



Sponson BOX

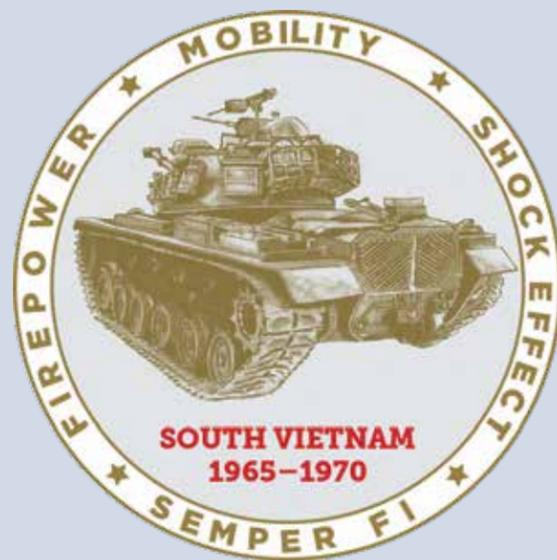
*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Featured Stories:

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COLLECT THE USMC VTA 20TH ANNIVERSARY COIN

We sold quite a few of these beautiful challenge coins during the Seattle reunion and now we are offering them to those of you that could not attend our 2019 gathering. The VTA logo is superimposed over the 20th anniversary logo with hand painted colors in key areas that look very much like the full-color VTA challenge coin that we introduced and sold at the San Antonio reunion in 2013 and that we also sold in St Louis in 2017. These coins will be \$20 each (plus \$4 shipping) and they are available now. Please contact Fred Kellogg at Phone: 360-609-3404 or Email: Kellogg@comcast.net



M-103 "Elephant" Tank Marines

Anyone who served as a crewman on one of those amazing 120mm gun tanks has got to have at least one story to share with the membership. We do seem to recall guys telling us about their tours in "Gitmo Bay" on M-103's...or maybe at Camp Pendleton.

Please give it some thought and put a story down on paper for a near future issue of our magazine. By submitting your story to John Wear, you are ensuring our legacy.

Letter from the President

SEATTLE: For those VTA members who attended our 2019 reunion in Seattle – Thank you for supporting the brotherhood. For those VTA member who either chose not to attend or were precluded from attending for various reasons, you missed a really terrific time. Several attendees approached me during the gathering and offered up comments like: "This seems to be one of the most relaxed and laid back reunions ever. We loved it!!!" We could not tell what the exact reason was or if per chance since we all have become 70+ years old, we are all just a bit mellower.

2021 REINION: We announced the next reunion location last week. It is **Providence, Rhode Island**. That town is the closest to Boston that we could get where we could still get a hotel room rate under \$300 per night. All of the Boston area hotels want too much money. The contracted room rate will be \$109 per night. We will be about 45 minutes from Boston...and the brand new and totally wonderful Armor Museum that was built late last year. One of our members went to visit it after is opened in May 2019 and his report was, "It was as close to a religious experience as I have ever had!!!" I am quite sure that this will be a major highlight for the past 11 reunions. Details will follow in future issues of our magazine.

VTA WEBSITE STORE: We had some left over VTA theme items from the PX in Seattle. Greg has posted them on the VTA website's VTA STORE and I highly recommend that you visit the website and check out the selection.

INTERESTING: The other day I was having lunch with an old high school buddy at a Chinese restaurant. I got my fortune cookie and when I opened it, it read: "Sift through your past to get a better idea of your present."

ELEPHANT TANKS: It would really be something of each and every Marine tanker who served as a crewman on the M-103 Heavy Gun Tank, would contact me and offer up a written story to share with the membership. If enough of you volunteer to do so then we might be able to have an entire issue of our magazine dedicated to those mammoth 120 mm gun tanks.

Your stories are the lifeblood of our magazine. I cannot thank you enough for your good spirit, for your candor and for your willingness to revisit memories that, in many cases, you would rather leave undisturbed.

OUR STORIES: The other day I was editing the stories that appear in this issue of our magazine and I noted that three of the more prolific writers have fairly recently gone to "The Great Tank Park in the Sky." If the other 90% of the USMC VTA membership does not get down to business and start writing at least one or two short stories of their time in-country Vietnam ... or even some funny or sad stories from their life before or after the USMC ... then we may have to think about cutting back on the four issues per year that we have grown accustomed to receiving. Get busy or get sad.



John

**"Blessed are those who can give without remembering and take without forgetting."
—Author Unknown**

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Fort Benning Mini-reunion

And Tank Restoration Program—September 9–13, 2020

The USMC VTA will plan to conduct our second mini-reunion in at Ft Benning in Columbus, GA. We will attend the graduation of a class of young Marine tank crewman students at the USMC Tank School.

We will also plan to gather and form a "working party" to assist the Tank Restoration Program in helping with the refurbishing any and all Vietnam-era armored combat vehicles such as:

- M-48 Medium Gun Tank
- M 67-A2 Flame-thrower Tank
- M-51 Armored Vehicle Recovery Vehicle (Retriever)
- M-50 Ontos

SEE PAGE 46 OF THIS ISSUE FOR MORE DETAILS

Executive Directors

John Wear, President
16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106
(719) 495-5998 · E-mail: johnwear2@verizon.net

1st Sgt. Richard "Rick" Lewis, Vice President
5663 Balboa Ave (#366), San Diego, CA 92111-2793
858-735-1772 Email: ricklent@aol.com

Bruce Van Apeldoorn, Treasurer
73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611-2837
(585) 613-6564 Email: bvanapeldoorns@gmail.com

Ronald C. Knight, Secretary
6665 Burnt Hickory Drive/Hoschton, GA 30548
(678) 828-7197 Email: rckusmcvta@att.net

Directors

Lt. General Martin R. Steele, USMC (Ret.)
16331 Ashington Park Drive; Tampa, FL 33647
E-mail: mrsteele46@aol.com

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

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

Robert H. Vaxter
13970 Hillcrest St; Livonia, MI 48154
(734) 385-6395 Email: rvaxter47@yahoo.com

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

Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri
279 Dundee Drive, South San Francisco, CA 94080-1028
(650) 756-2324 Email: zippoF-11@aol.com

Greg Martin
6514 – 81st Drive NE, Marysville, WA 98270-8010
Phone: 360-480-1206 Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Col. William (Bill) J. Davis, USMC (ret)
518 Mowbray Arch, Norfolk, VA 23507
Phone: 757-622-6973 Email: billandjandavis@gmail.com

Jim Raasch
3116 1st Avenue NW, Cedar Rapids, IA 52405
Phone: 319-551-1675 Email: jraasch47@gmail.com

Committees & Chairmen

SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll
Nominating Chair & Reunion Chair
CRCS/CR Representative
651-342-0913 CST

Bruce Van Apeldoorn
Audit & Finance
585-613-6564 EST

CWO4 Bob Embesi
CRCS/CR Representative
406-821-3075 MS

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

Ron Knight
Member Data Integrity
678-828-7197 EST

1st Sgt. Rick Lewis
VA Information
VTA History Project
858-735-1772 PST

Bob Peavey
Fallen Heroes
770-365-3711 EST

Pete Ritch
VTA History Project
850-734-0014 EST

OPEN
Scholarship Committee

Greg Martin
Webmaster
National Recruiter
360-480-1206 PST
Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Web Site: www.usmcvta.org

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John Wear – Editor & Publisher – johnwear2@verizon.net
Tuyen Pham – Layout and Design

Printed in the USA

New Members

Barnes, Jerry F
5138 Atchinson Dr SE
Olympia, WA 98513-4529
Home Phone: 360-456-0572
Email: jfbarnes@att.net
A Co, 1st / 5th Tanks, '68 – '69
MOS: 2771
DOB: ???
Recruited by: Seattle Reunion Walk-in

Brannan, Mark S
10850 Lost Acres Lane
Clinton, MO 64735
Cell Phone: 660-351-5784
Email: steve.brannan@gmail.com
B Co, 1st Tanks, 1970
MOS: 2141
DOB: 11/30/51
Recruited by: David Owen

Holston, James L
3050 Lane Woods Court
Columbus, OH 43221-4062
Cell Phone: 216-399-0020
Email: jholston46@gmail.com
?? Co, 3rd Tanks, '66 – '67
MOS: 1811
DOB: 05/02/46
Recruited by: John Wear

Lorch, Rick I
1623 Hackamore Road
Oceanside, CA 92057
Home Phone: 760-758-8455
Cell Phone: 760-583-0568
Email: ricklorch55@gmail.com
H&S Co, 1st Tanks, '67 – '68
MOS: 1811
DOB: 07/06/46
Recruited by: John Bartusevics

Shapiro, Myron
1295 W Northridge
Fresno, CA 93711-0720
Home Phone: 559-431-6257
Cell Phone: 559-960-9136
Email: agrampy@yahoo.com
Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks, '66 – '67
MOS: 1811
DOB: 11/10/40
Wife: Lonnie
Recruited by: Jack Byrne

Shears, Maxim B Jr
9901 S San Marcos Circle
Goodyear, AZ 85338-7125
Cell Phone: 602-432-6318
Email: Beryl@westernPilot.com
H&S Co, 1st Tanks, 1966
MOS: 2533
DOB: 05/23/46
Wife: Elaine
Recruited by: Website

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

COMMENTS:

It has been some time since I have corresponded with you. I seem to have run short of personal stories re: NAM or other career experiences. I still read the stories in the Sponson Box with interest, however, and I would like to comment on a couple in the latest issue:

The first relates to the article, "A Mother Sounds Off." Her honest and heartfelt story of how the Marine Corps took her three sons and "molded these boys into men...." I can appreciate firsthand how this transition occurs. I have a nephew and a grandson who had similar "growing up problems" prior to entering the Marine Corps. One was a thrice-wounded Marine veteran of the Vietnam War and the other was a Marine veteran of the War in Afghanistan. Both left the Marine Corps with the necessary "real life" tools to build a successful civilian life.

Also, I served a tour on recruiting duty from 1962-65 in RS Cleveland, OH. It was my job to interview all applicants for enlistment to determine whether they were properly motivated to serve as a Marine and mentally prepared for the ordeal they were to face at MCRD Parris Island. I recall that there were some cases of male and female applicants with serious enough "caution flag issues" where it was felt they were not ready for the Marine Corps. These applicants were told to go home and think about it. A few reapplied later but most did not.

The other article was "Four Tales from the Cherry Arms Apartments – 1965." This was written by my late friend, Bill "Lurch" Lochridge. Bill served as my 2nd Platoon Leader in Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks and later under my staff direction in HQ 3rd Tanks. I have related in previous articles for the Sponson Box where his escapades were many times heroic and at others where his exuberance needed to be reined in a bit. It is safe to say that "They broke the mold" when Bill was created.

Later in life after leaving the Marine Corps, Bill was instrumental in forming the New York State Maritime Militia. This boat group had a mission of assisting the Coast Guard in the inspection of shipping entering New York Harbor. Following the terrible attack on 9/11, his boat group was tasked with evacuating people from Manhattan Island to the New Jersey shore. It was during this time that Bill was exposed to the toxic dust permeating the air which led to serious health issues and his eventual death. I know Bill is where "The streets are guarded by United States Marines!"

Lt. Col. Ev Tunget
USMC (Ret.)

A New Member

After our phone conversation on 6/8, I pulled up the VTA website and was amazed at what you all had available. Hopefully, this pre-Vietnam War flame tanker will be accepted into your group. The old Tankers Association is out of tune with Marine tankers. The only thing that they want is membership dues. I did enjoy our conversation about my grandson-in-law, the ex-football player and Marine veteran living in the Seattle area. Hopefully, I can connect with him and that he will want to come to your reunion hotel for a beer and some conversation.

Semper Fi – Don "Flames" Masztak

UPDATE: Don became a member in October 2019.

FURTHER UPDATE: Don writes: I need to thank you and your Marines for allowing me to be a member of your association. I am humbled by being a member. I just read two books on Con Thien and was "rattled" reading them. Both books were written by Jim Coan who was a 2nd Lt when he began his tour with tanks. I also see that you were at Con Thien and I will always respect you and your Vietnam veteran Marines for their sacrifice.

I commend you and your Marines for the production of the Sponson Box magazine. Anything that I can do from the shores of Lake Erie in Michigan, let me know. If I can round up any photos from the old days, I will send them along.

My first tank was an M-47 with a five-man crew.

A Cheap Tank to Take Home!



ON THE COVER:
The "official" logo of the 2019 Seattle reunion that was held
October 31 – November 4, 2019.

Seattle

Col. Reed Bolick writes: Thanks for all that you do to keep the memories alive for all of us! While we may not express it as often as we should, all of us who served in tanks during the Vietnam years really do appreciate all that you continue to do! Keep up the great effort! Enclosed is a contribution towards our cause to be used as needed. I regret not being able to attend the Seattle reunion, but I am in the recovery "mode" following a back operation where a couple of my lumbar disks were fused. Hope all is well.

Roger Luli writes: My wife, Sherry and I had a great time. We are looking forward to Fort Benning next year. The VTA members and their wives were wonderful to Sherry. They understood her problems and really helped her enjoy herself. Semper Fi really does mean something.

John Hunter writes: Happy 24th!!! I really enjoyed the reunion in Seattle and the hotel was great. I really enjoyed talking to General Webber, and hearing his speech. I think you should invite him to our next reunion. I am looking forward to Providence.

Jenni Clock writes: Thank you for your kind words. We did have a wonderful time. I heard my daughter, Abbi tell her brother on the phone that is was amazing and good to put a real person to the names she had heard their dad talk about. The lady's breakfast, after listening to all of the personal stories, Abbi's comment was they're just like us. I think she thought her dad was the only dad that walked the perimeter every night (rode the 4-wheeler in later years) to be sure all was safe. Dad also taught his grandkids to honor our flag and country, and always hold the door for others, especially grandma. He'd get the "look" when helicopters flew over our farm or hunters took a shoot. So many other things. I told Abbi "...your beautiful daughter" comments, she said, "He is a Marine, Gotta love 'em!"

Yes I would like to connect with Marcia Falk. My email is jeniclock@icloud.com. Appreciate you and all that you do. Welcome home and thank you for your service. Semper Fi from Darrell

Doc Mike Pipkin writes: Tankers kept coming up to me and asking. "Are you John?" or "Are you John Wear?" Then when I met you for the first time, I chuckled to myself about how we could be brothers. That thought flew away fast. Getting the official photographs today I wished we could have had a photo of you and me. That was one hell of a good job on the reunion ... smooth, enjoyable and well thought out.

