keep him properly aligned, since his driver would be "buttoned up." Under the heading of "best laid plans," Bill jumped on the platoon net before I was able to come up and proceeded to "cheer lead" Tom's tank across, and I couldn't get a word in edgewise, as the saying goes! Then, to make matters worse, when the tank got to the other bank, they pulled it up on a sand dune to drain water out of the bottom, which had leaked in through the "water-tight" seals of the driver's hatch. At this point, all of a sudden, Bill and everyone else decided that radio contact with the "Skipper" was not a priority, and they were ALL gathered around Tom's tank to oversee the draining operation.

Let's stop here for a moment. If I could have gotten my hands on Bill right about then, he would NOT have eventually earned the Silver Star because I would have killed him on the spot! However, all's well that ends well and the 2nd Platoon of Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Bn., 3rd Mar Div. went on to achieve great things, along with all the other tankers I was privileged to command.

## Small World

BY MICHAEL GIOVINAZZO

SGT. "A" CO. 1ST AT'S

All of us have experienced, at some time, how two seemingly unrelated people or circumstances turn out to have a profound relationship to each other and to ourselves. One such story, for me, unfolded 50 years after the fact, in a place I would have never expected.

Two previous stories that I wrote for the Sponson Box, unrelated to each other, caused this story to come to light. The first of the stories concerned L/Cpl. Victor Tarasuk, of Rachel, West Virginia, a member of my Ontos crew, killed in action on December 22, 1966. The story goes on to explain how 31 years after Victor's death, I formed a relationship with his parents and sister in 1997. The story further states, since that time, I make the trip twice each year (Veterans Day and Memorial Day) from my home in New York State to Fairmont, West Virginia, to attend the memorial service at the Marion County Vietnam Memorial in Fairmont. Victor Tarasuk is one of the 28 names on the polished granite wall at this memorial site. For 19 years I looked at the names on this memorial wall. During the course >>

of these years I have, at times, entered the names on the internet's Vietnam Wall sites where I could read about each of the listed names.

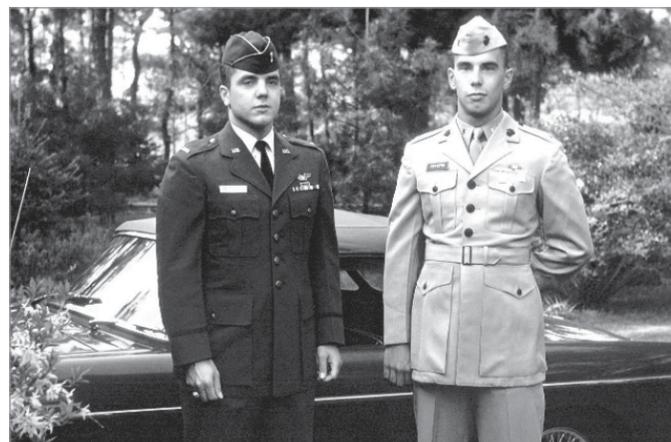
During the ceremony on Memorial Day of 2016, A West Virginia state senator was the guest speaker. The senator spoke of knowing several of the people listed on the wall from his youth, one being his best friend. He stated that we should never forget these young men, that we should get to know something about them and pass on our memories of them. His talk inspired me to again look up each name on the memorial, this time in greater detail. I used both the Virtual Wall site and the Texas Tech site, which is the most detailed. After I entered the fourth name on the wall, Pfc. Daniel Stutler, and saw the results of that fourth name on the memorial wall, I was able to view information, complete with a photograph, unit designation and date of death related to it.

Something stored in my mind came forward. The photo was someone familiar to me. I learned his unit was "D" Co., 1st, Battalion 1st Marines and the date of his death was July 4th, 1966. The date, unit and photo brought to my mind the story of L/Cpl. Robert Gage, MIA, which was a story I submitted to the Sponson Box. L/Cpl. Gage was a platoon member of 3rd Plt. "A" Co., 1st AT's, who went MIA on July 3rd, 1966, at about 1600 Hrs. We were part of a section of Ontos (2 or 3) that was sent to support the 1st Plt. of "D" 1/1. In the story I submitted, I stated that during the late evening hours after L/Cpl. Gage went MIA, the platoon sent out a small ambush patrol. The patrol was ambushed after proceeding a very short distance, causing a firefight that lasted only seconds. A reaction squad was then sent out to assist and shortly returned with the ambush patrol, one dead Marine and one dying. Due to the fog of time, what I had incorrectly submitted in the original story was that the ambush, and resulting deaths, occurred on the night after the L/Cpl. Gage, MIA incident, and not the night of. Using the command chronologies, I was able to get the correct facts. The chronologies of 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, and the chronology of the 1st Marine Regiment, contained the ambush and the L/Cpl. Gage incident.

I remember the corpsman working on the Marine, barely still alive, and him stating that if he does not get an immediate evacuation, he will not live. The evacuation could not happen due to the location of the platoon and the darkness. Shortly after, the corpsman pronounced him dead. I will always remember the Marine's baby face and reddish blond hair. I never knew his name, or anything else about him, but I do remember him as we hung around the platoon area in the daytime prior to the ambush. This platoon was a good bunch and we fit in easily. We engaged in the usual conversations of young men that age: girls, cars and war stories. For whatever reason, some people stay in your memory more than others. Maybe seeing him dying was the reason. In any event, his photo was not unfamiliar to me, even after 50 years.

During my recent visit to the Marion County Vietnam memorial ceremony, Veterans Day of 2016, I was asked to be the guest speaker. Having just found out this information, it became the subject of my talk. After I spoke, a young man came to me and thanked me for speaking of his uncle, Daniel Stutler. This young man was born years after Daniel died, but he knew of him from family and photographs. I thought to myself uncle; that sounds so old. Daniel died just short of his 19th birthday. I don't know if other Vietnam veterans think about age as I do, but when I am thinking about my time there, my brain switches from now to when I was 19 and 20 years old. It takes me a while to readjust when I see a gray headed old guy, either wearing a Vietnam hat or talking about the Nam. My first thought is, he must have been a senior enlisted man in Vietnam. Once I recalculate, I then see them as 19. It could be the Peter Pan syndrome of never aging.

I found the grave of Daniel Stutler on my last trip to Fairmont. This will now become part of my routine, visiting the grave of Victor Tarasuk, Daniel Stutler, and Michael Romanchuck, who died of wounds in the same incident as Victor. Michael is buried in Hellertown, Pennsylvania, which I pass and stop at on my way to Fairmont. One never knows where the journey through life will take us, or what you may find. One thing is for certain, if you don't explore you will find nothing.



Richard (Dick) Peksens writes: My nephew just sent me this photo. I never had seen it. My brother, Rudi, was recently commissioned in the Air Force and would later become a Phantom pilot and Brig. General. I have only my OCS (Nat. Defense) ribbon on my chest... Note the MGB in background.

We called the National Defense Service ribbon the "SHIRLEY HIGHWAY RIBBON" due to the weekly dangerous drunken swoops along that highway into DC while attending OCS/TBS at Quantico. We lost two of our officers along this highway during OCS (probably an average per TBS class). I would estimate that 25% of officers had

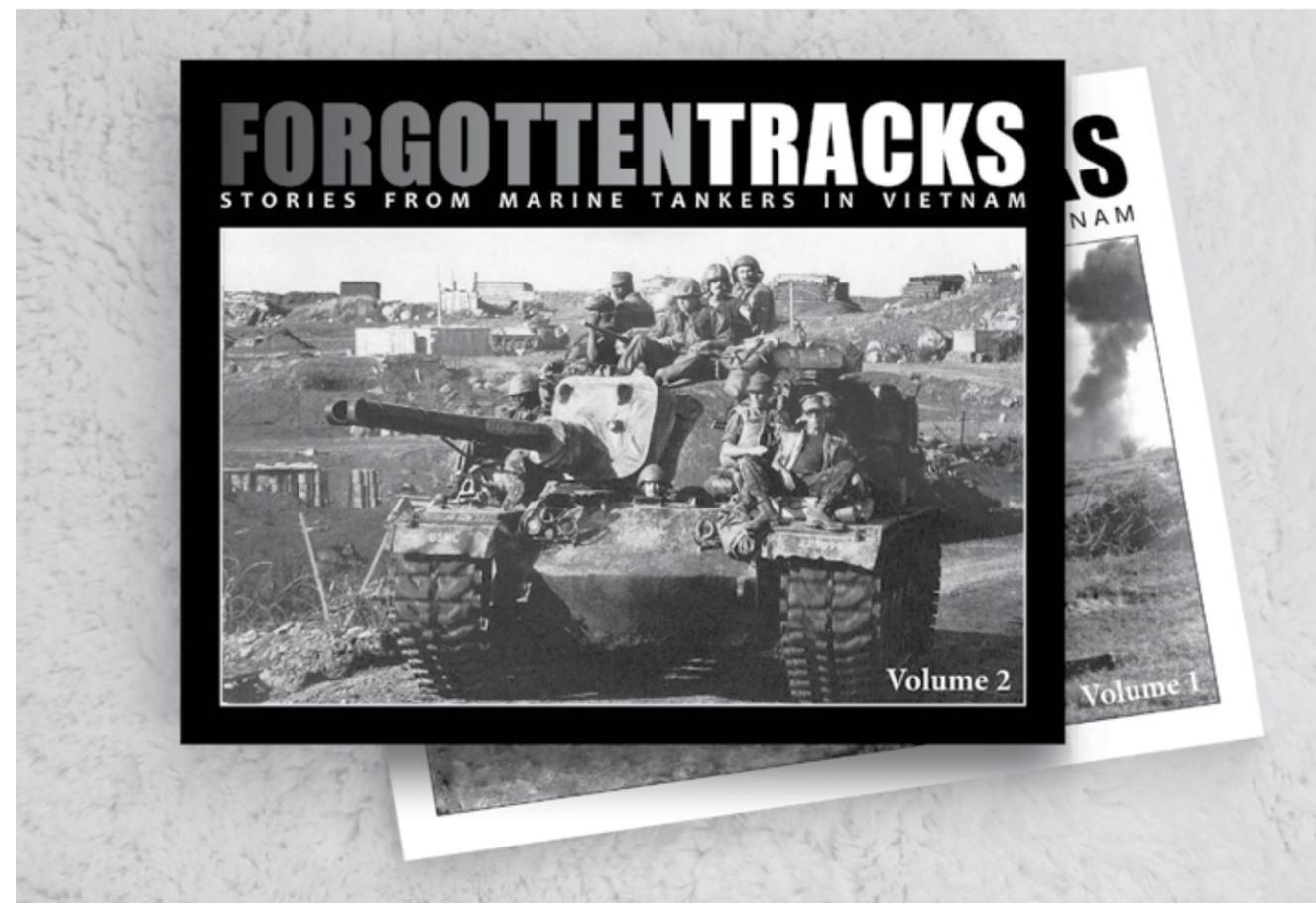
*(Continued on page 30)*

## The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association History Project **Forgotten Tracks Volume 2**

A very limited number of copies still available!!!

**\$40.00 per book**

(Price includes shipping cost)



During our most recent reunion in St. Louis, we sold out all of the copies of **Forgotten Tracks, Volume 2** that we had brought to the reunion. **We now have just 30 copies of Volume 2 for sale!!**

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(Price includes shipping cost)**

# Marine Tankers take on St. Louis

BY MSGT. BRUCE C. VAN APELDOORN, USMC (RET.)

As they have done since 1999, the members of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association (VTA) met for a reunion September 21-25 in St. Louis, MO. These reunions, held every-other year, help to satisfy the organization's mission of "ensuring our legacy through reunion, renewal and remembrance." Over one hundred twenty of the organization's nearly five hundred members attended with family.

The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association is a non-profit fraternal organization (brotherhood) of United States Marines and Navy Corpsmen veterans who served with any of the three Marine Corps tank battalions (1st, 3rd and 5th Tank Battalions) or anti-tank battalions (1st, 3rd and 5th Anti-Tank Battalions) in Vietnam between 1965 and 1970. Membership is open to any and all military occupational specialties (MOS) that were assigned to a Marine Tank Battalion including: tank crewmen and officers, Ontos crewmen and officers, tank repairmen, optics repair, ordinance, armorers, supply, office clerks, cooks, motor-t, and our beloved Navy Corpsmen.

The four-day reunion consisted of lots of visiting in the hospitality room, The Torsion Bar, named after a tank suspension part, bus tours of The Arch plus other points of interest in St. Louis, an auction which the funds are used to supplement the cost of the reunion, and a formal dinner on the last evening. At the farewell dinner there were 215 in attendance. Beyond these basic ingredients of a reunion, there were some special events.

## Multi-generational Marine Combat Experience Oral History

Several years ago, the Directors of the VTA decided to make an investment in an oral history project to record members combat experiences in Vietnam. Former 1st Lt. Peter J. "Pete" Ritch heads up the oral history and

In the photo: Former 1st Lt. Peter J. "Pete" Ritch interviewing (L) Retired 1stSgt. Al Nelson, (C) Former Cpl. Ed Hoffman and (R) Former Sgt. Joe Tyson

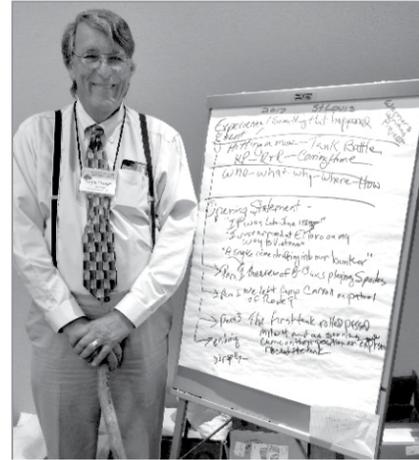


conducts each interview. There's a collection of these high-quality video interviews at the VTA web site under Members Stories. Some of these stories have hundreds of hits with one receiving over 8 thousand views from around the world.

In St. Louis, due to a dozen members of the Marine Corps Tankers Association in attendance, a video oral history was made that included tanks in combat on Iwo Jima and in Korea and Vietnam. Retired 1st/Sgt. Al Nelson recalls his experiences making a beach landing on Iwo Jima with 'C' Co., 5th Tank Bn. Former Cpl. Ed Hoffman takes about seeing 60,000 Chinese Soldiers while serving with 'C' Co. 1st Tank Bn. in Korea. Former Sgt. Joe Tyson, 'B' Co. 3rd Tank Bn., provides insight to landing in Chu Lai, Vietnam and participating in Operation Starlight. A rare opportunity to have a glimpse of initial combat during three different periods of Marine Corps History from the Marines who were there.

## Members Stories

At the VTA web site, under Members Stories, is a brief statement "How to submit a Story." Over the years it has been enough to capture hundreds of stories which fill the Sponson Box, another tank part which its name is the title of the VTA 48-page magazine (published 4 times each year). Over the years, so many stories have been submitted that Pete Ritch has published two books, *Forgotten Tracks I & II*, and is preparing to print III. Back issues of *The Sponson Box* can be found at the VTA web site under the News tab while copies of the *Forgotten Tracks* series can be purchased at the VTA Store.



Frank L. "Tree" Remkiewicz teaching a Warrior Writers workshop

During the St. Louis Reunion former Cpl. Frank L. "Tree" Remkiewicz decided to mentor several of the Marine tankers by hosting a workshop about developing articles in the *Torsion Bar*. "Tree" had several interested Marines who just needed a little guidance to get to recording their combat experiences.

## Fallen Heroes



Robert E. "Bob" Peavey at the USMC VTA podium presenting "Fallen Heroes"

The cost of the Vietnam War included one hundred fifty Marine tank crewmen and seventy-six Marine Ontos crewmen KIA. At the conclusion of each reunion, the dinner is the format used by former Sgt. Robert E. "Bob" Peavey to present "Fallen Heroes."

Bob conducts research and meets with family members of the fallen to develop an in-depth presentation of who the Marine was prior to his death. This also provides Marines in attendance an opportunity to talk about their comrade. Normally, one or two presentations are made during each reunion. It is a sad but healing part of the reunion.

## Future Plans

The final announcement is the location of the next reunion. We have decided to visit Seattle, WA in the fall of 2019. Until then the Marine tankers plan to hold mini reunions, read the *Sponson Box*, and watch the VTA web site for more reunion news. ■

# REFLECTIONS FROM A GATHERING OF WARRIORS



Larry Parshall, Jim & Diane Jewell, Pete Ritch in the Torsion Bar



Guy and Carol Wolfenbarger at the Welcome Table



Greg Martin and Fred Kellogg kept the PX running smoothly



Of our 20 "first time" attendees Bob and Pat Bonderud



Left to Right: Jay Miller, Bob Skeels, Miss "What happens in Saint Louis, never happens," Bill Davis and Dave Ralston



"Hughie" at the St Louis Arch



Ontos crewmen Lou Najfus, Mike Giovinazzo and their wives.



During the membership meeting Jim Raasch fills us in on the Torsion Bar hospitality room and the fund raising auctions



JJ Carroll, Greg Martin and John Wear enjoy the Pizza/Pasta Party



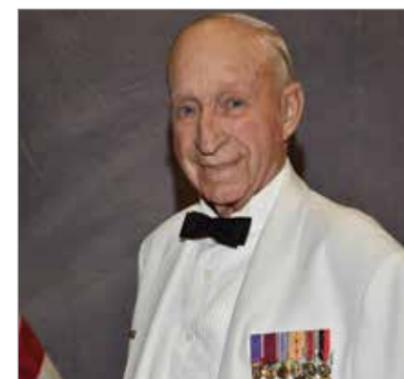
Capt. Mike Wunch's sister, Suzan, entertains some of the Alpha Co, 3rd Tank crewmen: Virgil Melton, Jan "Turtle" Wendling, Hank Fuller and Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz



Doc Gene Hackemack and Bobby Joe Blythe on the tour bus



"Sparrow" & Juanita Moad, Bruce Van Apeldoorn and "Boston" enjoy the St Louis museum



1st Sgt. Al Nelson, USMC (ret) sang "God Bless the USA" at the Farewell Banquet and that's not all ... while a tank crewman, he landed on Iwo Jima, served in Korea and in Vietnam. And at age 91, he's still going strong



Maj. Jack and Judy Schuyler getting ready for the banquet



Clyde and Adrian Knox meet a sweet young local lady



Monte's 1st Tanks logo



Belmo brought the whole gang



Dick Laurence and his family



Nick Warr, our guest speaker was grunt platoon leader during the 1968 battle for Hue City, gave a rousing presentation



The Young Marines did us proud



Harold and Laura Riensche



Roger "Blues" Unland makes a point with John Wear and Harry "The Hack" Schossow



Bruce and Nancy Van Apeldoorn enjoying some lunch



Rick and Joy Lewis on the bus to the Arch



Tony & Kathryn Simms



Thanks to Jim and Bonnie Raasch the Torsion Bar hospitality room was flawless

# America's Finest, So to Speak

BY RICHARD "DICK" CAREY  
Bravo Co., 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks, 1967/1968



During the first week of September, 1967, I was assigned to the tank retriever, the *Bodacious Bastard*. I had arrived at Camp Carroll, Bravo Co., 3<sup>rd</sup> Tanks the week before, having come from H&S Company located at Gia Le (Phu Bai). My very first job at Bravo Company was serving as a trash man emptying the numerous trash barrels throughout the base camp but, that's another story.

At Gia Le, I was assigned to the tool room, driving the fork lift during the day and serving with the 3<sup>rd</sup> Tank Battalion Reactionary Rifle Platoon performing convoy duty, listening posts, patrols and night ambushes. I also served as security for the retriever when it would hit the road to perform services in and around the Phu Bai area.

That first week in September it was drizzling rain as the monsoons had started early. Gunny "Cob" Davis had informed the tank retriever crew that the next morning we would be replacing the new track that had arrived for *Bodacious*. As fate would have it, three of the minions of the retriever and a man from the transport platoon were assigned duty as a four-man listening post 500 meters outside the defensive wire for that evening

That night, the crew, I, Terry Bochinno, and Milo Askay decided that we needed to cut the listening post short and to be in the rack by no later than 2100 hours. Without informing the fourth man, George Claxton, a plan was concocted.

As evening approached, our four man listening posts assembled in front of the maintenance platoon's perimeter bunker and were given instructions and passwords from the Sergeant of the Guard. Once we received those orders we proceeded through the maze of concertina wire and out into the extremely dark night.

Bochinno and Askay decided Askay and I would be on the first watch so I could do the "talking" on the radio as they believed I had a gift for the lingo. The plan went in effect.

As Askay and I stood the first watch Bochinno and Claxton got some 'shut-eye.' Or I should say Claxton did.

For the first hour and forty-five minutes everything went according to the rules of a listening post. Every 15 minutes I would call in and the command bucker would respond:

"Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, over."  
"Lima Pappa One, this is Lima Pappa, Go."  
"Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, Rotation, Over."  
"Lima Pappa One, this is Lima Pappa, Roger, Over."  
"Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, Out."

The words "rotation" meant all is well and "extension" meant all was not well. This went on for six additional "check ins." Exactly seven minutes later after the last "rotation" radio transmission, the plan went into effect.

I picked up the PRC25 and said in a rushed whispered voice, "Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, over!"

"Lima Pappa One, this is Lima Pappa, Go."

A continued rushed whisper, "Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, Extension, Over!"

"Lima Pappa One, this is Lima Pappa, Come Back, Over?"



At this point I turned off the Prick 25; I ad-libbed this part of the plan. When I turned it back on 12 minutes later I picked up the mike and said in a whisper:

"Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, We have indigenous personnel in front of us, moving from right to left. Over!"

A concerned voice said, "Lima Pappa One, this is Lima Pappa, Wait One."

At this point Askay pulling his .45 fired two rounds into the ground that seems lost in the vastness of the night. I pulled out a hand grenade and throw it as far as I could. It went into a deep ditch. BOOM! Then dead silence. >>

Behind us we could hear the entire base camp moving into position. We heard the rattling of 782 gear, rounds being chambered in the bunker's .50s and the .30s, and the whirl of the turrets of the tanks as the power was turned on. As this was happening, we snickered to ourselves. Everyone including Claxton thought this was the real thing.

I once again spoke on the Prick 25, "Lima Pappa, this is Lima Pappa One, Requesting permission to pull back!"

I was sitting on the ground with my legs out-stretched in front of me; without waiting for a reply, I made a 'V' with my boots and placed my M14 with an A/R selector upside-down so the rifle would not raise into the night sky as I fired off a full magazine with the 20 rounds coming from the double spring magazine toward the imaginary enemy. After I fired my weapon the area became filled with illumination, night turned into day. As the last round left the barrel, I looked down when I felt something against my right boot. It was the muzzle of the M14!