Seattle reunion note: After the reunion, there were several cases of beer and soda left over. Greg Martin, our most excellent Seattle reunion coordinator, took the left over libations and donated them to his VFW Post in Everett, WA. They wrote the following thank you letter to the VTA: "On behalf of the Veterans of Foreign Wars, Old Guard Post 2100, we wish to thank you for the donation of beverages to our Post. We will put it all to good use. We would like to

invite you to come in as our guest when you are in Everett, WA. Thank you."

John Wear writes: After the Seattle reunion, as is the custom, we wrote an "official" Thank You note to the general manager of the reunion hotel pointing out the employees who gave us exceptional service. The hotel Banquet Manager wrote this reply: "Thank you John for the kind words. Really you were so organized it really made it easy for me. I really enjoyed working with you and all the people on the different committees. I must say your group is one of my favorites. —Stephanie."

Rick Walters write: The Guest speaker was Excellent! He sat at the tables, in the Slop-Chute. He had a great understanding of ships, landing craft & MEU's. I would throw him a curve ball, a question about our subs? He knew the answers. How did you find him?

Seattle was a nice city. I like those fresh fish, their Red snapper was much better than East Coast & many middlemen. And the Boeing Vietnam Era museum had remains of an F4, JPAC recovery. Memorable story about the two Navy pilots.

Thank you and board for all of the hard work.

Gerry Hearne writes: John, I can't tell you how proud I am of you and the heard, work, time and effort you and the directors put into this organization. The VTA is what it is because of your direction and effort. I know you have help, but you're the motor.

Please pass on to the USMC VTA how grateful Kathy and I are for the generosity of your fine organization. It was so much more than we anticipated. The whole weekend, but especially the Fallen Hero remembrance, will be forever in our hearts. God Bless the VTA and all our brave Marines. Thank you again.

Chuck & Kathy Hayes – The Fallen Hero Family.

Forgotten Tracks Vol. 4

Fred Kellogg writes to Pete Ritch: I assume you have plenty Vol, 4 books left and will have them at least until the next Sponson Box comes out. I am sending a check for \$30 for volume #4 along with a shipping address. It's for a grunt Marine who was with us in Vietnam.

I HAD A "WHAT ARE THE ODDS MOMENT": I just got back from 2nd BN 1st Marines reunion held in San Diego. A large portion of those attending fought in the May 19th battle outside the gates of Khe Sanh and they think the world of us tankers. At the banquet I was introduced to the Battalion surgeon from Charlie Med at Khe Sanh and learned he was the one who saved my life that day. How cool is that??

I know we plan reunions several years in advance but one of the trips these guys arranged was to MiraMar Marine Air Station. We had a demonstration of Marine K-9, allowed on the flight line to stand on the apron as F-18s

took off and landed a dozen times, Also had the run inside and out of an Osprey while others did their thing in the air (training—not for us but still really cool and very close). Ch-53s everywhere and one taxiing so close my phone camera couldn't fit it all in. Great lunch in a beautiful mess hall and we were actually allowed up in the tower as they directed air traffic. Awe-inspiring to say the least.

Grunts of Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks

Thank you for the article that 1st Sgt Jim Langford wrote for the last issue of the Sponson Box. What the good Top fails to mention is that the majority of the men at the CP doing the bulk of the fighting were 0141 (I was one of the two); 3500 – motor T guys; 2500 – comm. guys; 2841 – radio tech; 2311 – ammo techs, as well as supply guys and corpsmen. We also had two cooks in the fight. The majority of us were not 1811's. Most of the tankers were on their tanks busting caps on the enemy. The only tankers not on tanks were New Guys waiting orders to their platoons, and guys on the way to R&R.

I remember that night in Nov. '68. We had our backs literally in the Cua Viet River when the gooks hit us. By then, the new CO, Capt Kuchma, had reported in.

I had written in the past that when Top first reported in to Charlie Co., he was a gunny who had not been promoted yet. I got him squared away. At the time, our company was in shock since we had lost our CO, the company gunny, and the maintenance chief all in the same incident.

Tom Hayes – Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks, Nov 67 – Dec 68

OUCH!!!



The Ontos Issue of the S-Box

Jerry White writes: Please let me know where to send my donation. The Ontos Issue of the Sponson Box magazine addressed an issue as to the vulnerability of the M-50 Ontos to enemy mines. Quoting Peter Brush, "It was the spring of 1966 when an armored column supporting 3/9 was returning to base camp. Three tanks and an Ontos went over a stream at a place called Viem Dong Crossing without mishap. As a second Ontos crossed, Platoon Commander Lt. Allen Hoof heard a "Pop!" and turned rearward to see the upper half blown off the vehicle. Three crewmen were seriously wounded. PFC Greg Weaver was quickly removed from the vehicle but died almost immediately."

I was in one of those three tanks and we were returning to Hill #55 that day. May 26, 1966. My TC was a Sgt. Reed and another crewmate was Lee Johnson (later KIA July 30th). We heard the explosion behind us and looked to see what happened. It was awful. PFC Weaver was indeed mortally wounded and it was the first time I saw someone die. It still is deeply imbedded in my memories of Nam. What was news to me however was Peter Brush's analysis of how it happened, I always assumed it was just the mine that caused all the damage but Brush goes on to say, "...the mine explosion, perhaps either command detonated or activated by a counter, caused the detonation of a 106mm round stored directly under the Track Commander. This secondary explosion blew the turret off the vehicle and killed Weaver." The secondary explosion was new to me, but I find no fault with Brush's conclusion and I now believe it to be highly likely to be accurate. It was a little strange to read an article of an event that I was involved in more than 53 years ago, but I am grateful to the Sponson Box editorial staff and to Peter Brush for his very fine article in "The Ontos Issue."

Jerry White, "B" Co., 3rd. Tanks

Mine Sweep Tank



Ken Zebal writes: I received Forgotten Tracks – Vol. 4 >>

today (Thank you) and I notice a drawing inside the cover that seems familiar to me. Please see the attached photo of my tank on a road sweep along Highway 9 between Ca Lu and LZ Hawk. I'm in the TC's hatch and Nick Appa is sitting in the loaders hatch, Sonny Venturi is driving.

Ray Ramos

John Wear writes: Andy Anderson left a phone message indicating that in the last issue of the Sponson Box there was a short story from the Colorado Springs newspaper printed in 1969 that told of US Marine Corporal Ray Ramos who was visiting his parents after he returned from Vietnam. Andy informed us that Ramos had been a tank mechanic with Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks with Andy when "C" Company moved its headquarters from Cam Lo Hill to Mai Xa Tai (Mi Loc) north of the Cua Viet River in the fall of 1968. Andy said that he and Mike Andregg shared a hooch with Ramos, who was nicknamed "Rudy." He also recalled that Ramos was an excellent mechanic as well as being an excellent person.

Crispy Critters



Andy Bloom – a US Air Force veteran and buddy of John Wear, who makes award winning military scale models, writes that his most current project: "Crispy Critters" which is an exact replica of a USMC M-67A2 Flame-thrower tank, recently picked up the "Charlie Jay Award for Best In-country Vietnam War Subject" at SuperCon 2019 hosted by the Fort Worth Scale Modelers Association...

You might note that Andy even made the TC have USMC-issue "birth control" glasses like "Sherman" wore in-country!!!

Look who came to my 75th Birthday Party...

Doc Gene Hackemack writes: It just so happened that my 75th birthday party was combined with the annual "Schützenfest" in Round Top, Texas, with 146 continuous years of this original German militia, organized in Texas to protect the German community from Indians, Yankees, etc. And not only that ... but this year a 22-pc

German Band came over to play—I had them over in 2010 also.



It just so happened that USMC Lt. Gen. Joe Weber (now the Fayette County Judge) graciously hosted four of the musicians in his home for us. Gen Weber has been an enthusiastic supporter of the Round Top TX Schützenverein, making most of the events when his schedule fits. And the following day, he invited us all into his office in the Fayette County Court House for a tour.

One last note: In Judge Joe Weber's office, he keeps on the door a sign, SHERIFF JIM FLUORNOY. You ask: Who was Sheriff Jim? Why, in the movie, "BEST LITTLE WHORE HOUSE IN TEXAS," he is the sheriff who tore the toupee off of the meddling reporter's head!



Semper Fil!—Doc Hack

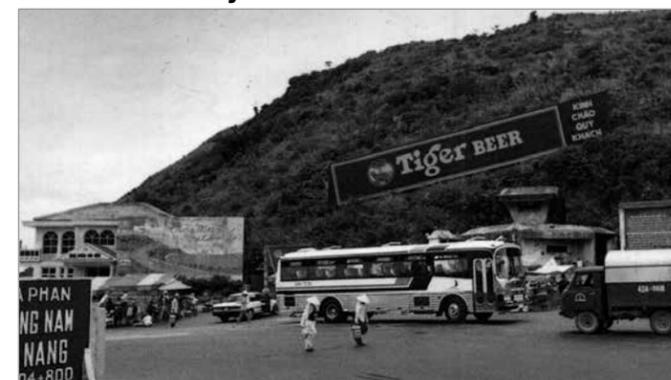
I Just Keep Writing

Roger Luli writes: I just devoured the latest issue. I appreciated the sentiments expressed by Glenn Hoopman. Politicians f**ked up our youth and now they are trying to do the same to our "golden years."

I am happy to hear you are planning another mini-reunion at Fort Benning, Georgia. Sherry and I enjoyed the first one and God willing we will do so again. If you want, I can talk it up in "Tacoma."

On another note, I have four stories in progress which I plan to review with "Tree" and Jim Coan at the Seattle reunion. They are about; O.C.S., The Basic School, Tank School, and the four day ambush and fire-fight at the Khe Ran bridge.

Hai Van Pass Today



John Wear writes: As many of us know, Ron Dudek takes tours back to Vietnam for Military Historical Tours several times each year. On occasion, he sends me a postcard. This is a photo of the Hai Van Pass as it looks today. I was never on the pass but I am sure that it looks a lot different than it did in the 1960's.

Arnold Schwarzenegger Was A Tanker!

Back in 1965, Arnie was drafted into the Austrian Army, which used to require a mandatory one year of service from all Austrian men. He served as a tank driver, and many years later, after he had become rich and famous, actually managed to buy his old M-48A1 tank and ship it to the States from Austria. He still drives it from time to time!



The Vets' Journey Home

Clyde Hoch writes: The non-profit "Veterans Brotherhood" and "Films-4-Good" have come together and joined forces to create a film on post-traumatic stress disorder. This has been an ongoing project for a couple of years. This will be a full-length film that will help veterans and non-veterans who experience PTSD and traumatic brain injury. The purpose of the film is to make more people aware of this misunderstood subject. It is very difficult for someone to talk to their family members about their experiences and problems. This film will help family members be more in

tune to the problems and issues veterans have today and, through the film, people can become more aware of warning signs of suicide.

Veterans; Vets' Families; Vets' organizations; First responders; Health Care workers; Mental Health Professionals; Law enforcement and Court personnel; Educators; Elected officials...are just some of the people this film will benefit.

If you are passionate about helping our veterans and would like to contribute please send your generous contributions to: The Journey Home, 313 4th St., Pennsburg, PA. 18073. Help us make life better for those who risked everything to protect you.

We Found Larry Fuentes!



Larry Fuentes in the middle; Valenti on the left and John M. Gray on the right. Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks, 1968 at Quang Tri

Joke

Bob Skeels sent this in:

A minister was seated on a plane bound from Hong Kong to the US with a stopover in Honolulu. After the stopover, a crusty old Marine boarded and, as fate would have it, he was seated next to the minister. When the plane was airborne, to continue on its journey, drink orders were taken.

The Flight Attendant asked the Marine if he wanted a drink.

The Marine asked for Rum & Coke, which was prepared and placed before him.

The flight attendant then asked the minister if he would like a drink.

He replied in disgust, "I'd rather be savagely raped by a dozen whores than let liquor touch my lips."

The ole Marine handed his drink back to the attendant and said, "Me too, I didn't know that was a choice." ■

Photo from Vietnam



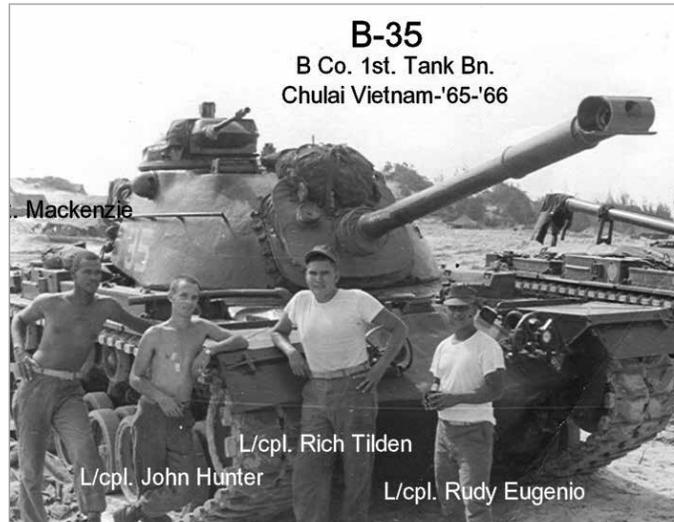
John Hughes writes: Yes, that sad shit bird standing in the rain reminds me of someone I used to know. One dinky-dau short timer who had just ground guided his poor pig over a box mine the day before and is short tracking to Dong Ha for repairs and sympathy. Got the tank repaired but got no sympathy. The story of his life. He was going to extend for 6 months but after getting his bell rung decided that someone was telling him to get the hell out of Dodge.