I picked up the radio and a voice crackled, "Pull Back! Pull Back!" I said let's go! As more illumination lighting our way through the wire with Bochunno in the lead, then Claxton, and Askay right behind and I took up the rear as we raced back into the "Safety" of the compound giggling all the way. The flame tank covering a small ravine lit up the ground in the ravine offering even more light. What a coup! It worked!

Once we cleared the wire the Sergeant of the Guard was nervously waiting for us near the side of the bunker that we had departed earlier. He asked me, "Where were you tak-

ing fire from?" With my arm extended and my index pointing to the right I said, "From there." Without hesitation the Sergeant pointed to the left and said, "You had green tracers hitting at your heels as you were coming in!" I froze. I was at a loss for words, a rarity for me.

You could read the expression on all our faces as we ambled back to the hardback tents in complete silence. That night I didn't get much sleep as did the others. We didn't let Claxton in on the secret until the next afternoon. He was livid! We didn't bother to ask him how he slept. I believe not informing Claxton is the reason for the many hardships I have suffered throughout my life.

We were praised the following morning during formation by our Commanding Officer, Capt. Kent, for the excellent job we had done. It was then we learned that when the entire base camp opened up someone had shot and killed an NVA in the wire and discovered his body as the sun rose in the morning. The NVA must have gone around us to our right as his body was found in front of the second bunker on the right from the maintenance bunker.

As it turned out we did not put the new track on the retriever. That duty fell to others.

We never knew if Capt. Kent and the other Staff NCOs learned of our scheme. Life went on until the Company Gunnery threatened to kick my ass and I took him up on it. The fight never took place but, I paid later for accepting his challenge and it was not long before I found myself exiled to the Rockpile where I remained until I rotated home the first week of April 1968. ■

## Photo from Vietnam



1967 - Operations around Con Thien

# Mission of Critical Importance

BY: FRED KELLOGG

In early March 1968 I was at Camp Carroll, South Vietnam, when some unknown lieutenant volunteered me to be flown into the jungle on a mission of critical importance. He told me to grab my weapon and enough gear for a week in the field and report to the helicopter pad located a few hundred yards away. I instantly began to doubt how much thought had gone into planning my participation in this mission of critical importance because, as a tanker, my weapons were a Colt .45 caliber pistol with three magazines and one M3A1 grease gun with bad magazines. I hurriedly packed what I needed and marched myself to the supply tent to be issued an M-16 and two bandoliers of ammunition. I wanted more but the NCO in charge refused—he seemed to think it was funny a tanker was being sent into the jungle and told me to get the hell out of his tent. I turned and began walking to the helicopter pad to catch my ride still wondering what my critical mission was all about.

I was about 100 yards away from Camp Carroll's LZ when I looked up to see my helicopter begin its final approach. My ride was to be a Marine Corps CH-34—the last of the piston powered helicopters and the very same model I had seen crash within minutes of my arrival in Vietnam (I had just exited the Continental Airlines jet when a low flying CH-34 spun out of control and crashed behind some buildings). So far, this isn't looking good.

As I prepared to climb aboard the

helicopter, the officer trotted over to explain that my critical mission was to tag along with the grunts to determine if the area would support the heavy weight of our tanks. Evidently, he thought high school geology somehow qualified me to analyze the load capacity of soggy Vietnamese soil. A thought crossed my mind that maybe I should just fill a couple of my pockets with samples and bring it back for officers to do whatever officers do with Vietnamese dirt. After quickly deciding that probably wasn't a good idea, I shook the lieutenant's hand and jumped aboard.

We flew for about 45 minutes and landed in a small clearing surrounded by thick jungle. I jumped down and was directed toward the commanding officer. After I introduced myself I was directed to some Marines standing nearby and told to stick with them for the duration. No problem there—I had no idea where I was and I was totally out of my comfort zone.

I learned that these Marines were tasked with locating a battalion of NVA that may be a couple of hills over and I was told to be quiet during the march. I told one of the grunts I had no problem with trying to find that many NVA—just put me back on the chopper and I'll be back as soon as I can with my tank. He gave me the one finger salute as we began walking into the darkness of the jungle.

I know how difficult it can be to maintain noise discipline with that many Marines slogging through thick

jungle and tripping over wait-a-minute vines. But I was determined to be as quiet as possible. However, about an hour later, all our efforts were negated when I heard a Marine several yards ahead trip and fall. Although his stumble was not overly loud his scream of "Awww Fuck!" was louder than my Drill Instructor screaming at me to do something sexually impossible. I was absolutely sure the NVA heard that yell as far away as Hanoi.

The jungle continued to be so thick that I had trouble seeing more than a few yards in any direction. I was mostly trying not to lose sight of the guy I was following when I spotted two branches laying on the ground about ten feet away. One was on top of the other and I remember thinking something didn't seem right. Branches just don't fall on top of one another like that. I took a hard look and about crapped my pants; we were in the middle of a bunker complex. The firing ports were less than a couple feet above ground and camouflaged so well they were almost invisible. I slowly took a look around and saw at least five more from where I was crouched. Thank God they had been abandoned because I would have been DRT (dead-right-there). I began to wonder how much time I would get in Leavenworth for punching the officer who thought sending me out here was a good idea.

Three or four days later (I don't remember exactly how many) we were digging in for the night when we heard the pop of mortars. >>

Everyone took off running and I jumped into the first hole I found. Another Marine launched himself at the same hole and we collided full speed helmet-to-helmet almost knocking both of us out cold. I rolled over rubbing my aching head and looked at the guy trying to share MY hole in the ground. I took a second look and said, "Steve?" He looked at me and said, "Fred?" I had a best friend in high school and he had a sister named Anna Marie. Steve was Anna Marie's boyfriend and he lived about a mile from me in Vancouver, WA. Talk about a small world. Not only were we on the opposite side of the planet, we were in the same friggin' hole!



Fred Kellogg ... Then and Now

Eventually, my week of hanging out in the jungle came to an end and I was told to grab a ride on one of the resupply helicopters already en route. I spent a couple of minutes gathering my stuff and unfolding my map. I then asked the gunny, "Where in the hell am I?" He actually smiled and took the time to show me our

location so I could mark it on my map. I also marked the location of the NVA battalion, still believed to be two hills "over-that-away" (he said it like Gabby Hayes talking to Roy Rogers).

Approximately 30 minutes later, I heard the whop-whop of the tandem rotor Marine Corps CH-46. Finally, something more modern than that old mass of moving parts flying in formation trying to crash CH-34.



The flight back to Camp Carroll was uneventful and, upon landing, I walked over to my tank, patted her front fender and told her, "Honestly, it wasn't my idea to leave you this past week." Hopefully she understood and wouldn't do something stupid like throwing a track to teach me a lesson.

Approximately an hour later the "mission of critical importance" lieutenant came by for my debrief. I showed him on my map where the NVA battalion was thought to have been and I gave him my honest opinion about the terrain. Yes, the soil is dry enough to support tanks. No, it is not a good idea to send in the tanks. The jungle is so dense no one can see more than a couple of yards in any one direction. Tankers would play hell trying to support the grunts and it was almost impossible for the grunts to protect the tanks from NVA sappers, RPG teams, or even a lone NVA soldier armed with nothing more than a handgun. I got the feeling that the lieutenant already had all this information from the grunt command staff because he wasn't really paying attention to me. After about four minutes the lieutenant simply stood up and walked away without uttering another word. To my knowledge no Marine Corps tanks were ever sent into the area. ■

maro, which I wrecked on the way back from Camp LeJeune in June, 1970, and then later replaced with a 442 muscle machine that was one of the fastest production cars ever made — 0 to 60 in mere seconds. Needless to say I blew up the engine on that "Deuce" hauling ass across Nebraska's plains in the middle of a warm summer night in July, 1971, consumed by a sudden impulse to visit an old girlfriend in Denver. ■



In the photo: (L to R) Cpl. Michael Walsh, Cpl. James P "Pat" Daly, and PFC Roger McLain display the shamrocks they added to their helmet covers in Vietnam, 1968. Lt. George Norris is to the rear and between Cpl. Walsh and Cpl. Daly. He was killed in action while serving as a company commander.

*As of this writing, Washington D.C.'s Vietnam Memorial is scribed with 58,272 names—each a story of lost opportunity and heartache; ultimate sacrifices that, with time, are known and intimate to fewer. The New Guy is one of those small stories, perhaps now, forty-eight years later, important to only me, though that doesn't mean it shouldn't be told.*

# THE NEW GUY

BY MICHAEL P. WALSH

Long Island's morning fog is dense and chilly as I turn into the drive at Pinelawn National Cemetery. Idling forward, windows down, face damp, I familiarize myself with the numbering. When close, I park and get out. After donning an overcoat, I cross the roadway to walk another fifty feet over wet grass to the New Guy's permanent address: Plot 31313A in section "N".

A stunted, winter-bare tree stands watch at his grave, looking like it shades him nicely come summertime. The headstone, identical to the thousands surrounding it, is engraved with bits of personal information: He was born twelve days after me—July 14, 1947. He died March 7, 1968. Below those dates is chiseled the word "Vietnam"; further down are two letters—"PH"—confirming a Purple Heart was awarded posthumously. Exactly forty years later, March 7, 2008, I am here for a long overdue visit. Although today I know his name, for most of the intervening years I didn't. In my recollections, he has always been, simply, the New Guy.

In those dangerous days, New Guys were easy to spot. Naturally, there was the rookie's nervousness, but a clean helmet

cover was the give-away. A seasoned Marine's helmet might have a heavy rubber band encircling it, holding bug repellent and a well-used plastic spoon, but always, printed on the fabric covering his steel "pot", was the "message.": sometimes a clever or rude manipulation of a biblical phrase, other times, a less-nuanced and bold "Screw You" challenge to the enemy. The really ballsy tempted fate with a crude calendar counting-down their remaining days "in country." All written on camouflage covers stained by rain, soil and sweat attesting the helmet's uses as protection, basin and stool. In 1968, those young Marines with helmet covers awaiting a personal signature were known to the rest of us as New Guys.

I was a Marine Forward Observer Scout. My helmet cover sported a faded green shamrock, surrounded by the words "All Irish F.O.'s". Early March found Louis, my radio operator, and me attached to Alpha Company, one of two line companies of First Battalion, Third Marines providing security up a backwater of the Cua Viet River.

It was a reprieve to patrol from a fixed location, allowing us to fortify positions, improve makeshift >>

## Short Stories (Continued from page 20)

to park their cars "off campus" due to on-base speeding and DUI's. At the reunion in DC, we asked about how such violations would be handled today. They responded that BAD CONDUCT discharges would be given! We would have lost many good officers under the new regime of political and social correctness.

Lt. Dan Guenther responds: Thanks for sending. That British Racing Green MGB is very cool. I opted for a Ca-

hutches, and learn the lay of the land before, not during, ambushes. The few incoming sniper rounds were erratic—a minor nuisance, quickly suppressed; meanwhile, the weather improved daily and we were alive. There wasn't much not to like.

Yesterday, our Vietnamese-speaking S-2 Scout ("Intelligence") reported enemy combatants moving through the neighboring village after nightfall. Since it was our job to keep bad actors out of the neighborhood, Alpha was ordered on top amphibious tractors ("amtracs") in predawn dark for a rough ride over dry rice paddies to give this little 'ville called Phu Tai the once over. It was March 7, 1968. Maybe we'd find trouble, maybe not. I was thinking not.

With the bellowing of our Amtracs' dual, turbocharged exhausts announcing our pending arrival, all North Vietnamese Army (NVA) Regulars working the area would surely be long gone before we showed up. Yep, pretty sure it was gonna' be an early morning cakewalk. Map and compass were close, radio communications checked; I was alert, not anxious. Turned out I should have been.

In the glow of false dawn we were rolling-up on Phu Tai's western edge when, suddenly, a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) flew out of the tree line, blowing a hole in our lead amtrac. With it came a stupefying volume of incoming automatic weapons fire. Screams of the wounded and shouts for "Corpsman!" were coming from all quarters as Louis and I leapt off our amtrac and scrambled to a nearby trench. So much for nobody being home. Dawn had arrived at Phu Tai with a promise of some serious mayhem.

A vestige of the French and Viet Minh conflict of an earlier time, our trench was typical of those surrounding villages near the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). Just to the north of it, outside the village, was an abandoned, French-era church. It didn't show on my map but there it was—two-stories tall and roofless, one of the few solid masonry structures in those parts. My view of it was blocked by a clump of bushes rimming our trench's back edge, directly behind where Louis and I made our stand.

Looking over the forward edge of the trench, I located where Marines were digging in. Our near-instant heavy casualties and the sustained volume of incoming fire indicated a large, entrenched force—a motivated enemy that might mount a counter attack. The simultaneous "firing" of several batteries was initiated to provide a protective curtain of shrapnel while we got a handle on things.

Despite everyone's best efforts, the day went badly . . . and quickly. To my right, just beyond Louis, a Marine I had bummed a cigarette from a few minutes earlier was dead. To my left, in sequence, were another dead Marine, our wounded platoon commander and scattered beyond them a dozen, perhaps fifteen, Marines. Some dead, some wounded; those still capable struggled to keep recently issued M-16's functioning.

In the midst of all this, I received a priority radio mes-

sage advising me an NVA sniper had been spotted on the second floor of the church—the reason for the high number of casualties in my immediate area now obvious. From his perch the shooter could target men well below the trench's rear lip. It was inevitable that Louis and I were going to find ourselves on that deadly son-of-a-bitch's score card if we didn't put him out of business—and soon. Hoping to be quick enough, another artillery mission was worked up.

It was just then that I met my New Guy, part of a Marine company sent to reinforce our precarious position. As he dropped into the trench behind me, I turned to see by his clean helmet cover and the look on his face that today was his introduction to the terrors of the fight. Still, he never wavered. Suppressing the fear we all knew, he spoke the last words of his life: "What do you want me to do?" In the intervening years, neither our dire circumstances nor his response to them have been forgotten.

Quickly I pointed out the sniper's position and explained the need to keep him down while some artillery was brought on target. I don't remember precisely but can't imagine more than 15 words were exchanged. Without hesitation, turning towards the church, he took a firing position at the base of the bushes. With my back now covered, I gave the final "fire for effect" that would eliminate that menace in the loft.

Moments later, six 105mm artillery rounds landed in the church's upper story, abruptly and decisively ending the shooter's reign. Unfortunately, my New Guy missed our small victory. Moments before his demise the sniper fired his last round. It was on target and fatal. My New Guy was dead.

Although aware that he had protected me, providing time to complete the task at hand, reflection was not an option as that 7 March, 1968, engagement at Phu Tai between the United States Marines and the NVA still had plenty of promised mayhem to be played out. A brutal assault, with Marines engaging in close quarters, routed the enemy. Afterwards, in late afternoon's fading light, we searched for our wounded and killed. I don't recall there being any prisoners.

As darkness enveloped the field, "Puff", the Gatling-armed C-130 flying transport, came on station, providing covering fire as it might have been needed and dropping huge illumination flares, lighting up the dry rice paddy for the night's remaining work.

With our men accounted for, the Marines withdrew from the village and linked up to form a perimeter where, from freshly dug fighting holes, weary eyes and lethal intent were focused into evening's menacing shadows. Inbound helicopter flights soon began landing with the necessities: munitions, food, water and, oh yes, always, more New Guys. Following triage protocol, our corpsmen backload the outgoing flights with our 94 wounded. It wasn't until the next morning, 8 March, 1968, sometime near sunrise,

my New Guy and his 12 companions, each now cocooned in a body bag, were finally relieved of duty. Marines gently loaded them into Hueys for their trip back across the Cua Viet to the first stop on their rotation stateside: the morgue at Dong Ha.

Curiously, though few things have had such a profound and lasting imprint on my life, many years passed before I dared replay those long-ago, violent days. When I did, prominent and persistent was the question: "Who was the New Guy?" With research, the answer found.

Three days after the battle of Phu Tai, the Department of Defense issued its weekly count of Vietnam Casualties. The following day, March 12, 1968, The New York Times published the names of those who claimed New York as home. Last on their list of 22 was a young Marine from Brooklyn, Esau Whitehead, Jr.

The Vietnam Memorial website describes Esau at the time of his death as a twenty-year-old, African-American, single, and a Corporal in the Marines. On the Wall his name is found on Panel 43E, row 049. The record states vaguely that he died from "... ground, small arms fire, Quang Tri province." Because of the chaos of battle, it is most likely I

am the only person who knows the exact details. Wanting to share those particulars, a letter was written describing Esau's last moments; however, when unable to locate survivors, I rewrote it as the story of The New Guy, hoping someday it would land where it belongs. Of course, after all this time, there may be no family left, or, it's also possible, none that care.

But, I do. I care. So, Esau, I'm writing your final story, hoping it will find its way to those who remember that 20-year old kid from Brooklyn and wonder how it was for you at the end.

And how it was at the end was this: Corporal Esau Whitehead, Jr., you died living up to the Marine Corps motto: "Semper Fidelis" while protecting a fellow Marine you knew for less than five minutes.

Thanks again, Esau. Your family should know.

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## Photo from Vietnam

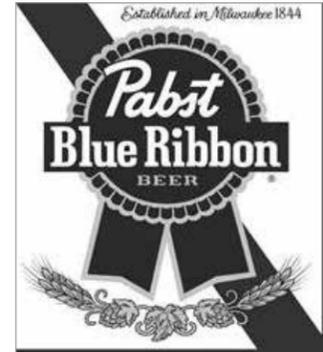
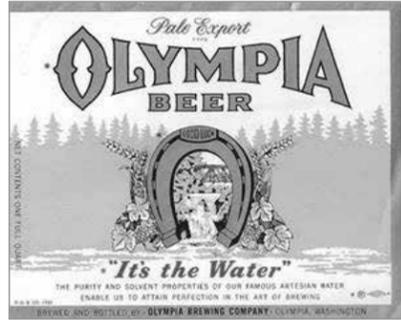


A "Sea Knight" chopper approaches an LZ

# Flat Tops: Canned Beer and Vietnam

BY PAUL LEWANDOWSKI

October 30, 2015



A soldier, sailor, airman, or Marine returning from combat has many comforts of home to look forward to: loved ones, a real bed, pizza, authentic barbecue, and of course, an ice cold beer. The modern military has adopted stringent rules on drinking overseas. This is in part because of cultural sensibilities in the countries where U.S. personnel are deployed, but also due to the erosion of conventional “front lines.” Military members of today are never far from danger, and must be constantly ready to react.

This wasn't always the case, however. Just a generation ago, during the Vietnam War, beer and combat went hand in hand. Marines or soldiers in Khe Sanh or Da

Nang would have balked if they were told they were forbidden from knocking back a cold one.

Unlike today, where tens of thousands of civilian contractors support troops in remote combat outposts, personnel in uniform performed every support function of the Vietnam-era military. Some estimates put 75 percent of U.S. troops in Vietnam as logistics or support personnel. As such, major logistics hubs grew into sprawling compounds where the war felt like a distant echo. At Long Binh, 20 miles north of Saigon, combat seemed to be the least of the military's concerns. Thirty-five hundred buildings and 180 miles of roadway filled an area greater than the size of Cleveland. Of course, duty at Long Binh was more

9-to-5 than the gruel of frontline combat. As such, Long Binh provided recreational outlets for the troops. By 1971, the base operated 81 basketball courts, 64 volleyball courts, and 12 swimming pools; an assortment of softball fields, tennis courts, craft shops, football fields, weight rooms, and mini-golf courses; archery, skeet, and golf ranges; and even a go-kart track.

Naturally, there was a club scene at Long Binh. Forty bars, which had a collective net worth of \$1.2 million, served the base's inhabitants. For personnel not into the club scene, the base also maintained an extensive system of retail stores, where personnel could spend their paychecks on beer, liquor, or less drinkable consumer goods. The military Post Exchange (PX)

placed a vast array of goods in a single storefront, not unlike the Wall-Marts or Targets of today. This shocked consumers in the '60s, since they rarely saw such a vast array of products under a single roof. The PX at Long Binh brought in almost \$800,000 a month in sales. Beer, a taste of home for many personnel on base, was a popular purchase. One estimate of total beer sales throughout Vietnam comes in at just under \$4 million a month. Given that a can of beer cost a GI around 15 cents, the 500,000 U.S. forces in Vietnam probably put away close to 32 million cans of beer a month.

Troops in the field, often infantrymen and unlucky support personnel, did not go without. While out on patrol, beer was beyond reach. At even the most remote firebases, however, beer was shipped in with the rest of a unit's supplies. Every unit seemed to have a different method for determining how the beer was distributed. Many American beer companies donated enough beer to ensure a ration for every troop. Some units would return from patrol and knock back a PBR or Schlitz as they cleaned their weapons following a mission. Other units kept the cases locked up until a designated day, when the unit could let loose. Some units even augmented their beer ration by pooling their funds and arranging for beer purchases during resupply missions to the rear.

The stifling humidity of Vietnam made cold beer even more appealing, and the U.S. military's world-renowned adaptability allowed even the frontline troops to get some cold beer — with a little planning. Support units like those at Long Binh could simply run to the PX and pick up a half fridge to keep chilled brew at arm's reach. Combat units had a tougher time. Units might requisition a clay water tub from the local economy, and barter with the locals for ice. By tossing the beer in the improvised cooler before a patrol, the unit could return to chilled Budweiser or Miller. When the might of American logistics faltered, U.S. forces sometimes drank the local beer, an iconic brand called “Ba muoi ba” or “33.” The rumors that it contained formaldehyde did little to deter consumption.



In 1965, a beer brewed in Minnesota or Pennsylvania could have easily made its way to a remote unit in the jungles of Vietnam on the other side of the world. Just 20 years earlier, the prospect of a service member drinking his favorite beer at a remote base would have been impossible. Shipping beer to the Pacific theater during World War II was so difficult that there were actually experiments to build a beer-brewing ship. The miracle of modern technology that allowed Bud, Miller, Schlitz, PBR, and Carling Black Label to get to the troops was as simple as it was innovative: the can.

Canning foods in order to preserve them has existed since the time of Napoleon. Yet canning beer proved more challenging than other comestibles. First, beer's carbonation meant that the can had to withstand up to 80 psi of pressure. Second, the metal of the can would react with the beer, ruining the taste. Despite this, manufacturers recognized the potential up-sides of canned beer. First, cans completely blocked out light. This is why glass beer bottles are often tinted green or brown. Cans however, keep out light until moments before the beer is drunk. Second, cans are less fragile. Cases can be made with cardboard and still handled roughly without fear of shattering. The can is also easily stacked and stored, making shipping far more efficient.

By the time industrial manufacturing advanced enough to mass-produce a can, Prohibition stalled the alcohol business. Prohibition was repealed in the 1930s, however, and by 1934 the American Can Company believed they had a workable design for a beer can, one that used heavy gauge steel and an internal coating called Vinylite to prevent beer-metal interaction.