John Hunter: Bravo-34 at Chu Lai 1965 with Stan Williams and R. Eugenio



Ric Langley took this photo of Bill "JJ" Carroll (left) and Manuel Garcia (KIA) in July 1967



Tanks & Medals of Valor

William C. Bird Home of record: Benton, Louisiana

AWARDS and CITATION:

Navy Cross—The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Navy Cross to Private First Class William C. Bird (MCSN: 2449630), United States Marine Corps, for extraordinary heroism while serving as a Rifleman with Company E, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), Fleet Marine Force, in the Republic of Vietnam on 15 May 1969. The First Platoon of Company E was assigned the mission of relieving a friendly unit heavily engaged in combat with a North Vietnamese Army battalion near An Hoa in Quang Nam Province. As the point squad of Company E crossed an open field, it came under a heavy volume of rocket and automatic weapons fire from a large hostile unit occupying well-camouflaged bunkers. Alertly observing two wounded Marines lying dangerously exposed to the enemy fire, Private First Class Bird, despite the intense volume of hostile rounds impacting near him, pulled his comrades to a position of relative safety. Reacting instantly, he fearlessly stood up and, effectively firing his M-16 rifle, provided enough covering fire to enable a Corpsman to reach the wounded Marines. Continuing to expose himself to the intense hostile fire, he delivered accurate covering fire for the Corpsman as he moved throughout the hazardous area and administered emergency medical treatment to all the wounded. At dusk, another reaction force and two supporting

tanks were deployed from the company command post. Alertly observing that the tank commanders were having difficulty discerning the enemy targets because of the approaching darkness, Private First Class Bird unhesitatingly climbed aboard the lead tank, despite the intense volume of enemy fire directed at him and, skillfully pointing out the hostile positions to the tank commander, was instrumental in bringing devastating fire to bear upon the enemy. As the platoon withdrew to a night defensive position, Private First Class Bird personally carried two wounded Marines to the friendly perimeter and subsequently assisted in loading the remainder of the casualties aboard the tanks for rapid evacuation. When an enemy rocket impacted on one of the tanks, seriously wounding the driver, Private First Class Bird positioned himself between the tank and the nearby hostile emplacement and, accurately firing his rifle, suppressed the enemy fire while the tank crew reorganized and continued firing. Private First Class Bird was directly responsible for saving the lives of six Marines. His courage, aggressive fighting spirit and unwavering devotion to duty upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the United States Naval Service. Action Date: 15-May-69 Service: Marine Corps Rank: Private First Class Company: Company E Battalion: 2d Battalion Regiment: 5th Marines Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.) FMF ■



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“The brave may not live forever, but the cautious do not live at all.”

David A. Weinert

Sept 19, 1947 to Sept 23, 2019

Craig Newberry writes: Dave and I went through boot camp and tank school together. We deployed to ‘Nam and were both in 1st tanks. He was in A or B Company, I don’t remember which. Over the intervening years, I tried unsuccessfully to get Dave to join the VTA. Now he is gone.

David Author Weinert, Muskegon, MI, age 72, passed away on September 23, 2019 at his home. He graduated from high school in 1965 and shortly thereafter he enlisted in the US Marine Corps. He served for three years which included two tours in Vietnam. After his military service, he attended college and worked in architecture and building, then later for 32 years in advertising. During those years, he also volunteered to build churches in Mexico with the Spanish Missions. He is survived by his widow and four children, ten grandchildren, and three great grandchildren.

Colonel Donald Morris, USMC (Ret.)

Age 65, passed on May 15, 2005. He was born in Houston, TX in 1940. Donald graduated from Baytown High in 1958 and from Texas A&M in 1962. He was with the A&M ROTC Corps of Cadets and was commissioned in the United States Marines upon graduation. He started his rodeo career in 1963 at Camp Pendleton, Calif., and won second place in the reserve saddle bronc riding in 1964. Donald won the Louisiana Rodeo Association Champion Saddle Bronc Rider in 1973, TSRA Championship in 1977 and OTR-CA Finals Champion in 1985, and many more competitions with the Tri State Rodeo Association.

He will truly be missed by his wife of 16 years, Jane Holt Morris; his loving mother “Tiny” Storenski, and his two daughters and grandchildren. Also by his two stepsons, two sisters, along with a host of aunts, uncles, cousins, nieces, nephews and many friends. Donald was truly a wonderful spirited man and touched the souls of all he knew.

Don was a charter member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

Gary Egan Cummings

Age 73, went to be with the Lord on May 6, 2011. He was born August 23, 1937 in Logan, Utah. He retired from the U.S. Marine Corps and was a two-time Purple Heart recipient from the Vietnam War. Gary is survived by his wife, Patrice, and his six children and his three siblings and their families. Gary was a charter member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

John C. Chambers

Joe Harrigan writes: John Chambers, my first tank commander, passed away. May he rest in eternal peace. His brother sent the following message:

John C. Chambers’ tour of duty has ended. Transferred on September 11, 2019, to serve the Almighty. A proud and faithful United States Marine who was awarded the Silver Star, Vietnamese Cross of Gallantry, Purple Heart and other citations. He lived life his way and touched many people with his generosity and humor. He will be interred on October 23 at 10 AM sharp at Southern Wisconsin Veterans Memorial Cemetery in Union Grove, Wisconsin with full military honors. All are welcome. Semper Fidelis. ■

They Don’t Wear Purple Hearts in Heaven

BY: JOSEPH L MELNICK

*I lost my brother to a foreign land;
I was too young to even understand.
There came a knock at the front door,
Then momma wasn’t smiling anymore.
The man at the door was a Marine;
The first I’d ever seen.*

*Momma told me to go out and play,
Then the preacher came and they started to pray.
Tears ran down from momma’s eyes,
And I heard her say, “Why, Lord, why?”
Father stood there seemingly mindless,
All he said was, “We’ve lost another of America’s finest.”*

*The Marine handed momma a small velvet case,
Inside was a purple ribbon, attached to a gold heart with Washington’s face.
I asked momma if it were mine,
But she said, “It’s your brother’s, Sunshine.”
“Momma, can we send it to Kevin?”
She answered, “They don’t wear Purple Hearts in Heaven.”*

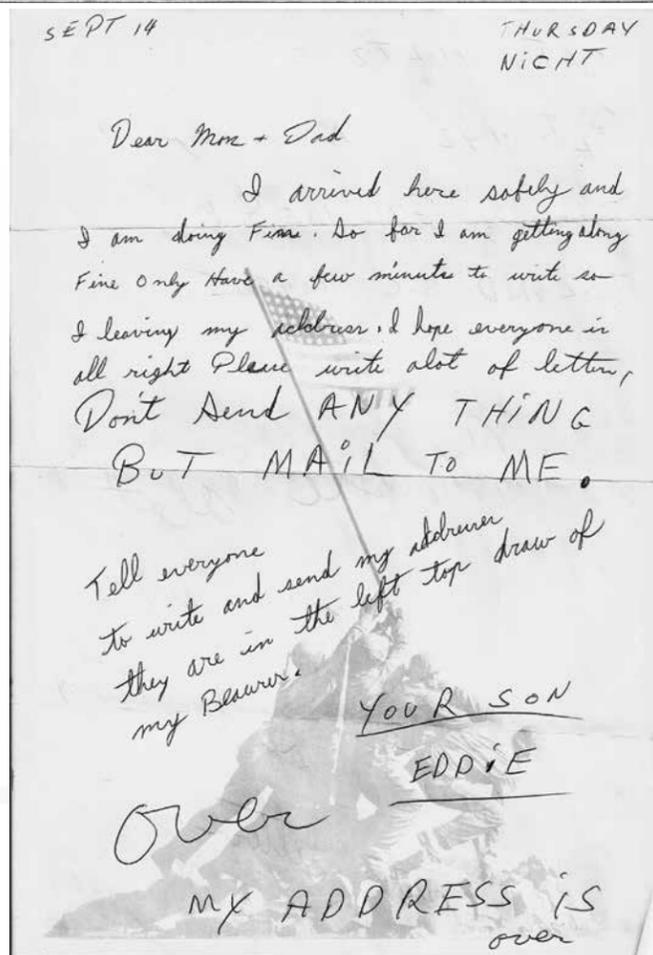
Letter Home

Ed writes: When I got out of high school, I went to work for a Baltimore newspaper as a printer "floor boy." That is, I was the one who ran a proof press and other small presses. I also proofread articles. Basically a "floor boy" was a GOPHER, also known as a house mouse. I got really tired of being abused and taking meaningless orders ... so I enlisted in the Marines for an easier life. The rest is history.

John, the very first letter I sent home from PI back in September 1967.

News paper clipping was from the place I worked which was a local News paper that served the Baltimore Area, The Baltimore News American.

Notice I said don't send anything but mail, D I, S had a tendency to grab your mail and read it out loud to rest of the platoon or grab yours and read what you were writing back to your family. Notice stamp was only five cents back then, My Mother saved many of my letters which I'm going through. God rest her soul



GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who the person on the right is in this photo? The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 with the right answer will receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner was George "Manny" Jordan who contacted John Wear on October 2, 2019 at 8:20 AM (Mountain Time) and correctly identified Olongapo City, Philippines. George explained that he was on a WESPAC tour in 1961 or 62, and during "Operation Shoofly." The US Navy ship that his BLT was on took a hit amidships from an enemy short battery and they had to sail to the PI for repairs. While there, George remembers drinking far too many "San Magoo" beers at 10 cents per bottle.



SIDE COMMENT from Frank Rodriguez: The Shit River and my babies! Just thinking back on my days in the Philippines. All those kids from different mothers. To those of you that don't know, this is a river we crossed from Subic Bay Naval Base to go into the evil city of Olongapo. It was the sewer system, literally full of shit! The kids would dive for change in this nasty ass river. The city of SIN! Me and Joe Verduzco drank San Miguel and watched all of the other Marines and sailors screw the whores. The Juju Club was our favorite, or the Cherry Club, or wait, the Olongapo Club. Actually, Joey and I spent most of our leisure time at the Catholic Church and library.



V. A. News & Updates

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

Pensions for Veterans Were Once Viewed as Government Handouts

By: Erin Blakemore



Photo: U.S. Military veteran and amputee Lloyd Epps after doctors serviced his prosthetic leg at the Veterans Administration (VA) hospital in Manhattan, New York City, 2014.

The Department of Veterans Affairs, which provides services for nearly 10 million veterans each year, currently handles health care, benefits and burials for those who have served. But nomination battles and standards of care haven't always been the most controversial thing about the V.A.—for years, Americans couldn't decide whether they wanted to support veterans at all. It would take centuries, and a tragic world war, to convince the United States to form a department that cared for its vets.



Photo: William R. Werne and Anita Bloom, both whose legs became paralyzed in combat, practice walking exercises as part of their rehabilitation training program at the Veterans Administration Hospital in the Bronx, 1944.

Fights over pensions began after the Revolutionary War

Veterans, even those with disabilities, weren't always perceived as returning heroes. From the beginning, the United States struggled with how to deal with soldiers' needs after combat was through. Though the new nation tried to induce recruits to sign up with assurances of bonuses and pensions, it didn't keep its promises to America's first veterans. The Continental Congress pledged money to anyone wounded in the Revolutionary War, but the cash-strapped Articles of Confederation Congress didn't follow through.

As historian Lester D. Langley notes, this wasn't exactly popular among the troops, many of whom had lost their limbs during the war. "The bitterness over the pensions...nearly brought on a military coup," he writes. Tension about pensions mounted between army men who felt they had been forgotten, and civilians who felt that pensions were government giveaways.

The War Pension Act of 1818

After dragging its feet for years after the Revolutionary War concluded in 1783, Congress finally addressed the issue of how to care for America's veterans with the War Pension Act of 1818. Thanks to a combination of relative prosperity and romantic sentiment toward the now distant revolution, the public supported pensions for veterans "in reduced circumstances." However, once it was passed, the number of claims astonished Congress. Almost immediately, benefits were cut and Congress tried to crack down on fraudulent claims.

Meanwhile, wounded veterans had no health care system to fall back on. Early hospitals were crude and unsanitary, and veterans' care wasn't guaranteed. In 1811, 20 cents a month began to be deducted from sailors' paychecks. Eventually, it built the Naval Asylum in Philadelphia, the first naval hospital and retirement facility in the United States.

It took until 1851 for the Army to open a similar facility. The U.S. Soldiers Home was funded without any money from the U.S. Treasury; soldiers' salaries and private donations paid for the Washington, D.C. facility.

The Civil War was a major turning point in veterans' care

The Civil War tore the nation apart and left hundreds of thousands of wounded soldiers in its wake. Sixty thousand men became amputees during the war, soldiers returned with ongoing complications of starvation and wartime diseases, and many men who did survive lived with what would now be diagnosed as PTSD. Military hospitals ran out of room for patients, hosting them in makeshift tents and discharging them as soon as it was safe. During the war, the U.S. Sanitary Commission ran temporary homes for disabled soldiers, but once the war ended it looked like they would have nowhere to go. Debates raged over whether to support disabled soldiers through pensions or state care. Then, in 1865, Congress created the National Home for Disabled Volunteer Soldiers as a nod to the men who had given their health in exchange for their service—the first of 11 such homes that cared for veterans of the Civil War and other conflicts.

It was the beginning of a new era of veteran care that depended largely on facilities known as soldiers' homes. Veterans'

organizations, private groups and states began their own homes where vets could receive treatment and live. Over time, veterans of other wars could access treatment there.



Photo: Wounded soldiers outside a brick hospital building in Fredericksburg, Virginia, 1864.

Civil War pensions became the world's largest welfare system

Since soldiers' homes were only available for long-term care, veterans had to patch together treatment and often self-funded their own care. Once again, disbursing pensions to them became a fraught political minefield. The American public was sympathetic to the plight of Civil War veterans, but it couldn't agree on what or how much the federal government owed them, says Casey N. Hedstrom, a Ph.D. candidate at Princeton University whose dissertation examines Civil War pensions.

"Massive entitlement programs are always contentious," says Hedstrom. "The pension system was the biggest welfare system in the world at that point; at its height it accounted for one third of the federal government's budget."

Meanwhile, visibly disabled veterans reminded the public of the human cost of the war. "The trope of the veteran with his 'empty sleeve' came to symbolize the individual who had sacrificed his body for the nation," says Hedstrom. "But how veterans were received depended on their class, their race, and the nature of their disability."

Additionally, a large group of Civil War veterans was excluded from veterans' benefits entirely—former Confederate soldiers. It took until 1958 for Confederates to be officially considered war veterans in the United States.



Photo: Injured soldiers at Walter Reed General Hospital in Washington, D.C. 1918.

World War I inspires a federally funded health care system for vets

It took the First World War for the United States to change the way it cares for veterans. Men returning from the war suffered from shell shock, the health effects of chemical warfare, and other ailments—and this time, the nation couldn't bear to look away. From that point on, America's veterans would benefit from a federally funded health care system.

As soon as the war started, Congress began to focus on rehabilitating veterans. As wounded men flooded home, it began to invest in vocational rehabilitation and disability compensation. The new specialty of rehabilitation medicine was seen as a way to help individuals recover instead of languishing in a state of "collective dependency."

In 1921, Congress established the Veterans Bureau; in 1924, it extended hospitalization benefits to veterans of every war, regardless of their disabilities. In 1930, Congress established the Veterans Administration. According to the V.A., federal spending on veterans rose 62 percent between 1924 and 1932.