American Can only needed a test market to prove to the big beer-makers that cans worked. The Gottfried Krueger Brewing Company, a small regional brewer, devastated by the depression, had nothing to lose and thus agreed to be the test market for canned beer. The first beer can came off the line in January 1935. The beer can exploded in popularity, and by the spring of that year, Krueger was buying 180,000 cans a day. Other, more highly prioritized needs for metal in an economy mobilized for World War II, however, restricted the use of cans for beer, meaning little could be sent to American service members abroad.

The first cans were made of steel, and lacked the pull-tabs common today. Instead, drinkers opened the cans with a small piece of steel called a “church key.” By 1958, aluminum replaced the steel can, but the flat top concept remained. As the Vietnam War waged through the '60s, cans evolved stateside, gaining the “pop-top” feature common today. Military personnel in Vietnam, however, still received cans with flat tops. It was small price to pay to ensure that U.S. service members got their beer, a taste of home.

As the '70s dawned and the Vietnam War drew to a close, Long Binh continued to grow, thanks to a difficult-to-control contracting system, but it too was eventually returned to the government of South Vietnam. The combat troops withdrew, and by March, 1973, only a token presence of U.S. advisors remained in the country. The stark contrast in conditions between the combat and support troops faded, as Vietnam veterans returned home and advocated for their benefits, fought against negative stereotypes, and readjusted to a civilian world that never seemed quite sure what to make of them. While some veterans' relationship with alcohol turned negative, for many others it became a strange sort of continuity. Even today, an aging Vietnam veteran can still buy a can of the same Budweiser, Miller, or PBR that he had in his youth, in a distant land called Vietnam.

Paul Lewandowski is a graduate student, veteran and writer. He prefers a good gin gimlet to just about anything else. America is his favorite country and his favorite color is a tie among red, white, and blue. ■

# LOUSY BEER

John Wear: For most of us Jarhead tankers, we were pretty well torn between the dread of hitting mines and having to go to the rear and bust heavies for repairing the damage, AND on the other side, the joy of being in the rear with hot meals, hot chow and with several EM clubs to choose to attend ... where beer was cheap, cold and plentiful. It always seemed to do us good to get the repairs done and back into the bush in order to preserve our health and wellbeing from the excessive alcohol ... even if it was 3.2% beer.

Below is a conversation about beer that was between several U.S. Army Vietnam tanker veterans who are friends of John Wear:

I do have a question for anyone who was in-country:

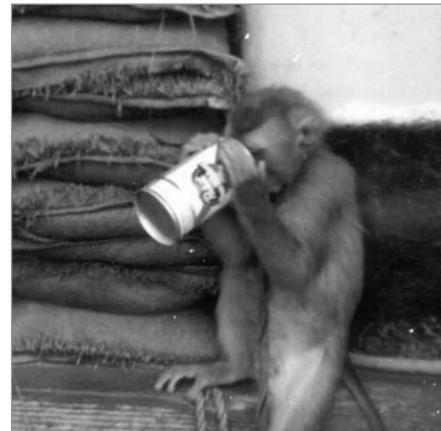
Can anyone add to this list of (disgusting) beers that they made available to us back in the day?

- Schlitz
- Carling Black Label
- Pabst Blue Ribbon
- Olympia
- Hamm's
- We never saw:
- Budweiser
- Coors

Capt. John Stovall: For you who missed it and especially "Jarhead John" who was in my AO & that is where I met him. For you who don't know it, my unit was OPCON to the 3rd Jarhead Division. They needed help up on the DMZ. I have never let him live that down. His platoon guarded the Cam Lo Bridge. I had to cross that river every day. When the 1/77 Armor shipped out of Ft. Carson, one Conex Box of COORS was shipped to Vietnam, late Spring of 1968. I will not admit who the S-4 was! As I recall, every tank had a MERMITE container on it just as the 1/69th had when I arrived in NOV 68. Additionally, there were M-85 MG Chrysler mounts for all 54

tanks. They were obtained at Pueblo Army Depot by hook or crook.

Lt. Richard Coleman: Ballantine cans were undrinkable warm. I recall finding several cans in the sponson boxes that had been there so long most of the label had rubbed off. No one I knew could drink the stuff. My tour started in July 68 and we drank beer and soda off and on all day long. No one showed drunkenness. I recall once in base camp, I took so much beer back inside my tank to the boonies, I actually was standing on it in the TC cupola. This was for the whole platoon and not just for my tank. Had we needed to fire the main gun the cases would have to be thrown out or the main gun recoil would have exploded many cans! In fact, the water was so bad that we refused to move out without the beer. I



A can of warm PBR is enjoyed by the troops

never got drunk and only had one NCO that did get drunk, but that was on Black Jack (Daniels) and not 3.2 beer. I had one private discussion with the man and never had the issue come up again. I would drink a warm beer every morning at 4:00 am and it really woke me up like a slap in the face! That was also the time when "Charlie" liked to fuck with us, so I needed to be wide awake. Hot beer did the trick!

Coors was not available nationally until around 1986, so it would not have been in the Army inventory

during our war. I recall drinking it when it was smuggled into Georgia in the late 70's. It was prohibited east of the Mississippi River then. Remember the show "Smokey and the Bandit?"

If beer was unavailable during your tour, then your first sergeant and or XO were not making it available to you. Anybody in Bravo Co. during my seven months as XO had plenty of beer available to them, and if they say anything different, we'll blame it on PTSD rather than say they are lying! Same goes for ice. I did not forget what a tanker experienced once I left the field as a platoon leader.

Sgt. Hal Shaver: When I was in Infantry, the only beer we could get was Ballantine. In the field we had to get it through the XO. It seems like a case was around \$5. By the time the XO, convoy people, and pilots got their share, there was about a 6-pack left.

PFC Carl Rogers: It was standard protocol that each tank member was rationed one beer per day, to replace the salt and to help with re-hydration. It was actually flown out to us on helicopters—four cases of beer per month, all types and different brewers. Someone stole a marmite can from the mess-hall to keep the ice cold. Our own Lt. Rich Coleman, after giving me my re-up talk, crawled up on the tank to join me in celebrating my "NO" decision. True that. One time I ended up with a case of Ballantine ... we couldn't drink that crap. When opening up the road one morning, I threw a can to an old Vietnamese man, he bowed gratefully. The next morning, I threw him another ... he threw it back ... forcefully. Pretty sure he wanted to hurt me, but it just bounced off the turret.

Sgt. Roger Urban: Rusty, filthy cans of beer was normal, same with the soda cans. I drank two Tiger beers and had the squirts for three days!!! What a waste of gourmet C-Rat's!!! ■

As a teacher of English, I employed many hours and years, and invested much effort to develop my vocabulary in order that I could fortify and strengthen the vocabularies of my thousands of students. I used the tact that the more extensive one's practical vocabulary, the more likely one might have the exact tool needed to convey one's thought, idea, concept, or understanding. A limited vocabulary was much akin to equipping one's toolbox with a hammer, screwdriver, and a pair of pliers, and using one of those no matter the task.

It is, then, with some regret that I admit how often, and with what variety I use the single word: shit and its derivatives. In the classroom, for too many years I euphemistically bantered other phrases, the most common was my reference to the compound nitrogenous waste of a male, bovine animal.

My thirteen months in Vietnam were punctuated with quite a few circumstances and experiences from which I must make varied reference to the simply word: shit. Sometimes it hit the fan, sometimes it only came close.

Many of us, Marines, soldiers, sailors, and airmen alike, might recall that first realization that those black, billowing clouds of smoke we encountered upon arriving in country were not due, as first expected, to the aftermath of enemy attack or destruction, but to the burning of the shitters. I recognize that I never was given the opportunity to participate in that activity, and further it would be severely inappropriate to wear the commemorative "shit burner" patch sold by so many vendors of veteran commodities. I did, of course, use the shitter. Like most, I marveled at the design and effectiveness of the screened parlor, the primitive use of plywood, and the simplicity of the hole set effectively above the halved 55-gallon drum ele-

gantly anticipating the offering from above; waiting to catch the shit from above; waiting without discrimination for that plop of Caucasian or Black man; the runny mess or Christian or Jew; the stink of Native American, or fart of a Latino or diarrhea of officer or enlisted man; draftee or lifer. And whatever the ingredients of those

worse with time and sweat. It turned out that these industrious Vietnamese cleaners did an adequate job of cleaning the things we left with them, BUT then dried them in an enclosed room with the heat of a fire fueled by water buffalo shit. That was the only time I used the cleaner and, in fact, they were quickly gone.

Another apology to those guys permanently or semi permanently out in the boonies, but there were occasions when I got a Sunday morning which I could begin by jumping on a six by and get to Mass...and then, get back to the CP and

have the morning off. These were the times when I could round up something to read, tuck it under my arm, and make my way to the shitter for, perhaps, a good dump and a new issue of Stars and Stripes.

I do not remember his name [I'm glad I don't, so I can't vilify him by name] but somewhere during my tour of duty, H&S had a new Company First Sergeant. Undoubtedly looking to further his Marine Corps career, this man seemed bent on squaring his troops away, and enacted a few non-traditional activities for Marines in a combat zone.

One of these directives was that we would stand morning formation each morning. At that time he would address the troops, list his complaints, and then, have us police the area. This was NOT a popular addition to our routine. "Top" railed against the slovenly way he perceived our CP looked, and was met with a disgruntled, less than cooperative response. He wanted a spotless area, one he could be proud of, and he announced he personally would inspect the area daily.

By the second or third morning, his announcements and his displeasure were united as he notified the Company that someone had desecrated his area by taking [and leaving] a >>

## Hitting the Fan... and Some Near Misses

BY STEVE FALK

ripe barrels, each was ceremoniously dragged from below the opening in the screened shitter, replaced by its equal, filled with diesel, and set aflame to mark the passing of another day in Vietnam.

I am sorry for all those Marines whose assignments kept them in the boonies, near primitive LZ's, outposts and seemingly unending sweeps and other such places. I lived, I guess, in relative luxury, actually sleeping in my own bunk a night, maybe two nights a week. Assigned to the S-4 section, I was able to change utilities when needed. After being in country not too long, I was made aware that some ambitious indigenous Vietnamese began a laundry and I could drop my clothing at a hut within our CP [command post] and, for a very small cost, get my utilities washed, dried, and pressed.

I immediately, if not sooner, decided to take advantage of this service and dropped off two sets of utilities. They were ready when promised a day or two later, and looked quite good when I got them back. However, once I put them on, I learned the error of my ways. I began to notice a smell, not a nice or pleasant odor, but one, instead, that grew more and more ominous. They smelled...well, they smelled like shit; and the odor grew worse and

dump in the middle of the compound. He was beside himself and, I'm sure, rightfully took that as a personal insult. It occurred again the next night.

He, or perhaps those, responsible managed to make it a daily task. The variety was in that it was found in a different location each morning. The first sergeant's threats became greater and greater daily, but the perpetrator was as sly as he was diligent. He became legendary and was known by all as "The Phantom Shitter." he was never caught. The Battalion CO realized daily formations were as inappropriate as could be, and they did not last very long. When formations ended, so did the nefarious shitter.

That same First Sergeant leads to another incident. The Marines of H&S manned nine bunkers around our CP every night. Most of the time, Bunker 9 was staffed by those of us who worked in the Battalion staff sections, maintenance, and the Company Office.

One night when I happened to be assigned to Bunker 9 with Jim Sefrhans and, I think, Gary Gdula, I had

the first watch. I'm not sure when, but well toward midnight, I heard noises off to my left, perhaps midway to Bunker 8. I roused "Sef" [Sefrhans] and he, too, thought it might be an attempted infiltration into the defensive wire. I called "Halt," as we both aimed in the direction of the disturbance. With that, the First Sergeant staggered, drunk, into plain sight, uttering unintelligible syllables and fell down. He was such a pain in the ass, I admit there was a temptation to fire, but we both refrained from doing so. Just about that time the OD [Officer of the Day] arrived, having been alerted by field phone as to the incident. The First Sergeant was, as you may have surmised, shit-faced.

During my time in country, indigent Vietnamese began to use a plot of land across the road from our CP as a garbage dump. Vietnamese garbage dumps were cruelly like transfer stations for some of the poorer folk. As trucks dislodged their contents, many locals would forage through the leavings searching for something of value, or something to eat.

Quickly, though I can't place a time frame, the dump attracted flies and other bugs. This elevated into an amazingly large number of flies in and around the CP. The flies brought with them a creepy kind of presence, AND dysentery. For the sake of any non-veteran, the official military term for dysentery is "the shits."

I don't know how long the plague of the shits lasted, nor how quickly the dump was closed [though it was quite quickly closed], but I think every one of the Marines and corpsmen in the compound got some form of the shits. I know it is disgusting to think about, but we got to counting how many times a day we had to visit the head. And, though I could not find proof, it is believed the 1st Tank Battalion record was twenty three trips to the shitter in a twenty-four hour time span.

If nothing else worked as a cure, the corpsmen at sick bay administered a dose of what was affectionately known as the "pink cork,"

\*\*Excerpted from the author's book, *We Were Brothers*. ■

# The Mexican Standoff

BY LEE DILL

It was the rainy season. Actually, between the rain and the humidity, maybe it was always just wet in I Corps... or that's how I remember it.

Early September '69 and I was at An Hoa as tank commander of B-51, attached to a platoon of tanks in the new tank park. The new tank park was located in an industrialized area of An Hoa. I think it had something to do with the production of cement at one time, but it was a new scene for me. We always had two tanks at Phu Loc 6, about 7 miles closer to Danang than us, but also closer to Go Noi Island area, so it was not a place to skate. The two tanks at Phu Loc 6 were relocated to Danang, so B-51 and I believe B-23 (I would not swear to this) would replace the tanks at Phu Loc 6.

There was a new section leader, just arrived, multiple tours, and that we were just getting to know. He was tired of Vietnam when he arrived and was a "drinker of gook rum." Sgt. Kelly had arrived in An Hoa and he was Platoon Sgt. He ordered us to meet a couple trucks full of Marines at the gate by the German Hospital at 4pm.

B-51 arrived first, the other tank was late and no trucks full of Marines, so we just sat tight until the parade arrived. What I didn't know was that the other tank commander had spent the day drinking. As we waited by the gate, you could hear the roar of that wonderful 12-cylinder diesel at full throttle and see the plume of red coming our way. I figured the section leader would go first, then the trucks, and then us. Not exactly...

The first tank roared by us, headed up the road to Phu Loc 6. Obviously, I couldn't wait for the grunts and let the other crew do a one-tank charge up the

road and maybe into an ambush, so I took off also, no grunts in sight. The section leader was on the air and you could hear his crew in the background; they were not happy and he was drunk.

About two miles out of An Hoa we were going full speed and saw troops in the distance – I thought they were Marines and he thought they were gooks. We later found out they were ARVN's. He decided to open up on them with the .50 cal. and tells me to do so also. I could tell they were not targets. He fired about 10 to 15 rounds, then lost interest. We also never slowed, so they were in the distance quickly. It was at this time I asked myself, "Do I shoot him with the .50 and go to Danang brig or wait it out." I waited it out; it was easier. From there to Phu Loc 6 it was balls to the wall. As soon as they were inside the gate, the tank began spinning the turret right inside of the compound still doing at least 20mph. They overshot our area and went through the compound with the turret spinning!

I stopped 51 where I was supposed to and, after a few minutes, the other tank came back to us with the turret finally stationary. Unfortunately, the spinning turret /gun tube had knocked a 6-by truck off the road and injured two. The section leader got the tank parked and went right to our tent, grabbed a cot, and went to sleep. The story doesn't end here.

The grunt colonel in charge of Phu Loc 6 was totally pissed. He didn't show up at our tent until an hour later. He had been in contact with Battalion explaining his take on things and here's the best part, our commanding officer (his name escapes me but all I remember is "six actual")

wanted both tank commanders on the radio in 30 minutes to explain what had happened that day. This was not good for me! I have to deal with a hung-over section leader and I have to explain to the colonel what happened and why. It was at this point I began to wish I was just a loader.

At the appointed time, we both climbed into our tanks, cranked up the radios, and started getting grilled by the colonel. The first thing he said, and I think he was speaking to me, was he wanted the truth and God help us if he didn't get it. The section leader gave his story; obviously, it lacked a little detail and a whole bunch of accuracy. After he had given his version, he looked over at me and gave me a warning that I'd better cover for him (we were both standing up in our TC cupolas).

So, at this point I am screwed either way. If I lie I go to jail. If I tell the truth I will probably get shot. Wow, talk about a "rock and a hard place!!" Long story short, I was more afraid of jail than getting shot, so I told the truth. The colonel got off the radio, we climbed down from the tanks, and all 8 of us were in the tent for an hour wait before taking the tanks out on guard.

The now sobering section leader had his .45 in his hands and he was mumbling something across the tent. I had my .45 loaded and locked and praying I would not have to use it. It was a classic "Mexican standoff" except without Clint Eastwood and Tuco in the tent, I was truly sweating bullets.

So, let's review: the section leader is screwed, he knows he is going to the rear, will get busted and maybe go to jail. So, shooting me is not the best solution, but it might make him feel better. >>

## Photo from Vietnam



Having a bad day...

Me? I was totally screwed! If I shoot first I go to jail. If he shoots first from this close range, I either get seriously wounded or dead. I can't leave the tent because then I'm a coward, so I sat there wondering how much it was going to hurt. The tent is dead silent – yes, you could hear a pin drop except it would fall into the Vietnam red mud. Then the Angel that normally travels with me on my shoulder came to life.

After about 20 minutes, the other tank commander laid down and fell asleep. We went out on guard one man

short on the other tank and returned in the morning to our tent to go get chow. The now-sober section leader had already been gathered up and was on his way to Battalion. The gunner, Joe, became TC and a new crewman was brought out later that day.

It was at least two weeks later when I saw the now PFC (ex-Sgt. section leader) in Battalion delivering mail. He walked towards me. I was expecting the worst but he actually was friendly towards me and not angry at all. Apparently, he had a great career up to

that point and they were giving him a second chance, so he was fine with life in the rear with the gear.

So, I did not become a casualty, and I never heard another word about it. But it was the next day I think that I got my delayed promotion to Corporal, put in for a Navy Achievement medal with a combat "V" and all the Marines in rank above me became friendlier. It was all rather surreal. One of those things that happened, but we don't want to remember it, so don't talk about it, please. ■

## Photo from Vietnam



Agent Orange

# Operation Cumberland

By JIM KNEE

Around the 1st of June, 1967, 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd tanks arrived at Alpha Company, 3rd tanks at Dong Ha, after being on a search and destroy mission on the Trace. We arrived at Alpha Company in the midmorning and thought we would have a couple of days to rest before going out again. About two hours after arriving, we were told we would be going out again in the late afternoon of the 2nd of June, heading to Hue. We had to top off fuel, replenish ammo, load C-rations, wash clothes and all the other goodies it takes to support a platoon of tanks.

Late on the afternoon of the 2nd, we were ready and loaded aboard mike boats and started down the Cua Viet river towards the gulf and the city of Hue. We arrived at Hue before daylight and staged off shore until daylight, then came ashore and off-loaded. About midday we had everything squared away so we mounted the tanks and left out. We crossed the Perfume river by ferry onto an old road that had been widened into a two-lane road, where we staged again and waited for our escort to arrive. After a long wait, a jeep pulled in with a 1st lieutenant and we started out again. We traveled this road for several miles. It skirted the northern edge of the "Land of the Tombs" and eventually led to a large base camp. Welcome to Operation Cumberland! The road went through the middle of the camp, up and over the mountain ridge, and into the A Shau Valley.



Operation Cumberland was an engineer project to widen this pig trail to a two-lane road to the top of the mountain ridge and build a gun plateau to fire into the A Shau Valley. Our job was to provide security so the engineers could work on the road and also be security for the base camp. When we arrived, they had done some work on the road, but it had slowed down because of sniper fire. In the beginning, we would send two tanks out with the dozers, one in the lead and the other at the rear. It would take a couple of hours to sweep the road for mines, even longer if they found one.

This started out as a humdrum mission with a lot of slack time watching the dozers push dirt. As time went on and the road got longer, we started sending three tanks. Lead, middle and rear. The sniper fire increased with the addition of mortar fire, even with a few at night in the base camp. If the mortars landed in the base camp early in the morning, before daylight, we would get a few on the road that day. It made finding mines difficult sometimes.

Then, sometime around the 17th of July, things started to get serious. Sniper fire picked up dramatically and we would find several mines every morning. We figured the gooks had decided

they didn't like what we were doing and what the end results were going to be. So, we started to play hardball too. We called in air strikes from Da Nang, artillery and mortar strikes from the base camp, and what we could do while on

the road. It wasn't a humdrum mission anymore.

Now comes the 19th of July! The day the world changed forever for me. Around 0800, base camp started putting a truck convoy together to run the road to the gun plateau to deliver some much-needed supplies to an outpost there, and run the road back to base camp. They didn't want tanks to go as security, because we wouldn't be there after the work was completed and the gun plateau went into operation. The convoy left base camp about 1300, which would give them plenty of time to get back before dark, even if they had some sort of mechanical breakdown. About forty-five minutes into the run, things went to hell in a handbag in a hurry. As you got within a mile of the gun plateau, you entered a valley with high ridges on both sides, narrow and a perfect bottleneck. If the gooks set up there, they had you by the ass. That afternoon, when the convoy entered the bottleneck, the gooks let them travel about 500 meters and then wiped the convoy out.

We received the word about 1500 and started putting a reactionary force together to retrieve the survivors and assess the damage. As we started getting my tank ready, I couldn't find my gunner and the rest of the crew >>

didn't know where he was. I asked the lieutenant if he knew where my gunner was, as sometimes he would send people out on work details. He told me that he had asked to go on the run with the convoy and that he had okayed it. That's just f—king great!! Now were leaving with one man short. When they got the vehicles staged, the column was something like this, as I remember. I will always remember the first four vehicles until the day I die.

The first vehicle was the jeep with the driver and the captain, who always said that God answered to him. He was one arrogant SOB. The second was my tank, C-11; third came two six-by trucks with grunts, and fourth was a tank, and after that my memory is dark gray or black. When we started to leave base camp, for some reason, we had to put a prick-25 in the gypsy rack so I could communicate with the SOB captain. Did you ever try to put a prick-25 hand set in a com. Helmet? It doesn't work! Also, your com. cord and the prick-25 com. cord tie you up like a steer at a rodeo, or they are around your throat and choking you to death. We left the base camp at about 1630 at a rapid rate, keeping our eyes open. We arrived at the convoy and it made your heart sink and anger grow at the same time.