Photo: The Bonus Army demanding their war bonus payments on the steps of the Capital while the Senate debates their case.

The V.A.'s first controversy

It didn't take long for the newly formed department to run into trouble. In 1924, Congress had promised veterans of World War I bonuses that could only be redeemed in 1945. As the Great Depression ravaged the country, though, many veterans became destitute and wanted to cash in on their bonuses early. Tens of thousands of war veterans calling themselves the "Bonus Army" descended on Washington to demand payment. They set up camp at the Anacostia Flats and marched on Washington. Then, on July 28, 1932, President Herbert Hoover ordered the Army to force the marchers out of the capital. Though they dispersed peacefully (and were eventually compensated sooner than planned), their march helped make the public more aware of the challenges facing veterans.

It wasn't a moment too soon. As veterans' services expanded under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's administration, the nation entered another world war. This time, the country was more united in its desire to help returning veterans.

World War II didn't mark the end of controversies over how to support veterans. For years, the Department of Veterans Affairs, as it's now called, has confronted questions about whether and how it serves the needs of veterans. But its very existence marks a change in how Americans perceived the people who fought its wars.

Today, most Americans can agree that it's worth supporting veterans—even if they differ on who should lead the charge. ■

Pookie

BY: STEVE FALK

I was standing in or near the Hut 4 doorway, talking to [who has become a lifelong friend] Gary Felix. I happened to have a pencil and carelessly wrote on the exposed door jamb: "Pookie."

Gary's whole being reacted off to my left rear and his voice joined the response yelling questions and offering a colorful array of violent, nasty words and phrases.

I was completely stunned by what seemed a combination of physical and emotional convulsion emphatically punctuated by a wide variety of vo-

cabulary. Finally, I clearly understood one of his interrogative remarks which basically asked: "Have you been reading my letters from my wife?"

"What the hell are you talking about, Gary?"

Red, perhaps livid, and NOT calmed at all, Gary continued: "You wrote 'Pookie,' my wife's nickname. You could not have known that if you weren't reading my mail."

"Gary," I replied, "I wrote Pookie because it's my fiancé's nickname."

I offered proof by showing him one of my letters from home. My wife's

maiden name was also Felix...so it was that one woman in New Jersey, one in California, both family names alike, were called "Pookie" by the Marine in their lives.

Editor's note: As I think most of us are aware that we lost long-time VTA member and prolific writer, Steve Falk, back in July of last year. This is the last story that he wrote to share in the Sponson Box magazine. We'll all meet again when each of us checks into the Guard Shack in Heaven.

Possibly the Worst Day that Snake Ever Had...

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

It was November 1966. Ten U.S. Navy FMF corpsmen had just arrived at Chu Lai, Vietnam. President Johnson's increase in troop levels was well under way—as was the monsoon season. The rain was heavy, the mud was thick and we were crammed into a single tent. The snake was lurking.

My journey to this place was typical. I was a U.S. Navy Corpsman in the '60's. I was also qualified in submarines, having earned that designation prior to attending Hospital Corps School in 1965. In September, 1966 I received orders to the Fleet Marine Force and to Vietnam. All US Navy Corpsmen who transfer to the Marine Corps are designated as "FMF Corpsmen".

My transfer to FMF status started with training in Marine Corps tactics, weapons and field medicine techniques. In addition to field medical procedures I had to qualify with the Colt .45 Model 1911 A and the M-14 rifle. In the Marine Corps, every Marine is a rifleman

and that includes Corpsmen. After six weeks of intense training, I shipped out to Vietnam with about 100 other corpsmen. All of us were replacements and that thought was not lost on any of us.

Arriving in Vietnam in November during the height of the monsoon season and its heavy rains, I reported to my duty station in Chu Lai. The base at Chu Lai was in the early stages of becoming a major air base for fighter jets and helicopters. It was also a staging area for all supplies being sent out to the field.

Our quarters was a 10-man canvas tent in a field of the thickest red mud I had ever experienced. In order to keep our cots from sinking, the floor of our tent was made of wooden pallets that were retrieved from the supply area. The pallets allowed the water to drain through the tent while keeping us somewhat dry. They also provided refuge for the various "critters" that liked to get in out of the rain.

One particular night, with the

monsoon raging outside, a snake decided he'd had enough and saw our tent as a place to get in out of the rain. We had been told in FMF School that there were 100 kinds of snakes in Vietnam but only 99 were poisonous; the 100th would swallow you whole. We knew the D.I.'s were joking, or at least we hoped they were.

I don't remember who saw the snake first, but when the cry went out we did what anyone would do when confronted with a savage enemy we knew would try to kill us. Without thinking twice about it, all ten of us "combat ready" corpsmen locked and loaded and then opened up on that snake with fully automatic M-14 rifles. What genius decided giving FNG's (Effen' New Guys) fully automatic weapons was a good idea lost to history?

Now imagine what happens when 10 Corpsmen with 10 rifles and each with 20-round magazine all start shooting in a 10-man tent. Tent pole shattered, pallets destroyed, cots destroyed, chaos

reigning supreme. Snake survives, tent doesn't, and ten Corpsmen have their weapons taken away, their duties changed from providing medical aid to burning shitters and an ass chewing from a Marine gunnery sergeant that would be indelibly printed in my memory forever. The gist being, what do you

morons think you're doing?

Once calm was restored and the damage was cleaned up we were told that, since we had destroyed our tent, we would be sleeping on the ground with only our poncho's serving as a shelter half and our sleeping bags keeping us dry. It was a hard lesson to learn but it made

this corpsman much more knowledgeable about the proper use of weapons and provided years of self-deprecating stories about the stupidity of people in a chaotic situation.

Footnote: The snake survived to tell his friends about the dumbasses at the medical compound.

A Soldier Fell in a Hole and Could Not Get Out

A soldier with PTSD fell into a hole and couldn't get out. When a SNCO walked by, the soldier called out for help, but the SNCO yelled back, "Suck it up son, dig deep and drive on," then threw him a shovel. The soldier did as he was told and dug that hole deeper.

A senior officer went by and the soldier called out for help again. The officer told him "Use the tools your SNCO has given you," then threw him a bucket. The soldier used the tools and he dug the hole deeper still and filled the bucket.

A psychiatrist walked by. The soldier called, "Help! I can't get out!" so the psychiatrist gave him some drugs and said, "Take this. It will relieve the pain and you will forget about the hole." The soldier

said "Thanks" and followed his advice, but when the pills ran out he was still in the hole.

A well-known psychologist rode by and heard the soldier's cries for help. He stopped and asked, "How did you get there? Were you born there? Did your parents put you there? Tell me about yourself, it will alleviate your sense of loneliness." So the soldier talked with him for an hour, then the psychologist had to leave, but he said he'd be back next week. The soldier thanked him, but he was still in the hole.

Another soldier, just like him, happened to be passing by. The soldier with PTSD cried out, "Hey, help me. I'm stuck in this hole!" and right away the other soldier

jumped down in there with him. The soldier with PTSD started to panic and said, "What are you doing? Now we're both stuck down here!" But the other soldier just smiled and replied, "It's okay, calm down, brother. I've been here before..... I know how to get out."

No matter what you're going through, you are never alone. But don't be too proud to shout out: "HELP! I'M STUCK IN THIS HOLE!!!" We all get stuck in a hole from time to time but all it takes is to ask your mates for help and we will be there even if we have to jump in that hole with you.

Adapted from writings by Aaron Sorkin, Soldier On Australia, Mates4Mates, Beyond Blue

BULL & FRUIT

BY: ROBERT VAXTER

For some reason after fifty plus years I cannot seem to recall the exact date but it was in June of 1968 and, as the driver of Charlie 3-1 (Charlie Co, Third Tank Battalion), I took care of the old girl with help from the loader (Tony Sims). We had been running convoys between Dong Ha and Khe Sanh for a couple of days. We were at LZ Hawk for the night. After checking the track, I was killing time before chow by cleaning the driver's compartment. A check of the fuel gauge showed



that we were low on "go juice." I told the TC, Darrell Clock, that we needed fuel. Clock said he would take care of it.

The next morning Clock advised us that he had spoken with Lt. Ralston and we were to go to Cam Lo to refuel. I fired up the engine and in a short time the crew of the "Lonely Bull" was heading down the mountain on Highway 9 towards Cam Lo.

After a short trip, we arrived at the fuel depot at Cam Lo. We rolled five 55-gallon drums up next to the tank and, with a bit of effort, we got one up and on to the engine cover. Tony Sims got a hand fuel pump from the Marine work- >>

ing at the depot. Taking turns, we began to pump fuel into the tank.

The Marine assigned to the fuel depot told us that they had fresh fruit at the supply tents, but you had to be a Staff NCO to get any. Sgt. Clock thought for a minute and said that he had an idea. He opened up his 40 mike-mike box and, after a few seconds, pulled out a Staff Sgt. chevron.

How he got one was anyone's guess. He broke off the top chevron and, low and behold, a "Staff Corporal" chevron. He took out his cover and attached the chevron to the front of the cover, and off he went towards the

supply area.

What seemed like about a half an hour later we were just finishing putting the last of the fuel in to our fuel tanks when Sgt. Clock returned with a card board box full of fruit. The fruit was placed in the gypsy rack on the back of the turret and we started getting ready to return to LZ-Hawk. Tom Freeman, our gunner, asked Sgt. Clock how he got the fruit.

Sgt. Clock replied that when he got to the supply area it was lunch time and the only one around was a private fresh out of Boot Camp and new to Vietnam. Sgt. Clock told him that he was there to get the fruit for the tanks.

Stone Heart

At the Toy Loan Bridge, Quang Nam Province, Vietnam 1968

Charlie Company, 1st Tank Battalion

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

A pile of unusual looking debris drifted down the river into the flood lights. It appeared to stop in the current, and then moved up stream. I fired the M-79 and saw the splash – it didn't detonate. The sentry on the bridge hit the floating clump with rifle fire.

The night went on...

Weeks pass...

There is an angry mob at the end of the wire. Two men and a woman come to the gate cradling a young boy. His face and legs are covered with an old towel to keep him from seeing the horrific wound to his foot. Parris went for the Lieutenant. I opened the gate.

The boy stepped on the round I fired at the suspicious movement on the river weeks before. The men and the mother were screaming through their tears for some kind of attention.

One of the village kids yelled over the wire at me, "You're number fuckin' 10!"

I moved over to the boy. The blood stained towel stuck to the wound. He flinched when I lifted it. His big toe, half of his foot and arch were gone. Severed bones stick out of his small foot. Only his fourth and pinky toe remained. I raised the towel higher, he flinches again. Shrapnel fragments run from his testicles down both sides of his legs. His wounds are deep and he is bleeding onto the dirt.

The mother smacks my comm. helmet and turns me to face her. She is sobbing and trying to catch her breath. I am staring at her. She squints with a glare and moves in closer. I can feel her looking deep down inside of me—she starts to talk. She speaks slowly, wagging both hands at me in an angry tone. I watch her for a long time

Combat Veterans?

Please keep this in mind: If you have a Combat Veteran in your family and you don't like their moods and behavior around the holidays; please consider these six things:

1) Your Combat Veteran has served

in countries where people are blessed to receive a tattered pair of shoes or have clean water to drink; he/she no longer lives the "first world illusion" and no longer cares that if you buy one play station you can get a second

The private started to say something and then he saw the chevron with the rocker and said, "I will get it for you, Staff, what do you want?"

We ended up with about a dozen oranges, a bunch of apples and a half dozen bananas.

Sgt. Clock said all that boot FNG saw was the rocker. So off we went back to LZ-Hawk with fuel for the tank and fuel for our bodies. Some of the oranges and apples made it back to the LZ but the Bananas did not. They tasted great. All thanks to Staff Corporal Darrell Clock.

Rest in Peace TC.

going to the mall.

2) Your Combat Veteran is thankful for the most basic things—not thankful for mega-sales and million dollar parades. They are thankful to be alive; thankful to have survived both the wars far away and the wars they struggle with inside.

3) Your Combat Veteran is thankful that it wasn't them that got killed, or wishes that it was them that got killed instead, or is torn painfully between the two. Either way, their

celebrations are forever complicated by guilt and loss over those that died. Some of the most thankful times in their life (lucky to be alive) were some of the scariest. Their feelings of thanks and celebration often conjure memories that are equally painful.

4) Your Combat Veteran is not like you anymore. At some point, for some period of time, their entire life boiled down to just three simple things: when will I eat today, when will I sleep today, and who will I have

to kill or will try to kill me today? They are not like you anymore.

5) Your Combat Veteran does not need a guilt-trip or a lecture; they already feel detached in their grief while others so easily embrace the joy of the season. They need understanding and space; empathy not sympathy.

6) Your Combat Veteran does love his/her family and is thankful for the many blessings in their life...and they are thankful for you.

The U.S. Marine Corps Version of Genesis 1

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

In the beginning was the word and the word was God.

In the beginning was God and all else was darkness and void and without form. So God created the heavens and the Earth. He created the sun and the moon and the stars so that light might pierce the darkness. The Earth, God divided between the land and the sea and these he filled with many assorted creatures.

And the dark, salty, slimy creatures that inhabited the murky depths of the oceans, God called sailors. And He dressed them accordingly. They had little trousers that looked like bells at the bottom. And their shirts had cute little flaps on them to hide the hickeys on their necks. He also gave them long sideburns and shabby looking beards. God nicknamed them "squids" and banished them to a lifetime at sea so that normal folks would not have to associate with them. To further identify these unloved creatures. He called them "petty" and "commodore" instead of titles worthy of red-blooded men.

And the flaky creatures of the land, God called soldiers. And with a twinkle in His eye and a sense of

humor that only He could have, God made their trousers too short and their covers too large. He also made their pockets oversized so that they may warm their hands. And to adorn their uniforms, God gave them badges in quantities that only a dime store owner could appreciate. And He gave them emblems and crests... and all sorts of shiny things that glittered... and devices that dangled. (When you are God you tend to get carried away.)

On the 6th day, He thought about creating some air creatures for which he designed a Greyhound bus driver's uniform especially for Air Force flyboys. But He discarded the idea during the first week and it was not until years later that some apostles resurrected this theme and established what we now know as the "Wild-Blue-Yonder Wonders."

And on the 7th day as you know, God rested.

But on the 8th day at 0730, God looked down upon the earth and was not happy. No, God was not happy! So He thought about His labors and in His divine wisdom, God created a divine creature. And this He called Marine. And these Marines, who

God had created in His own image, were to be of the air and of the land and of the sea. And these He gave many wonderful uniforms. Some were green, some were blue with red trim. And in the early days some were even a beautiful tan. He gave them practical fighting uniforms so that they could wage war against the forces of Satan and evil. He gave them service uniforms for their daily work and training. And He gave them evening and dress uniforms... sharp and stylish handsome things... so that they might promenade with their ladies on Saturday night and impress the hell out of everybody! He even gave them swords so that people who were not impressed could be dealt with accordingly. And at the end of the 8th day, God looked down upon the earth and saw that it was good. But was God happy? No! God was still not happy! Because in the course of His labors, He had forgotten one thing: He did not have a Marine uniform for himself. He thought about it and thought about it and finally God satisfied Himself in knowing that well... not everybody can be a Marine!

The Meaning of the Flag-Draped Coffin

What a wonderful lesson this was for me. I do not recall ever being taught this in school. "The Meaning of the Flag-Draped Coffin." All Ameri-

cans should be given this lesson. Those who think that America is an arrogant nation should really reconsider that thought. Our founding fathers used

God's word and teachings to establish our Great Nation, and I think it's high time Americans get re-educated about this nation's history. >>

2019 Seattle Reunion Recap

Here is how to understand the flag that laid upon it and is surrendered to so many widows and widowers: Do you know that at military funerals, the 21-gun salute stands for the sum of the numbers in the year 1776?

Have you ever noticed that the honor guard pays meticulous attention to correctly folding the United States of America Flag 13 times? You probably thought it was to symbolize the original 13 colonies, but we learn something new every day!

The 1st fold of the flag is a symbol of life.

The 2nd fold is a symbol of the belief in eternal life.

The 3rd fold is made in honor and remembrance of the veterans departing the ranks who gave a portion of their lives for the defense of the country to attain peace throughout the world.

The 4th fold represents the weaker nature, for as American citizens trusting in God, it is to Him we turn in times of peace as well as in time of war for His divine guidance.

The 5th fold is a tribute to the

country, for in the words of Stephen Decatur, "Our Country, in dealing with other countries, may she always be right; but it is still our country, right or wrong."

The 6th fold is for where people's hearts lie. It is with their heart that they pledge allegiance to the flag of the United States of America and the Republic for which it stands, one Nation under God, indivisible, with Liberty and Justice for all.

The 7th fold is a tribute to its Armed Forces, for it is through the Armed Forces that they protect their country and their flag against all her enemies, whether they be found within or without the boundaries of their republic.

The 8th fold is a tribute to the one who entered into the valley of the shadow of death, that we might see the light of day.

The 9th fold is a tribute to womanhood, and mothers. For it has been through their faith, their love, loyalty and devotion that the character of the men and women who have made this country great has been molded.

The 10th fold is a tribute to the father, for he, too, has given his sons and daughters for the defense of their country since they were first born.

The 11th fold represents the lower portion of the seal of King David and King Solomon and glorifies in the Hebrews eyes, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.

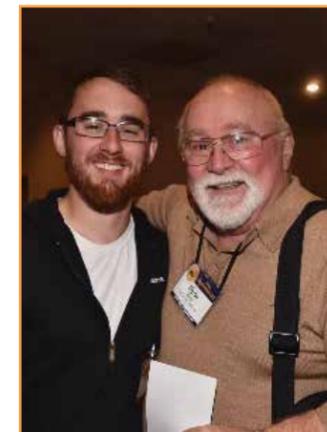
The 12th fold represents an emblem of eternity and glorifies, in the Christians eyes, God the Father, the Son and Holy Spirit.

The 13th fold, or when the flag is completely folded, the stars are uppermost reminding them of their nation's motto, "In God We Trust."

After the flag is completely folded and tucked in, it takes on the appearance of a cocked hat, ever reminding us of the soldiers who served under General George Washington, and the sailors and Marines who served under Captain John Paul Jones, who were followed by their comrades and shipmates in the Armed Forces of the United States, preserving for them the rights, privileges and freedoms they enjoy today. ■



Rick Lewis, Craig Newberry and Greg Auclair



Aaron-Clyde Knox



Carol - Guy Wolfenbarger



Carol - Ron Colucci



Greg and Fred man the PX



Virgil - Janice Melton



A Band of Brothers



First timers Armando - Ester Moreno

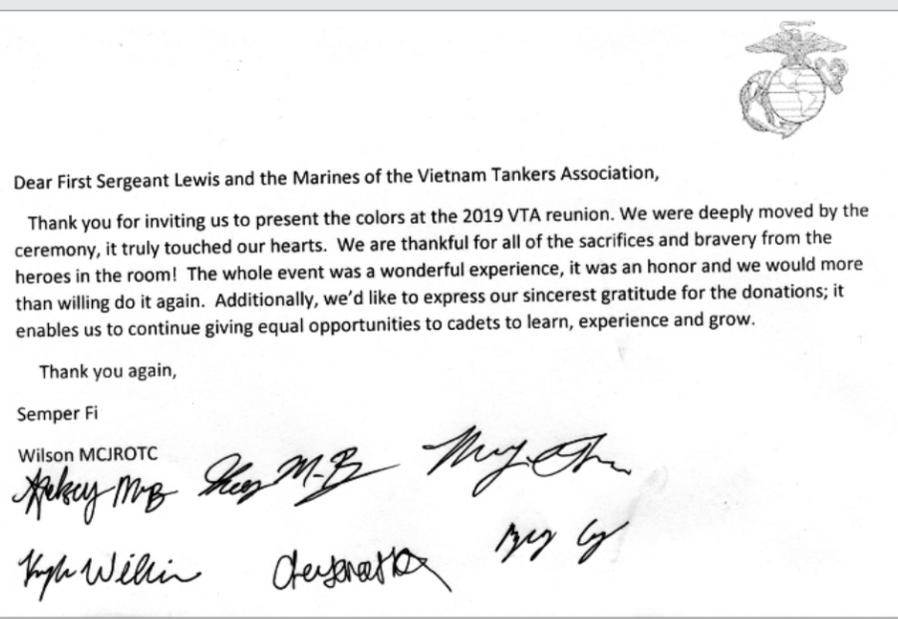


Belmo and Bruce man the Welcome Table



Tom Reisch and "Hughie" Hughes

During the opening ceremonies of the Farewell Banquet of the VTA 2019 reunion in Seattle, the color guard was comprised of Young Marines from the Wilson High School JROTC unit. The Young Marines did an outstanding job of presenting the colors. During the meal, a hat was passed for the VTA attendees to donate money toward the Young Marines' program. We collected \$661 for them. I am pretty sure that this is a record number that we've ever contributed and the Young Marines were thrilled. This is their Thank You note to the VTA.





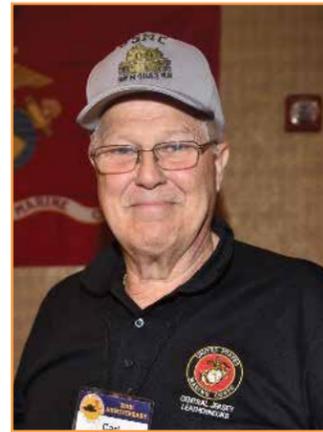
Garry and Dona Hall and Grandson



First timer Ted - Jacque Hildabrand



First timer Richard Cecil



First timer Carl Hokanson



Ladies Meeting



Business Meeting



Guy Everest, Roger "Blues" Unland and Rick Lewis



The ladies plan their meeting



Carl Fleischmann is all smiles



Harris Himes, Rick Oswood, Mike Pipkin, Fred Kellogg, Rene Cerda Rick Coulter and Cliff Heino



And the winner is... Michael Jaron



Terry Wallace - John Wear



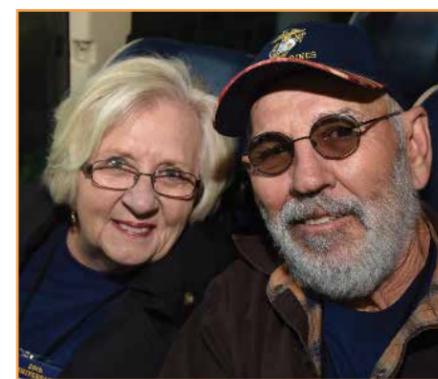
Roger always charms the ladies



Terry Hunter and Ben Cole



Ginnie - Gerry Hearne



Toneia - Wally Young



Bonnie - Jim Raasch



Abbi Rudy - Jenni Clock



Salute to Doc Hack



The Ontos Marines



Bruce - JoAnn Wahlsten



Jean - Tom Cartier



Ric - Mary Colter and friends



Tony Sims and family

My First Flame Tank Mission—May 1968

BY: LEE DILL

May 1, 1968, was my first day in-country. Off the plane to battalion, spent the night, I think we got mortared, and then to Phu Bai and Alpha company the next day. I remember getting on a C130 and thinking, "I wonder how old this plane is since it has props....hell it was nearly new." God, was I the boot!!

So there are roughly twelve of us FNG's assigned to Alpha Company. They broke us up by last name—I ended up in Flames; Tim Hanks ended up in 2nd Platoon; and Riley was in 3rd Platoon. Leave it to the Corps to find your skill sets.

The next day I did my first and only patrol around the camp—wide open territory, razor concertina to the left, and I assumed all the VC in the world to my right (nothing happened).

This was followed by building bunkers and guarding the trash dump, keeping out kids. So two weeks into my tour, not assigned to a tank and doing shit work.

The next morning I get my assignment—gunner on F-12; Cpl. Drewes commanding and PFC Curtis driver. Flames would never be my first choice because too close inside and "THEY" could get too close outside, so even though I was on a tank, I was not thrilled about the assignment.

I should mention that Cpl. Drewes was a Flame Tank Legend. He knew more about Flames than anyone I knew and had gone up and down in rank a number of times. Overall a good man to be with. Curtis had arrived a month before me in-country.

So the mission is to go to a firebase north-west of Phu Bai near the mountains and clean brush out of the wire—simple enough, huh? After breakfast we throw our gear onto F-12 and head out...yes, a one tank mission; it must have been a very safe area after Tet.

Since I am the new guy I get to drive. After about 40

minutes, Cpl Drewes, who has been singing "Orange Blossom Special" on the intercom over and over, informs me to stop in front of that building on the left; we are going to have lunch. LUNCH?? WTF!! Safe to assume that it was a "Fast Food- Boom Boom combo establishment!"

Since FNG does not question the TC, I pull over and park F-12. All 3 of us proceed to enter the front door. Drewes assigns a Vietnamese man to watch the tank (you can't make this shit up!). We sit down to a chicken dinner and a big tall bottle of TPB, Tiger Piss Beer (yes, cool, not cold). Dinner must have been free range chicken (if it was chicken because mine was stringy and chewy), but the beer was good and, since I was basically a 19 year old nondrinker I was getting buzzed quickly. While drinking my 2nd beer, Drewes told me to go outside and watch the tank. He had to stay inside and visit with moma-san. Apparently, they had been friendly before

I have no idea where Curtis is and the beer is really hitting me hard. But I was told to watch the tank, so tank watch I began. One issue was that F-12 was loaded with Vietnamese. They were all over it, so in my best buzzed command voice I hollered "get off my tank!!" They did, but they were so friendly we all started taking photos with my camera. It was over a year later that Mom remarked about the photo of me and the little Vietnamese boy that she told everyone, "Look, Lee misses his little brother Mark so much that he took a photo of him and the little Vietnamese." What she does not see in the photo is that Lee cannot see too clearly because the buzz is now in full force, and I am using the little kid for balance!

After some time, Drewes and Curtis reappear. Somehow, I drive the tank to the fire base without issues and nobody said anything....until now. I think 50 years is enough time for the dust to settle – Lee ■



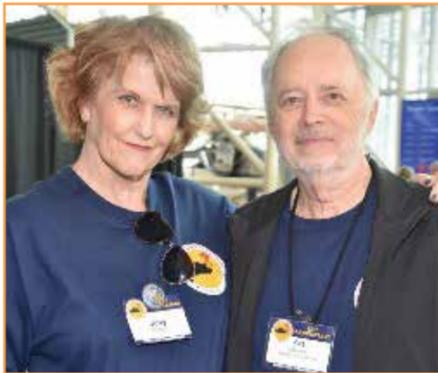
Ron - Kandra Kalanick and Glen - Gail Hoopman



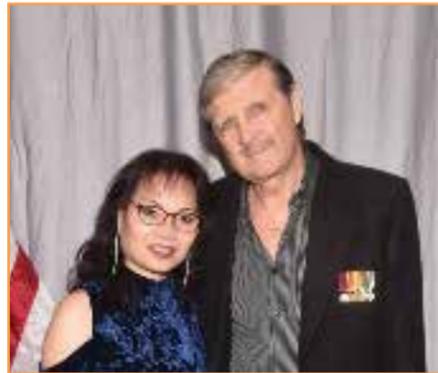
Roger "Blues" Unland



Greg Martin and Sara



Judy - Art Moreno



Ron Dudek - Minh Thu



Bobby Joe - Jeannie Blythe



Ken - Liz Zebal



Joe Liu



Lt Gen Joe Weber - Guest Speaker



John Wear gives the word



"Tree" gives us the word



Bob Peavey - Fallen Heroes



Me and Baby-San



Curtis and Drewes

Remembering Gunnery Sergeant Keith

BY: JIM COAN

My tour in Nam ended in September, 1968, and my stateside assignment was with 2nd Tanks at Camp Lejeune. The battalion commander was Lt. Col. Saul. Initially, I was the S-3A, assistant to the Battalion S-3, Major Green. I was a first lieutenant at the time.

That first month with 2nd Tanks was not a pleasant one. My boss, Major Green, took delight in giving me assignments that he didn't want to be bothered with, even though they were above my level of experience. Then, to add insult to injury, he gave me zero help. And, he could never get my name right, calling me "Lieutenant Krone," no matter how many times I said: "It's Coan, sir."

Second Tank Bn. mounted out to a southern Army base that winter for live fire exercises.

I noted that our enlisted Marines had nothing to do in the evening. I got in my jeep and contacted the base recreation NCO, asking him to see what he could do to provide our Marines some recreation in their off-duty hours. In no time, ping pong tables, library books, and table games were brought in. When word got back to Colonel Saul what I'd done, he called me in to his office and told me he was going to have me replace the Charlie Company commander who had recently departed for another assignment.