The whole convoy was burnt to the ground, still in a column, like death had just settled over it, like a blanket over a bed. As we passed the burnt-out convoy, I was trying to get com. cords off me just in case. About 50 meters past the convoy, something told me to look left, and at twenty yards out steps a gook with an RPG on his shoulder, and it's pointed right at me. He's smiling like he's saying, "I've got your ass." I'm thinking, don't you squeeze that f—king trigger. I'm standing in the loader's hatch tangled up in com. cords and the RPG hits high on the turret and eighteen inches in front of me. What kept it from cutting me in half, GOD only knows. In that few seconds, standing in that load-

er's hatch, I met the only coward I ever knew or heard of in the corps. That SOB captain made a hard run to the end of the column and started calling me on the prick-25 wanting to know what was going on at the head of the column. I told him I didn't have time to f—k with him. I was busy, and if he wanted to know what was going on, to get his ass back up here and act like a MARINE. I don't think he wanted to be a Marine because he didn't show up. If I was to meet that SOB today or any day until my dying breath, and I heard him say he was a brave marine in VIETNAM, I'd put a K-Bar in his cold, black heart. The Marine Corps doesn't have cowards in their ranks. So help me God!

I loaded 90 mm rounds until my hands and arms were so bloody that I couldn't pick them up out of the ready rack. I fed the .30 cal. by hand, because when the RPG came through the turret, it bent the ammo box mounted on the turret and the rounds would not feed out. The ambush lasted about thirty minutes at the most. We kicked their asses real good and showed them what pissed off marines can do. All in all, it was one hell of an afternoon. We got our shit together and moved to the gun plateau.

When we got to the gun plateau, I was put on a UH-34 with the other grunts that had been wounded, and off to the field hospital we went. One ride in a 34 is enough. About half-way to the field hospital, I got to looking around at the chopper. I was sitting in the door by the door gunner. I noticed that the instrument panel was vibrating so badly that you couldn't read the instruments. There were bolts missing, rivets so loose they were spinning in place and you could see daylight everywhere you looked. I motioned to the door gunner and told him if they would hover this thing four feet off the ground, I'd jump out and walk the rest of the way; I'd stand a better chance of getting there. He laughed and gave me a thumbs-up. From the time I entered the field hospital to when I got off the

hospital ship *Repose* was one month. It was back to full duty and the usual fun and games.

It was a bad time to get back to Charlie Company at Camp Evans. The day before I arrived back, Charlie Company lost a tank and crew to a booby-trapped bomb on the "Street of No Joy." I knew the crew well, as we came in country by Task Force ROBBIE from Okinawa. **THEY WILL NEVER BE FORGOTTEN** – Semper Fi.

Many years later, Lonnie Hedges told me the story of how he got on my tank. He was my gunner and part-time loader when I got back to Camp Evans. The day after I was wounded, he brought the mail to base camp. He walks up the hill to C-11's position. The lieutenant meets him at the top of the hill and asks him, "What the hell do you want?" Lonnie told him he was there to deliver the mail. The lieutenant asked him if he was a tanker and Lonnie told him "Yes." The lieutenant told him he was no longer a mail man—you're a tanker. The Lieutenant said, "You see that tank up there, that's C-11, that's your tank, now get your ass over there and clean the blood up in the turret, it's a mess. Oh, by the way, everything works on that tank and it's the cleanest tank in this platoon and the cleanest tank in the f—king company...and it better stay that way. If it's not, when Cpl. Knee gets back, he'll have your ass and I'll let him." Lonnie told me that he was dreading the day I checked back into Charlie Company.

It's time to end this story. I know that it's been a long hard journey for a lot of us. It's my hope that this will help some face their demons and realize that they are not alone. Your brothers are willing to try and help, if only to listen, so you can chase your demons instead of them chasing you.

Thanks, John, for having me write this. I'm sorry it just took five years or so. I had to chase a few demons writing this, but it's for the best. ■

# THE TRUE STORY OF "THE MARINE ON THE TANK" AND ONE OF THE MOST EMBLEMATIC IMAGES OF VIETNAM

BY MARK BOWDEN  
May 20, 2017

The Battle of Huế—the bloodiest battle of the Tet Offensive—was launched almost 50 years ago on January 31, 1968, and was fought in close quarters inside a walled city over a period of more than three weeks. In terms of American public perceptions, the Tet Offensive changed the course of the Vietnam War. From the fighting in Huế came an iconic photograph that captured the tragic futility of the conflict. In an excerpt from his new book *Huế 1968*, Mark Bowden tells the story behind it.



In the photo: Wounded Marines ride on top of tank used as a make-shift ambulance during the Battle of Huế, Vietnam, 1968.

Photo by John Olson/The LIFE Images Collection/Getty Images.

During the first week of the push inside the Citadel at Huế, in February 1968, photographer John Olson was with Charlie Company in the thick of the fighting. Officially, he was shooting for Stars and Stripes, but he carried four other cameras to take pictures he hoped to sell elsewhere.

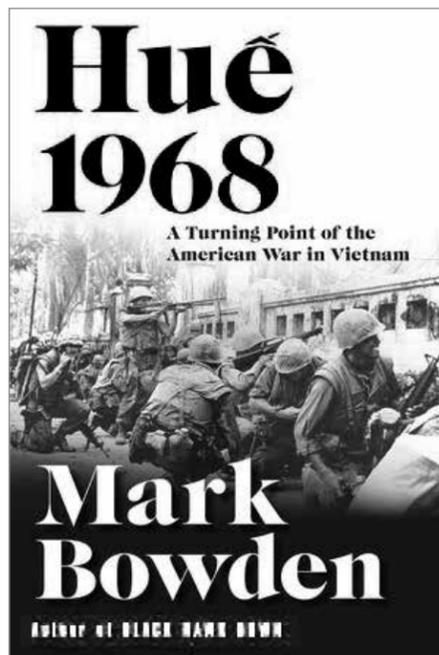
One of the frames he shot that week was a common sight in those terrible days of urban warfare, when for a period of weeks, in seemingly permanent fog and rain, American forces and their South Vietnamese allies were locked in combat with North Vietnamese forces inside the walls of Vietnam's ancient capital. It was a photograph of a Patton tank carrying wounded U.S. Marines. The picture would become emblematic of the Battle of Huế — one of the most famous photographs from the Vietnam War and one of the great images in the annals of combat photography.

With an artist's eye for composition, Olson captured seven Marines in a tableau worthy of Rembrandt. The palette is one of dark, muddy

greens and blues and browns in a grayish light, with shocking splashes of red. Under their helmets, the eyes of the men who face the camera are wide and anxious. They are looking past the photographer fearfully. One man has his entire face wrapped in a thick bandage, with his arm in a sling. Behind him sits a Marine whose face isn't visible but whose bare leg is smeared with blood. The most striking figure, at the center of the shot, in the foreground, is supine. He has been shot through the center of his chest. He is pale, limp, and half-naked. His shirt has been stripped away and his wound roughly bandaged. His head is the closest thing to the viewer in the frame. We

see him upside-down, his eyes closed beneath dark eyebrows, his head resting on a wooden door that has been used as a make-shift stretcher. He has a full head of wet black hair, and a lean, handsome face with a long aquiline nose and a faint, youthful attempt at a mustache. He looks to be dead, or nearly so.

The photograph would appear on March 8 in Life magazine, part of a six-page color portfolio of powerful images from Huế. Olson would go on to win the Robert Capa Award for these photographs. His shot of the Marines on the tank got the biggest play. It was printed over two full inside pages. The remarkable pictures came with no story line or detailed captions. The scenes were not described; the Marines were not identified. In the brief text that accompanied the portfolio, the magazine noted that the carnage and desolation of Huế "demonstrated the sickening irony into which the war has fallen—the destruction of the very thing that the U.S. is there to save." >>



From Atlantic Monthly Press.

The pale figure shot through the chest was Alvin Bert Grantham. He was from Mobile, Alabama, and he was 18 years old. A year earlier, he and his friend Freddie Prist had joined the Marines. They had been working as bricklayers. Both had dropped out of high school, and when the draft board came calling, they decided to join the Marines. They knew nothing about Vietnam or the war, except that the communists were trying to take over the country and had to be stopped.

In Vietnam, Grantham went to Charlie Company, 1st Battalion of the 5th Marine Regiment, based in Huế and became part of an M-60 machine-gun squad. He was in Huế at the end of January, when the North Vietnamese and the Viet Cong launched the Tet Offensive. The assault against Huế came on the 31st, and the battle for control of the Citadel lasted for 25 bloody days, with the combatants controlling an ever-shifting patchwork inside the three-square-mile precinct. The fighting was inch-by-inch, room-by-room. Grantham's unit was nearly always directly across a street from the enemy, and each morning rang with action. The unit was repeatedly ordered to send squads across, and the squads were mowed down each time. Then the Marines would spend excruciating min-

utes, sometimes hours, trying to drag the killed and wounded back. Once, Grantham watched as a sergeant walked out alongside a tank to try to retrieve a fallen Marine. When they got close, he took off his helmet and leaned down to place his ear on the man's chest, to see if his heart was still beating—and was shot through the head, the bullet entering by his left ear, just below the temple, and exiting through his right jaw. The sergeant, improbably, was still alive. He fell over and rolled around, and the men behind him, Grantham included, shouted for him to crawl back. He made it to a ditch in front of the house where the rest of his squad was hiding, and a corpsman went to work on him there.

This went on for days. The moist air was thick with smoke and diesel fumes, and—because many of those killed on both sides remained unburied all over the city—the smell of rotting flesh. You did not get used to it.

On the day Grantham was wounded, all four of the other members of his machine-gun squad were hit by shrapnel. He was the only one unhurt. He had dragged the men, one by one, from the building they'd been in and pulled them across the street to cover. When he returned for the last one, a bleeding and incapacitated man he knew only as "Snow," the man refused to let Grantham pull him from the room.

"Take the gun first," he said.

Grantham could not carry both him and the gun.

"I ain't got time to come back," Grantham said.

"Take the gun first," said Snow. "You can't let them get the gun."

So, Grantham did as he was told. He carried the gun out and then went back for Snow, whom he picked up and carried out to the others. Then someone down the street started yelling that they needed the machine gun. Grantham ran with it toward the house on the corner, which was set back farther from the street than the others. He stopped behind the last house before that one, looked to his left, and saw an enemy soldier pointing a rifle at him. Grantham ducked into a back

door just as rounds hit it behind him. He set up the gun in a rear window and started blasting toward the shooter.

Another Marine ran into the house, screaming for him to stop firing.

"There's Marines in that house!" he said.

"Well, there might be, but there's gooks all over the outside of it!"

More enemy soldiers came running across the street toward the corner house and Grantham started shooting at them. He ducked back out of the window just as return fire came through, waited for a few moments, and then peeked back out. That's when the rifle round hit him square in the chest. It knocked him backward off his feet, and he landed on his back. He still had the machine gun in his hand when he hit the floor. He threw it off to the side and yelled, "I'm hit!"

Then he felt it—as if a hot poker had been stuck through his chest, just to the right of center. It burned all the way through him. He started to have trouble breathing. A Marine who had been in the room started to work on him. His shirt was torn off. Grantham could see blood spurt out of the bullet hole when he exhaled and get sucked back inside when he tried to inhale. The Marine took the cellophane off a cigarette pack and placed it over the bullet hole with a finger. He placed a compress over the wound and bound it tightly with a bandage wrapped around Grantham's chest and neck.

Now he could breathe better, but the wound still burned. Several of his ribs were shattered. Grantham was turned on his right side so that his good lung wouldn't fill up with blood. The Marine kept slapping him, trying to keep him awake, trying to make him talk. Grantham felt an overpowering need to go to sleep. A corpsman came, fumbled with his arm, and started an I.V. There was a discussion about morphine.