Charlie Company, 2nd Tanks, had the M-103A2 heavy tanks. The three other battalion companies had the M-48A3. Initially, I was unsure about those "elephant tanks." They mounted a 120mm cannon and had a crew of five. However, during a live-fire competition at another southern US Army base, I was highly impressed by the ac-

curacy of that main gun (as well as its gunner). I became a fan.

My first day on the job, I met Gunnery Sergeant Keith, Charlie Company Gunny. He was a Black Marine, about 6 ft. 4 inches, and 250 pounds of solid muscle. His waist size could not have been more than a 34.

Camp Lejeune was having serious racial problems in 1969, including an assault on a White sentry and the subsequent hanging of two Black Marines outside the base theater one night. All of us 2nd Tanks company commanders were tasked with attempting to have some dialogue (sensitivity training?) with our Marines to head off further incidents. Right away, I realized that having Gunny Keith in my company was a blessing. New Black Marines sent to Charlie Company from Nam were told their first day in no-nonsense terms by the gunny: "I only see one color around here, and that color is Marine Corps green!" As I recall, Charlie Company had no racial incidents of note while I was assigned there.

Gunny Keith had been present at the "Street without Joy" incident in Quang Tri Province when a Charlie Company tank ran over a command-detonated bomb that totally destroyed the tank, instantly killing all four crewmen. I could tell he was deeply troubled by that tragedy. On more than one occasion, he sat down in my office, wanting to talk about it.

The scuttlebutt about the gunny was that he only went as far as the 9th grade before quitting to go to work in the North Carolina logging industry. But, whenever our battalion was scheduled to participate in a parade, I would just ask Gunny Keith where I

was supposed to stand and what I was supposed to do. He knew the manual like the back of his hand and never gave me wrong information.

The gunny was "Old Corps" in many ways. One Monday morning, he accompanied me on a routine barracks inspection. As we entered the barracks, we noticed a Marine still lying in his rack, sound asleep. I sensed the gunny's urgency as he suggested (told me): "Why don't you check out the latrine, sir, while I speak with this Marine." As I proceeded into the latrine, I heard a loud thump—ka-thump! I counted to three, then walked slowly back into the squad bay.

"What seems to be the problem here, gunny," I said, knowing full well what had happened. The pale-faced, shaking Marine standing at rigid attention had just been booted, literally, out of his rack.

"No problem, sir," said the gunny. "This man thought because he had come back from sick bay, that he could sack out. But we have an understanding now, don't we, private?"

The Marine looked at me wide-eyed as he replied: "Y-Y-Yessir."

"Very well, then. Carry on," I said, biting my lip in order to keep a straight face.

On another occasion when 2nd Tanks went to a southern US Army base for live-firing training, Gunny Keith and I took our jeep into town on an errand of some kind. As he parked the jeep by the curb in front of a store, I exited and walked toward the store entrance. A Black Army soldier was standing slouched against the store

(Continued on page 34)

Ed Hiltz

Ed writes: In the past I believe the Sponson Box had published articles about several of our members as to what they have been doing since being discharged from the Marine Corps. I think that it would be interesting to get as many of our members to write and send in a short biography on their lives after the Corps.

HERE'S MINE:

I enlisted in the Marine Corps for a three-year hitch in September, 1967 and was assigned to PLT 1042, Parris Island. After the first day there I said to myself, "What the f*ck did I get myself into?" After ten weeks of hell, I graduated and went to ITR at Camp Geiger. I then got 30-days leave to go home for some well-deserved rest. After that, I reported to Camp Pendleton and to the Delmar Tracked Vehicle Schools Battalion.

I was a Private First Class (PFC) when I shipped out to Vietnam in early March, 1968. I first went to H&S Company at 1st Tank Battalion where I was assigned to the Battalion Headquarters Tanks, Yankee 51 and 52. Shortly after that I was transferred to Bravo Company at Hill 55 and then finally to the 4th Platoon, Alpha Company, with Lt Hurt at the An Hoa Combat Base.

I was a Lance Corporal when I left Vietnam in April of 1969 and I immediately took my 30-day leave. While back home, I bought a new 650 BSA motorcycle and a used 1962 Ford Galaxy convertible with the money I saved from my Vietnam service. I spent every penny that I had saved on those two purchases and never regretted it! After my leave, I reported to Camp Lejeune. I was stateside for approximately six months. I went first to 2nd Motor-T, then to 2nd Tank Battalion with Lt. Allen Cohen's company (What a great guy!).

Sometime in October of 1969, I was sent on a MED Cruise with the 7th fleet. I had a wonderful time while visiting all the ports/countries (Ha Ha!!!!). Actually, I had four days leave in Paris, France. After six months of the "float" I returned to the states and received a four-month early out with an Honorable Discharge. Just a note: I only had four article 15's while in the Marine Corps and all were for minor stuff. I still received an Honorable Discharge...after all, what good Marine didn't get a few of those?

I started working a construction job as an iron worker, right away. It was hard physical work that was outside in the weather, both hot and cold. During this time, I met my wife, Kathi. We were married in 1972, and still married after 45 years! We have three grown daughters. My oldest, Kara 40, is an operating room RN and charge nurse. The twins Kasey and Kristi are 38 years old. Kasey is a senior underwriter for a major insurance company and Kristi is director of new construction for Comcast. I have two grandsons, Logan and Caden and one granddaughter, Chayse age 13 now (who is the light of my life).

After a few years of working construction, I decided the construction business was not for me and went to work for my father-in-law. After working with him and learning the business, I started my own company, Tri



County Building Maintenance Inc.

My dream had always been to become a police officer. I was hired by the Baltimore City Police Department while my wife ran the maintenance business. My motto was, if you can't beat them, join them! I had accumulated numerous traffic violations on my motorcycle and car but, amazingly, I was a quick hire due to my Marine Corps and military background.

I spent 25 years with the police department, first as a patrol officer and the last 12 years as a detective in Criminal Intelligence/narcotics. I retired in 2006. I enjoyed retirement for four years, caring for my granddaughter, traveling and riding my custom-built motorcycle. I then decided to join the work force again after being offered a job as a Special Deputy Marshal, U.S. Marshal Service, at the Federal Court House in Baltimore. I look forward to retiring in the future for good this time!!!

I attribute all of my good fortune and success to the time I spent in the Marine Corp and the discipline they instilled in me. It was my stepping stone to a career in law enforcement and a successful life. I have also been blessed with a wonderful wife and children who are all very successful.

Charles "Ed" Hiltz, Jr.
Nottingham, Maryland
Home: 410-256-7151
Cell: 410-935-7434

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VIETNAM MEMORIES

I'm now providing some of my memories from my tour of duty in Vietnam from March 1968 to April 1969. It is in no particular order or with regard to the months that they occurred. Unfortunately, with age & time, my memory has faded a bit.

After only a few days in-country, I was first assigned to H&S Company's gun tanks, Yankee 51 or 52. We were sent out to 7th Communications (7 Comm.). I was brand new and while I was on evening watch, I experienced my first encounter with incoming rockets. I learned quickly that seeking refuge inside of the tank was the safest place to be. Later on, I was transferred to Bravo Co., 1st Tanks, that was located on Hill 55 and then to Alpha Company with Lt. Hurt at An Hoa.

I participated in Operation Mameluke Thrust with the grunts of 1/5. Our platoon leader, Lt. Hurt, was TC of the tank and I was the driver. I saw my first combat action when we were the lead tank in a column of tanks and grunts. All of a sudden, two Marine engineer mine sweepers were shot down in front of me. I immediately came to the realization this was for real and I was very concerned/scared. I remember dropping my driver's seat and then closing and locking the hatch. That same morning, our tank, which I believe was A-11, took an RPG hit at the right road wheel area. The strange thing is that none of the crew didn't even realize this RPG hit took place until later on that day, after we stopped and dismounted in a secure area.

That same day, Lt. Hurt was directing me to drive forward towards incoming small arms fire and my response was either to myself or verbally. "WHY THE HELL DO YOU WANT ME TO GO THAT WAY?!!!" We had Marine grunts behind our tank and I had my driver's hatch open but my seat was down. Evidently, an unknown Marine was trying to get my attention, I guess to get me to maneuver the tank in a certain

direction. He threw a small rock into the driver compartment, but as soon as the thrown object went past my field of vision, my imagination simply took over and I thought that the rock was an enemy grenade! I started frantically reaching around, using just my hands to locate the enemy explosive. My panicked mind had the grenade going off and ripping through my body, killing me instantly. Much to my relief, I latched onto a small rock. When I looked out of the driver's compartment, the grunt was standing there with a smile on this face.

I vividly remember B-52 arc light strikes with the ground close by actually vibrating. During this same operation while our tanks were still in a column, the grunts located a suspected VC. They laid him down in front of our tank's track and they had me drive slowly forward to get him to talk. As I drove the tank forward, the enemy's eyes got really big and he began to cry like a baby and talking very fast to the ARVN interpreter.

Some experiences on Go Noi Island were these:

We were mistakenly bombed by our own pilots. I believe a Marine was KIA. Lt. Allen Cohen was my platoon leader at the time and, while in this area, in the distance we observed an NVA flag actually up high displayed on a tree or a flag pole. Lt. Hurt, SSgt. Hoover and others tried to shoot it down using our 90mm main guns, but we had negative results.

While on perimeter that night all four crewmen slept inside the tank. After an overnight ambush, the grunts brought in two prisoners... along with a very young suspected VC who looked to be around the age of 12 to 15 years old. I have several pictures of prisoners on Tim's Bravo Co. website. In order to get them to talk and/or to give us information, a .45 caliber hand gun was put to their head.

Our tank almost wasted a company of ARVN's. One night while on

perimeter, we saw a column of troops on an open trail heading toward our position. Thinking they were enemy troops, our tank had a canister round loaded in the gun tube ready to fire at them. Then at the last minute they shot up a green flare. They were saved from being KIA by just a few minutes.

I will always remember rationing our water to the grunts. We always carried three or more 5-gallon water cans on our tank. They used to form a line behind our tank while we poured them water from our supply. Sometimes they didn't get water supplied from choppers until much later. I also watched in dismay as many grunts dipped their helmet into rice paddy water to get a drink.

I remember while we were on an unknown hill (maybe Hill 10 or Hill 148) a Vietnamese mother carrying her child up to the grunts. The infant had several canister / arrows/ flechette rounds protruding from his chest. You could hear the air escaping from his lungs. I assume the grunt's corpsman attended to him.

On another note, I was probably best remembered with the nickname "Nazi." Although it's not politically correct today, that's what everyone called me while in-country. I was named "Nazi" after the character named Sgt. Shultz from the TV show "Hogan's Heroes." He is famous for saying, "I see nothing and know nothing." Since Hiltz rhymes with Schultz, it was a natural nickname. Lt. Hurt assigned me that name when I was his driver. He and I have kept in touch over the years.

On perimeter one night at An Hoa, I was close to rotating back to the states. I was the TC even though I was only an E-3. This was because I had the most time in-country and there were no sergeants available to take command. While Heagy was on watch in the cupola, I was sleeping on the gypsy rack behind him. All of a sudden our tank took an RPG

striking the TC cupola. PFC Heagy was seriously wounded as he hollered out, "Nazi, I'm hit!!!" PFC Perez jumped into the driver's compartment and backed the tank up away from the concertina wire. I jumped into the cupola and started firing the .50 caliber blindly into the area that I thought the RPG came from. I called over the radios and notified SSgt. Hoover and Lt. Cohen or Hurt (I don't remember which one). They called in for a medevac. It was there in no time and they flew PFC Heagy out. I believe L/Cpl Ron Colucic has more information about Heagy. Even though I was right behind Heagy, the impact of the RPG never touched me. Thankfully, my guardian angel must have been watching over me the whole time that I was in-country.

While heading back to An Hoa from the Go Noi area with a company of ARVNs, the tank in front of ours hit a land mine. The small contingent of grunts that were with us immediately set a perimeter. The ARVNs, on the other hand, actually started to run away. Their CO had to take out his .45 pistol and fire shots over their heads to get them to stop, assemble and set up their own perimeter. They then fired off some mortar rounds as H&I fire. So much for their dedication to their own cause.

Here are a few more things that I can recall:

On June 28, 1968, while moving with the 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co., our tank, A-11 hit (what we estimated as) a 150-pound land mine. I was the driver and Lt. Hurt was TC. I believe that he may have received a Purple Heart for injuries to his face/nose. Several other Marines who were riding on the tank's fenders were also injured. One Marine could have even been severely wounded or KIA. Prior to hitting the land mine, I was told years later by PFC David Reed (who is now deceased) that he remembers me saying over the tank's intercom and just before we hit the mine, "Something doesn't look right. The shit's going to hit the fan!"

That statement was made because it was unusually quiet and there were no civilians around. Cpl. Sena was gunner that day. I don't know where we were heading at the time. I actually have a copy of the after-action report regarding this incident. I never wrote home about this to family/parents because I didn't want to upset or worry them. And just like when I was at Parris Island for boot camp, I always wrote home and said everything is fine.

After hitting the mine, the damage to A-11 was really bad on the right side. I don't remember exactly when a Marine tank retriever came either to An Hoa or at the location where we sat

after detonating the mine, and hooked us up to be taken to Hill 55 or to 1st Tank Battalion Maintenance.

It was Cpl. Sena and me, but I don't remember if others were with us. Once we got past Liberty Bridge and down to the pontoon raft used to get back & forth to each side of the river, the tank retriever backed our tank onto the pontoon raft. In addition to our tank and the tank retriever, also loading on to the raft were numerous Vietnamese civilian adults and children. Well, both of the vehicles were on the pontoon when the retriever disconnected from our tank in order to return to their base camp. The retriever moved out but the raft became unbalanced. Then, the raft capsized forward (or backward, I can't remember). Our tank rolled off the raft and down into the water taking with it many Vietnamese civilian men, women and children. Several Marines went jumping into the water in an attempt to rescue as many people as they could. I recall Cpl. Sena and others were in the water grabbing children/babies. I also remember S/Sgt. Hoover having to write up some sort of report about this and he questioned us about the incident in detail. I don't know how many civilian casualties there were but I'm sure there were some. After that we then had to spend some time recovering the tank out of the river.