"We can't give him too much," the corpsman said. "I don't want him to pass out."

He was placed on a wooden door and four Marines carried him from the

house and lifted him onto a tank with other wounded men. When it started to move, the pain was excruciating.

He drifted in and out of consciousness. They stopped at one aid station, which couldn't take more wounded—they were overwhelmed. At the second station, Grantham was removed from the tank and zipped immediately into a body bag. He was only semi-conscious. He could hear people yelling, screaming in pain, but there was not enough help for everyone. He heard someone say, "Wait, this one's not dead yet." Grantham felt sorry for that person, whoever he was, only to realize that they must have been talking about him, because the body bag suddenly came unzipped.

Grantham was sure he was dying . . . "not dead yet." He was not going to make it back alive. A whirl of thoughts went through his head: the people and things he would miss, his parents, his friend Freddie, a girl he liked . . . and then he remembered the truck.

He had fallen ill when he was five years old. He had a rare enzyme disease, porphyria, which had affected his kidneys. He was afraid of the hospital where his parents had taken him to stay, and where he was confined to his bed. So, one day his father brought him the truck. It was a miniature tow truck made of metal, with real rubber tires. It had a hook on the back. You could change the tires and lower and raise the hook. The doors would open and close. He loved that truck.

And then he remembered Krystal's burgers. He and Freddie, after they'd worked a long morning laying bricks, would drive together to Krystal's, which sold small, square hamburgers for 10 cents each—you could eat one in two bites. They would order a dozen each, two large fries each, two big Cokes each, and two pieces of pie each.

"Who's going to eat all this food?" the counter girl asked.

"We are," they said.

They took the food out to the car and

sat there and feasted until it was time to go back to work.

Grantham was taken to an operating room—he wasn't sure anymore where he was, but it was a huge room with lots of lights. There were many people in the room, and there was a lot of noise, a lot of shouting. He was stripped naked and turned over on his side. A nurse jabbed him with a needle. The doctor lifted one of his arms up over his head and started cutting. He was still conscious, and the blade stung like hell.

When he next opened his eyes, he was on a hospital ship. He was in a tiny room with a number of other beds. The man in the bed next to him was screaming. The man had just awakened to discover that he had lost both of his legs. Grantham went immediately back to sleep. The next time he awoke he was being loaded onto a plane, a C-130, and he was told that he was being taken to the 106th Army Hospital, in Yokohama, Japan.

He would learn more about his wound later. The rifle round had left a small hole in his chest and a larger one under his right shoulder blade. He had an incision that went from his right nipple all the way around to the exit wound in his back. There were tubes in his torso and his arm and up his penis. Six weeks would go by before he was able to get up and walk around. He learned that he had contracted malaria in Vietnam, and that while he was recovering in Japan he came down with typhoid. He dropped 50 pounds. The doctors told him he could not be flown back to the States until his fever subsided, so he started taking the thermometer out of his mouth when it reached 98 degrees. They flew him to Pensacola, Florida. When they discovered he still had a fever, he was placed in quarantine.

He was there when his sister's former husband, who had also served in the Marines, came for a visit and showed him the picture in Life. He had been at a barber shop, flipping pages in the magazine, when he'd seen it.

Grantham's full recovery would take more than a year. He got married when he left the Marines in 1970 and

went to work for Scott Paper Company in Mobile. He and his wife had three children. Twelve years later, he got a job with a company that built circuit boards for computers. In time, he became the head of manufacturing. He divorced and remarried, and adopted his second wife's youngest son, who grew up and joined the Marines, serving two tours in Iraq.

Like most of those who fought in Huế, the slightest glimpse of a photo or scrap of video shot there in February, 1968, is enough to bring back the smell, the noise, the days of gray, cold rain, of smoke and cordite, the days of fright and feral anger and pain. Something about the grayness of that month is the battle's signature, as if the city for nearly a month had literally fallen into the shadow of death.

Grantham never talked about Vietnam. At first it was a difficult subject. The war was ever more unpopular in the years that followed, until it ended—from America's perspective, not just badly but disgracefully. The war divided two generations and, nearly a half century later, still shapes our politics and foreign policy. Grantham didn't want to talk about it at first, and in time not talking about it became a habit. He got on with his life. He reset his moral compass. He hid his scars. Olson's picture became famous, but the Marine at its center did not. No one outside his immediate family and friends ever recognized that the stricken Marine with the hole in his chest was Alvin Bert Grantham. He is like a model who sat for an artist who produced a painting that resonated in the world for larger reasons. In that sense, and in that sense alone, the picture is not about Grantham. And yet, because it is a photograph, because it captures something real, it will always be very intimately, very painfully, about a specific person at a specific moment.

From the book *Huế 1968: A Turning Point in the American War in Vietnam*, by Mark Bowden. Copyright © 2017 by Mark Bowden. Reprinted by permission of Atlantic Monthly Press, an imprint of Grove Atlantic, Inc. ■

# Introducing our two VTA Scholarship Awardees for 2018



A USMCVTA scholarship was awarded to Sarah Parshall, the granddaughter of VTA member Larry Parshall, for academic year 2017-18. Sarah attended Riverside Polytechnic High School in Riverside, California. Her graduating class rank was 19 of 572 students (top 4%). She was selected for Girl's State and was a Junior Olympics springboard diver. She will enter the University of Northern Colorado and major in psychology and criminology. She also intends to continue as a competitive springboard diver.

## Why we should Honor America's Veterans BY SARAH PARSHALL

America is the land of freedom, a place where opportunity, liberty and dreams merge into the red, white and blue banner. When we say the pledge of allegiance, it is not only an opportunity to remind ourselves how blessed we are, but to pause and honor the men and women who fought diligently for the freedoms we often take for granted.

Veteran's Day is celebrated in November, right around the time we remind ourselves how thankful we are for God's gifts, as we sit with our loved ones and rejoice in our blessings. As a country, we take one day; that is twenty-four hours or 1,440 minutes, to celebrate and honor the men and women in uniform; but, as a team, our troops do not take only one day to defend our country. They do not wear their uniform for twenty-four hours and decide that maybe it isn't worth it. These men and women place our values and our safety above all else, and it should be our responsibility, nay, our pleasure, to respect, praise, and honor our veterans, not just on the designated day in the fall, but every day.

We feel the effects of their unrelenting bravery, but we do not see what happens behind the scenes, and unless you have had a loved one who has served, it can be difficult to understand the weight these men and women will carry for the rest of their lives. Hundreds of thousands of these veterans end up homeless.

No one who risks their life for us should come home to die on the streets of the land they fought to protect, and I will stand by each and every one of them until our troops are treated with the highest form of respect by our whole nation. They took care of us, and in turn, we need to take care of them. We should feel honored to be surrounded by such an abundance of veterans who selflessly devoted their lives to preserve the privileges of our nation; and, when the flag is raised, I am the first on my feet, gripping my heart with an overwhelming feeling of complete, and utter gratitude, as I pledge to honor this land and those who protect it.

Trinity Gill-Knack, granddaughter of VTA member John Knack, received the second USMCVTA



scholarship award for academic year 2017-18. She graduated from Saint Francis Catholic Secondary School in Ontario, Canada. Her graduating GPA was 3.41. She was active in badminton, track & field, cross country, and snowboarding, as well as being a cheerleader. While on the school rowing team, she was oarswoman of the year in 2015. She plans to major in psychology at a Canadian university so she can pursue being involved in the field of children's mental health. She has had Type I Diabetes all of her life and had to overcome many personal issues around being an insulin-dependent child. Trinity is a Canadian who wrote an exceptional essay on why we should honor America's veterans.

## Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans BY TRINITY GILL-KNACK

What is a veteran? Title 38 of the Code of Federal Regulations defines a veteran as "a person who served in the active military, naval, or air service and who was discharged or released under conditions other than dishonorable." To be a veteran was a choice—a choice that so many young people made because they believed that standing up for their country was important

enough for them to risk their lives. No one wants to go to war. No one wants to be put in a position where they may have to kill or be killed. But many felt that America was such a great and good country that they would do whatever it took, including leaving family behind, and going to places they could never imagine; all to protect our freedom.

For some it was a family affair. Sons following in the steps of the fathers and grandfathers. For others, it was a personal decision. My grandfather, John Knack, is one of those men who risked his life for our freedom. In 1966, my grandpa Knack was in Vietnam with the 3rd Marine Division. His responsibilities were to evacuate and protect villages, protect convoys, and secure his surroundings. It was not normal nine to five to say the least.

Most people make the drive in their comfortable cars to go to their jobs every day; they do what needs to be done and then go home to their families; maybe watch a little television and have a good dinner. The job my grandfather, and others like him did daily, included the very real possibility that they may never see their families again. They didn't get to have a good night's sleep in a comfy bed. They didn't get to be in a climate-controlled work environment and know that they would be going home. That's the reality of being a veteran, knowing you may never get to go home again.

We are a free people, able to vote, to go to school, to walk the streets without the very real fear that we may be blown up or have our homes destroyed by bombs and gunfire. This is because of our veterans. We can thank them for being so brave that we don't have to give these luxuries a second thought. We can and often do take them for granted.

Recently, a local park erected a monument dedicated to the local veterans in the area where my grandfather lives. His name, along with many more is etched into the stone so that no one can forget those that fought for our freedoms. My grandfather goes to this monument daily to make sure it is clean and free from any garbage. I know that the display makes him feel that what he did was important. I hope he never loses that feeling. ■



St Louis  
The Gathering of Warriors

The Boys of Charlie Co., 1st Tank Bn., 1st Mar Div., FMF that landed in Chu Lai, offloading from the USS Alamo LPD in early 1966. (L to R) Ken Ganny, Craig Newberry, Rick Lewis, Greg Auclair, Jerry Maddox and Ed Boyette.

**Ken Ganny** was the driver; hit a mine that cracked the hull of the tank and was medevaced out and had many subsequent back operations.

**Craig Newberry** started off in gun tanks and moved to flame tanks after extending his tour. When I became short in 67, I was moved to flame tanks. Craig took me under his arm and schooled me on flames. We cooked a few NVA bunkers together.

**Rick Lewis** was in 2nd Plt. heavy section, and both Auclair and Boyette were on C-23 with me for 9 months together. The best!

**Greg Auclair** and I were in boot camp together and ITR. We really got to know each other in tank school. We were to be assigned to Charlie Company which had already landed in VN, but we got side-tracked to 2nd Tanks. A place called Santa Domingo had flared up; we two privates were reinforcements for 2nd Tanks. We were there about 4 weeks and then got orders to Viet Nam. Only problem was that Auclair went

and got married, so the company 1st Sgt. took his name off the orders. Like the good buddy I was, I told the 1st Sgt. that Auclair was very upset that he was not going with me. He put his name back on the orders. Several years later I told Auclair's wife, Lorie, what I had done and she said I was a lucky she didn't kick my ass.

**Sgt. Jerry Maddox** was our first TC—tough and strong and a good leader. He was shot in the back by a VC sniper in November '66 while we were on security for a civil action operation. He was sent to Japan and did not return.

**Ed Boyette** was the loader on Charlie-23 and an outstanding one at that. I was the gunner on Charlie. I never had to worry about him keeping me in ammo. Ed was awarded the Bronze Star for his actions on 17 January 67 while under enemy fire. He dismounted and went outside the wire to carry back the wounded Marines from the listening post, saving their lives.



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

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USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611**

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