John, here is a list of names to the best of my memory that I served with throughout Vietnam March 68 to April 69

- ★ Lieut. Morton Hurt from Washington State
- ★ Lieut. Alan Cohen from Georgia
- ★ Staff Sgt. Hoover
- ★ Sgt. Drysdale from Michigan
- ★ Sgt. Piper
- ★ Sgt. Hearon from Massachusetts
- ★ Cpl. Hines from Minnesota
- ★ Cpl. Turner
- ★ Cpl. Yacovich from Kentucky
- ★ Lieut. Ron Knight
- ★ PFC Dimitris
- ★ Cpl. Russ Sena from CA
- ★ Cpl. Jellerson from CA
- ★ PFC Perez
- ★ L/Cpl. Garcia

- ★ L/Cpl. David Reed from MI (now deceased)
 - ★ PFC Epps from NY- KIA An Hoa (His picture is on Tim's web site under my images)
 - ★ Cpl. Richard Coonfield from VA
 - ★ L/Cpl. Tim Caterell from PA
 - ★ PFC Heagy-WIA at An Hoa (RPG on night perimeter and he had to be medevaced out that night. I was his TC)
 - ★ PFC Hornbeck from CA.
 - ★ PFC Ron Colucia-WIA
 - ★ Cpl. Dudley from WA
- Keep in mind that all information may or may not be accurate as well as the spellings of names. I'm strictly going off my memory from 50 years ago. I do have pictures of some of these guys posted on Tim Mayte's web site. ■



STEEL-HORSE MARINES

AUTHOR: P. L. THOMPSON

Leatherneck Magazine—December 1968

Volume 51, Issue 12

The Horse Marine has long since passed from the Corps scene. Today, instead of one man on a horse, four Marines now ride an M-48A3 tank. The Marines of the 3d Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division in Vietnam differ little in tradition from the now legendary Horse Marines of the early 20th Century. Scratch a tanker and you find a Horse Marine. Talk to an old Horse Marine and he will talk about his horse, hour after hour. A tanker, too, has been known to get a little long winded about his tanks. And, in the case of today's tanker, he has good reason.

In almost every Vietnam battle in which Marines fought, a tank was there. At Hue, Con Thien, Khe Sanh, you name it, a tank played its formidable role.

During the struggle for the city of Hue, four tanks that had been on their way from Phu Bai, Quang Tri, rumbled into the battle. They were credited with helping save part of the southern half of Hue and checking the communist advance.

Maj. Conrad J. Samuelsen, executive officer of the 3d Tank Bn., said of the engagement, "We had four of our tanks, two gun tanks and two flame tanks, in Hue for 18 days. At the loss of one tank we accounted for more than 140 North Vietnamese communist soldiers."

Members of the 3d Tank Bn. were at Khe Sanh when Marines occupied the combat outpost and when it was deactivated. In fact, the last man out was a member of 3d Tank Bn. SSgt. Kent H. Baldwin, a platoon leader with "B" Co., was that man. "The tail end of the last convoy was brought up by my tank. Because the turret was facing forward, I was the last Marine to leave. I was riding about a foot or so behind my gunner," said Baldwin.

South Vietnam is not ideal tank country. Large parts of it are covered with steep hills and, during the monsoon season, tanks are usually forced to keep to the roads or are used in fixed positions. At times they may be used like artillery for indirect fire, although they are designed for direct fire.

An M-48A3 tank is armed with a 90-mm gun, a .30 caliber machine gun, and a .50 caliber machine gun. The crew of four is made up of a tank commander, who rides in the turret; a gunner, who controls the large .90 mm. gun; a loader who feeds the gun; and a driver who gets the tank where the action is.

The popular conception of a tank is a large armored vehicle that can't be stopped, especially if it's the enemy's. This is not true. Maj Samuelsen said, "If you don't take care of a tank, it will die on you, or the enemy will kill it." He explained that in a fire fight a tank must be protected and, if it is given the protection it requires, it can do a good 50 percent of the fighting. He added, "An infantry unit that knows how to work with a tank and take care of it has a good deal of fire power on its side."

The majority of a tank's fire power is supplied by the 90-mm gun. It can fire a variety of rounds, each designed for a different purpose. It fires a high explosive round; one that can go through steel or armor; a white phosphorous round; and a special anti-personnel projectile that turns the tank into a 90-mm shotgun.

Every Marine unit is as good as the men in it and 3d Tank Bn. will tell you they have the best in the Marine Corps.

"Not long ago, a patrol near our battalion area was hit by an ambush late at night," Maj. Samuelsen related. "Before we could even pass the word to fall out and man the perimeter, it was done. No one told them, they just did it. Not only that, we had more volunteers for a reaction force than we could ever use. The thing I still can't get over is the number of men who seemed to be angry because there was no room for them on the reaction force."

1stLt. Harris D. Hines will give anyone interested a number of examples of what makes a good tanker. "I was with the tanks in Hue when we got into a hell of a fire fight," Lt.

Hines said. "My tank took eleven hits with a rocket called an R.P.G. The first two that hit were duds; the rest went through the tank. My loader, Cpl. Rene Cerda, was wounded with the first three that went through the tank. I asked if he would like to be evacuated. He said, 'No.'"

"He stayed at his position as a loader until the battle was over, some four hours later," the lieutenant continued. "When we got him out he was weak from loss of blood. No one had any idea Cpl. Cerda had been hurt badly." Cpl. Cerda was recommended for a Navy Cross because of his devotion to duty. For his part in the battle, Lt. Hines was recommended for a Silver Star and has already received a Purple Heart—his second—for the same action. Every member of 3d Tank Bn. who fought in Hue was wounded.

A 45-minute Jeep ride from Quang Tri to Dong Ha and then on to Camp Carroll takes you over some of the roughest road in Vietnam. It will also bring you to "Bravo" Co., 3d Tank Bn. Few of the company's tanks are there. They are spread out from Camp Carroll through the Rock Pile, L-Z Vandegrift and Ca Lu, at this writing the last western corner of Marine-held territory. The Tankers at Ca Lu call their position "Tanks West."

On a low hill, with its gun pointing west, is the last Marine position at Ca Lu, a "Bravo" Co. tank, of the 3d Platoon. After Ca Lu, if you decided to take the road, you would be going into what the Marines call "Indian Country." The tanks at Ca Lu are on the perimeter to keep the "Indians" out.

SSgt. James E. Jewell is the platoon sergeant for the Ca Lu detachment. While serving a tour of Embassy Duty in Africa, he decided he wanted to go back to tanks when his tour was over and especially to Vietnam. Except for the tour of Embassy Duty, SSgt. Jewell has been with tanks since coming into the Marine Corps. "I've only been in Vietnam a few months, but I already plan to extend my tour,"

said SSgt. Jewell. He added, "At the moment, for tanks anyway, this is the place to be, kind of like where the action is—or will be."

1stLt. Roger B. Luli, the 2d Platoon Commander of "B" Company, is based at Camp Carroll most of the time. He has been stationed at the Rock Pile, Ca Lu, and a number of other Marine camps in Vietnam. Lt. Luli's ambition is to tangle with some NVA tanks! "Almost any tanker you talk to," said Luli, "would give his eye teeth to come up against a Communist tank."

One of the biggest chores the tanks have in Vietnam is convoy duty. At one time, on convoys to Khe Sanh, three tanks were used—two gun tanks and a flame tank. Most of the time they were spread out within the convoy, providing fire power all along the column. On one convoy, near what is now Landing Zone Vandegrift, an ambush put the tanks to the test. The ambush was set in the tall brush on either side of the road. The enemy opened the attack with anti-tank R.P.G. rockets from close range. The tanks left the road while firing and kept up a steady stream of shells into the enemy positions. The enemy attack lasted four hours, but the fire power of the tanks forced him to withdraw.

SSgt. Amil K. Childs has been with all manner of tracked vehicles. He spent a number of years in amphibious tractors. Now he is a confirmed tanker and he is the Maintenance Chief for "B" Co., 3d Tank Bn. SSgt. Childs and the six men in his crew are responsible for keeping "B" Company's tanks moving. One of the "tools" they use is a tank retriever.

The 62-ton retriever looks like two tanks put together and has a long boom on the top which is used for towing another tank. The only weapons it carries are two machine guns. With a grin, SSgt. Childs says of his retriever, "The enemy has been trying to get one of these retrievers for some time. The boom makes it look like

some kind of rocket launcher, without the rocket. They seem to think it is some kind of new 'Buck Rogers' weapon and will stop anything they're doing to try and get one."

Childs explained that this is not really as funny as it sounds. Any tanker would rather lose a tank than a retriever, because without the retriever, a "sick" tank is of very little use. If a retriever can get to where it is, chances are the damaged tank can be put back into action. SSgt. Childs and his crew work some very long hours. He explained that a tank is far more delicate than most people would think. Just the weather, the heat and the dust can cause a lot of major maintenance problems if he and his crew don't keep a close check on the tanks. SSgt. Childs and his crew are only a small part of the maintenance. Any time a tank is seriously "ill" it is taken to the Tank Battalion's major maintenance facility at Dong Ha.

One of the maintenance men, Cpl. Thomas A. Fay, usually can be found on top of, under, inside or hovering somewhere around a "sick" tank. Because a tank uses a lot of grease, oil and diesel fuel, and because of the fact that the tanks stir up a large amount of Vietnamese dust, Cpl. Fay's own mother wouldn't know him most of the time because he gets dirty. He is a tank mechanic and has been in Vietnam for a little more than ten months. "Tanks are not as hard to work on as you might think. The only problem is that nothing is light about them—it's all heavy," said Cpl. Fay. "Working with a tank is a lot like working on a car. Both have just about the same problems, only with a tank everything is about five times bigger." Cpl. Fay continued, "We have men who work on the engines; communications people who fix the radios; and optics men who repair the range finders and sights. "We work until we get the job done." Cpl. Fay's job is to repair and maintain the big 12-cylinder engines. He says they are simple when you get to know them. But any- >>

one else, looking at the massive power plant, would think twice about trying to take one apart.

The senior enlisted man with 3d Tank Bn., is SgtMaj. Joseph E. Burns. Having been in South Vietnam for a tour back in 1965-1966, SgtMaj. Burns is an old hand at the problems faced by the men of 3d Tanks. "My first tour was with "A" Battery, 2d Light Anti-Aircraft Battalion, stationed just a little north of Chu Lai near Ky Ha, Vietnam. Things are much the same here, except 3d Tanks is spread all over the place. Second LAAM's were too, but not like this," said SgtMaj. Burns. The sergeant major described some of the troubles faced by a unit that is spread all over northern I Corps. "Take the mail man, for example," SgtMaj. Burns said. "When he gets a letter for someone, say in the 2d Platoon of "B" Company, he has to know where the platoon is. Sometimes it moves every week or so."

"I'm not really a tanker—this is my first tour with tanks—but I have never seen more teamwork, morale and devotion to duty than you see in these tankers. The real tanker of the outfit is the C.O., LtCol. K. J. Fontenot," the sergeant major said.

LtCol. Fontenot is a tank officer, and has been one for a good many years. While stationed in Vietnam on an earlier part of his tour, Fontenot (then a major) held the job of executive officer with 3d Tanks. When he was promoted to lieutenant colonel, he was transferred to Third Marine Division Operations (G-3). After a few months, the former tank battalion C.O. rotated to the States. LtCol. Fontenot was again transferred back to tanks, this time as the commanding officer.

Cpl. Milton L. Raphael, Jr. is a tanker. In fact, it runs in his family. "Once in awhile, some of the guys kid me about the fact that my father is a career Marine and also a tanker," said Raphael. He went on to add that his father, LtCol. Milton L. Raphael, was at one time the commanding officer of 3d Tank Bn.

Today's tankers are more than just an incidental part of the Marine Corps—they are a very necessary item. A tank-infantry team is a hard combination to beat, whether it's operating in the field, in a fixed position, or on convoy duty.

Like the Horse Marine of old, the tanker is a special breed. A Marine, to be sure, but one with a little added

depth; and, if possible, a little more aggressiveness. There is nowhere to hide in a tank when the going gets tough. You stay there and man your guns. When and if the enemy hits the tank and damages it so it can no longer move, it's not dead—the guns can still be fired. Until there is no more ammunition, or a fire gets too close to the crew, it remains a deadly machine. That Horse Marine could have felt no more affection for his animal than a tanker has for his tank. When Khe Sanh was deactivated, a tank belonging to 3d Tank Bn. had been hit so many times it was a total loss and had to be abandoned. Everything had been stripped from it. What remained was little more than a large steel shell. But, like their fore-fathers, the Horse Marines, they refused to leave their modern-day "horse" for the enemy. The Marines of 3d Tank Bn. did the only reverent a thing they could. They dug a pit and buried it!

Members of the 3d Tank Battalion, Third Division, differ little in tradition from the now legendary Horse Marines of the early 20th Century. In Vietnam, they are men of steel, riding "Steel Horses." ■

Remembering Gunnery Sergeant Keith (Continued from page 28)

wall entrance, his cover canted to the side, both hands stuffed into his field jacket pockets. He looked past me as I entered the store, pretending not to notice the silver bars on my uniform. Then, I heard a commotion outside the store entrance. Gunny Keith had grabbed that soldier by the front of his field jacket, lifted him up off his feet, and had him pressed against the wall.

I quickly exited the store as Gunny Keith snarled in that shocked soldier's face: "Don't you ever disrespect my officer like that!!"

"Let's get outta here, Gunny," I said. I knew if anyone witnessed that event it could be bad for us. But, no

one could have made it into a racial incident. As it turned out, fortunately, we never heard another word about it. It was comforting in a strange way to know that the gunny always had my back, no matter what. And, I would always have his, no matter what.

My last day on active duty, as I backed slowly away from my parking space in front of the Charlie Company office, the last salute I ever exchanged with another Marine was with Gunnery Sergeant Keith, as he stood at attention in front of the company office. He was one unforgettable Marine.

Jim writes: This attached photo was taken of me while I was the CO of Charlie Company, 2d Tanks, at Camp Lejeune in 1969. The medal prece-



dence changed a few years later making the Purple Heart rate higher than the Navy Commendation Medal. ■

Crossing McNamara's Line

BY: BR MCDONALD

This incident happened to the 1st Platoon, A Co, 3rd Tanks around May 1967, between Con Thien and Gio Linh on the fire break below the DMZ ... which I learned ten years later was called "McNamara's Line. (Ed note: The Marines also called it "The Trace.")

I liked being in the Nam so much that I tried to extend six months, but the 1st Sgt. told me that I could only extend three months at a time. I was due to rotate in April and I was now into my first month of the extension. I had made sergeant and was the light section leader by this time. We got the word that some Charlie Co. tanks had been ambushed while on a sweep just south of the fire break and that a couple of tanks had been knocked out. I was also told that they had run into an NVA unit that had been headed to Cam Lo.



In the photo: This burned out hulk of a US Marine M-48 tank was knocked out during "Operation Kingfisher" when on July 29, 1967, a column of grunts from 2/9 and several tanks went north through the "Trace" toward the Ben Hai River. For whatever reason the column returned on the exact same route. The enemy was waiting for them with a massive amount of firepower and many Marines were KIA and WIA.

My section met up with the heavy section and a battalion of grunts and we headed north. Our two tank sections had not been together as a platoon in many months and we had a new gunnery sergeant as the platoon leader. I hated being in the back of the operations so I always volunteered to be the point (or lead) tank. We were traveling on the same road (really just a trail) where Charlie Co. had gotten hit, when we came upon the fire break. The grunt commander decided to send a fire team to recon the other side of the fire break and he wanted a tank to

accompany them. The grunts jumped on my tank and we headed across the clearing to the north side of the clearing. At this time, due to personnel shortages, a lot of tanks were running three-man crews. My tank was no exception. I had a driver, a loader and I served as both the TC and gunner. As we moved across the clearing, I was scanning the debris bank that our bull dozers had left when they had recently finished the clearing. At about 20 yards from the other side, I told the driver to stop and the grunts dismantled and ran over to the bank.

My tank had been modified with the new vision block ring on the TC cupola so I got off of the gun sights and was watching the grunts through the vision ring.

I saw a flash of light to my right about 500 yards away and, as I looked toward it, I saw a rocket coming at us. In that split second, I could see the nose of the rocket, the flames at the back of it and the smoke trail. I yelled, "RPG!" and grabbed my override and brought the turret to the right while watching the rocket and while trying to key in on the RPG team location. God must have loved us that day because the rocket fell about 10 yards short of our tank and exploded.

When I got the 90 lined up with the location of the RPG team, I fired. The loader threw another round into the breach and fired again. I was really worried that the enemy would get another RPG round and making it to us this time. I looked into my sights because I had not seem my rounds hit the target. When I looked through the sights I saw that I was aimed at the top of some trees. I then realized that when I had brought the turret around toward the RPG, I had raised the gun tube. Now I lowered it and but there wasn't anything to shoot at. About that same time the gunny came on the air and said, "You're shooting high!" I almost replied, "I'm just trying to scare the shit out of them like they did me."

The grunts loaded back up and we headed back to the south side of the fire break. I never asked the gunny why nobody was covering for me but I should have.

The grunt commander decided that we would camp overnight on the south side and we'd move across the next morning. The gunny went to a meeting and when he came back he told us that the grunts were going to move in a line across the break and they wanted us to move with them. Now >>

that I think about it, we were working with Foxtrot Company and that Golf Company was to our left. My tank had taken up a position that night which was facing north and that was about 20 yards east of the road that we had come up.

The next morning at dawn, the grunts started moving across the break. The gunny was still standing on the ground talking to some tankers. I told the gunny that the grunts were moving and they started mounting onto the tanks and I told my driver to move out. The grunts were about 50 yards into the 200-yard-wide break when our tank crossed the south bank. We were about 25 yards behind the grunts when the north side lit up with enemy gun fire. The grunts were in a line and had their backs to us. I was yelling at them to let my tank pass through them (so we could engage the enemy). I looked down the line to the left and saw grunts falling to the ground, lifeless. I saw a grunt throw his rifle to the ground. I saw another grunt on his knee working on his rifle and saw another one standing up working on his. I said to myself, "What the hell is going on with them?" We got around the grunts on line and opened up with the .30, shooting into the north bank. I could see the gooks staring to run away from the bank and headed into the bush line behind them. When I crossed the north bank and after our tank leveled out, the gooks were pretty much out of sight into the tree line about 100 yards away. We had killed a lot of them while we crossed the break so I told my driver to stop. I looked out the TC hatch to see that we were about 20 yards east of the trail and about 100 yards north of the clearing. We had been moving fast for about 300 yards before we stopped.

I looked to my left and saw a line of troops moving north. They had bushes sticking out of their helmets and wearing green clothes. I asked myself, "How the hell did these Marines get up there so fast?" I looked back and saw that the grunts were just getting to the north

side of the break with the other tanks. I then realized that those troops were NVA. I said over the intercom, "We've got gooks on the left." I brought the main gun around and told the loader to get some canister ready. I was looking through my sights and fired a HE round into the middle of the enemy line. The enemy was about 50 yards away when the first canister hit them. And then a second and a third. By this time the enemy was running into the tree line and so I put a couple of hundred rounds of .30 into the trees.

A grunt officer came up behind my tank and asked how many gooks were out there. I told him, "A few hundred had disappeared into the tree line." About that time, mortars started coming in and the grunts went for cover and some crawled under the tanks. I buttoned up and did what my first TC had taught me. I scanned the woods looking for the spotter in the trees. What I saw was smoke and tree limbs moving as the mortar was fired. The gooks were in a trench, so I aimed at the biggest tree that I could see and that seemed to be the closest to the enemy and fired a HE round. The mortar went silent and I used the same tactic on the second suspected mortar sight. I shot about 100 yards to the right of the first one and all of the mortars stopped.

The grunt FAC called in an air strike and they said that 8 jets were waiting to come in. The FAC was standing to the left of my front fender and he told the first jet to do a dry run. Thank God! The first jet came in right over us and the FAC was yelling at the second jet to break off. Luckily the second jet did. The FAC then got the jets into the right position with another dry run. You could hear the gooks trying to shoot down the incoming jets with their rifles. When the second jet came in, the blast almost blew my comm. helmet off so we buttoned up. The jets dropped tons of bombs on the tree line for about an hour and then they went home. The other tanks had set up a perimeter with my tank facing

toward the north. We hadn't moved our tank from the position we had taken that morning.

About 30 minutes after the jets had left, three gooks came walking out of the tree line walking toward us. One had a rifle but the other two were staggering evidently from the shock waves of the bombing. The grunts had filled my gypsy rack with weapons from the killed and wounded Marines after the battle on the fire break. I wanted to make this personal with these three gooks, so I reached into the gypsy rack and grabbed one of those new rifles. I had never felt or fired one before. The first one that I grabbed was jammed with the bolt open. It would not fire so I grabbed another rifle and noticed that the bolt was not all the way home. By now the three gooks had turned toward the left. I grabbed what looked like a reliable rifle but it was empty. By then, I was furious. I grabbed a 12 Ga. Shotgun and when I aimed it toward the moving gooks, I said, "Hell there isn't any way that a shotgun is going to reach them." The enemy was getting close to another tree line, so I brought the .50 around and opened up. Two of them looked like they were cut in half and the third fell down so I could not see him anymore. The grunts asked me what I was shooting at and I told them that there were gooks walking around over by the tree line. About two minutes later grunts started yelling, "Find a hole! Arty is coming in!" Anyone who has been in the field knows that you hunker down and hide when they shoot. We buttoned up and sure enough there were about four short rounds before the grunts could cancel the fire mission.

We had to medevac some more Marines and by then the grunt commander decided to hold our position until the next morning. That night, some grunts told me that half of Golf Co. (the grunts on my left) had been killed or wounded crossing the break. Another grunt asked me, "Did you

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CHASING A BLACK PANTHER

BY: BEN COLE

In May of 1967 I arrived at 3rd Tanks Headquarters at Phu Bai after five months with the 12th Marines. Having been on a howitzer crew since getting off the boat in Da Nang in January, I was glad to be back in tanks. No more wallowing in the mud with jack plates during fire missions or LP's and night ambushes.

H&S Company was great garrison duty while it lasted. Hootches with wooden floors, screens and cots. The days consisted of a casual formation, maintaining the tanks, and standing perimeter watch. Hot chow, warm showers and cold beer were also part of the program. Life was good inside the wire.

One morning I was told to report to the headquarters hooch and Sergeant Major Culpeper. I wondered what I had done. I couldn't recall any rules I knowingly violated or anything I might have screwed up.

When I reported, he told me he had a special mission for me. I was to proceed to the 3rd MP Battalion brig in Da Nang and bring a prisoner back to Phu Bai for courts martial. After being given a set of orders signed by the CO, I was sworn in as a representative of the court as brig escort or "chaser."

The next morning I shaved and put on my cleanest utilities. A little oil on my 1911, a dab of Kiwi on my boots, with orders in hand and I was on my way to the airport.

As I arrived I was soon boarding a C-130 aircraft. Most there were enlisted Marines and Army, some right out of the field probably going home or R & R. Others had shiny new boots and

starched utilities probably fresh from the world. There were a few corpsman and walking wounded from Charlie Med next door, a place I remembered from few months earlier. We strapped in the nylon sling seat along the bulkhead and were soon in the air.

It was summer and the temperature was warming up on the ground, but as we climbed out and gained altitude it cooled off pleasantly. A half-hour later we were in the pattern at Da Nang waiting our turn to land. The airspace was busy with everything from jet liners and fighter bombers to Cessna Bird Dogs. We worked our way into the pattern, landed and taxied over the west side of the field. The big ramp door lowered and opened to a world of noise and choking heat. The concrete ramp radiated heat as we walked to the terminal, located in a big wooden open-air structure with waist-high sandbag walls. At the counter I showed my orders to the clerk and he called the brig for a driver.

Da Nang airbase in the summer of 1967 was to a stateside airport what a western boomtown was to a sedate New England village. The sounds and the smells were part of the business of war. The noise of a jet engine as it deafens all others as it booms into afterburner. Then the welcome void of normal sounds of voices and vehicles as your hearing tries to return. After a fighter clears the pattern with his bomb load heading for a target, a 727 airliner touches down with a load of troops, some of whom could be going to the same place, but on the ground with a rifle.

Finally, a dusty, green jeep drove

up and a Marine with lance corporal stripes asked, "You need to go to the brig?" I answered, "Yeah, have to pick up a prisoner and bring him back here." He looks at my pistol and said, "Is that the only weapon you have?"

"Will I need more?" I answered, not knowing if he was trying to scare or trying to intimidate me; either way he had my attention. He gave me a funny look. "The stockade is outside the wire on the other side of hill 327, but they should have swept the roads by now." I began to feel naked without my M-14. "There's a shotgun behind the seat." He chuckled, and I felt slightly relieved.

I hopped in and we drove out toward the gate and fell in behind a truckload of grunts armed to the hilt. Traffic moved in stops and starts as bicycles and cyclos maneuvered cutting in and out of traffic. The heat of the day was building and the dust and exhaust made it hard to breathe as we tried to keep up with the six-by. We finally started making our way through that scrappy little roadside collection of shacks called Dogpatch. Souvenir stands, barber shops, laundry, and most any other service or product that a GI wanted could probably be found in this bustling collection of humanity.

Hill 327 with its well-known PX passed by on the left as we made our way to the western gate where bunters and barbed wire barriers marked the exit. The MP checked our paperwork and explained that the road had been swept but we should stay behind

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Operation Beaver Track

July 6, 1967—Part of Operation Buffalo

BY: JAMES ROBINSON

Hey John, I am the grunt you helped find the church that was up along the DMZ where I was shot some years ago. I hope you are doing well. I did a brief write up on that day and I am not sure if I sent it to you or not. I also am not sure if you are still looking for articles. Here it is, feel free to edit if you wish.

SF

Jim Robinson

2nd Platoon, Hotel Co, 2/3

July 6, 1967, Operation Beaver Track and somehow part of Operation Buffalo, H 2/3, 2nd Platoon.

The 4th of July 67: BLT 2/3 CP and Hotel Co. departed USS Tripoli for Cam Lo; then we flew to LZ Canary (north of Cam Lo and south of Con Thien). This movement was followed by F, E, and finally G companies. A platoon of tanks arrived at LZ Canary and 2/3 is chopped OPCON to 3rd Marines. Our CP attaches itself to G, while the companies of 2/3 set up for night in positions and for next morning's sweep north toward Con Thien on three axis.

Many activities took place during this operation which started on July 4, 1967, which was also my deceased father's birthday. Unfortunately, I only know my little piece of it.

We left the Tripoli on that morning and we somehow landed at the correct LZ. The archives show 2/3 landing at LZ Canary but even that has a question mark after it. Did we land there or not? Was it a different name and changed to confuse the NVA? Was it a one-time use, temporary LZ? I do not remember being at the village at Cam Lo.

I do know that we proceeded on foot north towards Con Thien and the brass hats pronounced it wrong. As I was trying to find it decades later, no one un-

derstood Con Thien. It is actually pronounced "Con Tee-yen."

I remember very little of the move north. I am not sure if we took to the road or stayed off it. I do remember a short "friendly" round going over heads and landing close by. And, as usual, I had no idea where we were or where we were going... or even why. Any "official" briefings seldom made it down to squad level. Maybe they did make it down to us snuffies, but I do not remember them or seeing a map very often.

We proceeded to and set up SE of a church ... and here is where the story gets kind of fuzzy. The church was referred to as the "Four Gates to Hell church." That's a nice catchy name and it seems that Marines called every church in Viet Nam a similar name. And that seems to make it even more confusing when I tried to locate it on a map ... even though it had been destroyed a month earlier on 6/6/67.

We set up a perimeter on a hill overlooking the church, a squad (I think it was just a squad) was sent to recon the area and it returned without incident. The tanks showed up and it felt good having them there to protect us. The tankers told us they had some new main gun rounds and if we got attacked they would yell to us to keep down and they would fire those new rounds. I believe the shells were called "beehives." They were loaded with hundreds of metal "flechettes." We spent an uneventful night and I assume the tankers were disappointed that we did not get attacked ... so they could play with their new toys.

Morning arrived and 2nd Platoon, Hotel Co. was sent with two tanks to scout around the church. The building

was not far from our perimeter, as I remember only a few hundred yards. As we got near the church, all hell broke loose. Cpl. John Houlihan aka "Jack" was hit in the neck. It makes me cringe when I see an article that also mentions that a Marine was killed. His name was Corporal John Richard Houlihan from Brockton, Mass; he was 20 years old. Bullets were flying; people are screaming; a tank had been hit; things are blowing up ... just another day at the office.

Another Marine and I were sent to get Houlihan. Talk about hindsight!! First, I set my rifle down and we head out. Now that I think about it, in the middle of a frickin' ambush, I leave my rifle behind! We get to Houlihan and neither one of us wants to take his head, he had been hit in the juggler and there was blood everywhere. I believe the other Marine with me was Darold Buffington, but have not had the chance to speak to him about it. For years I thought the Marine's name who was with me was something like Rydenhouer ... but Doc Radic told me it was Buffington. I guess I will never really know for sure.

In the middle of the mayhem over Jack's body, an excruciating pain hit me that was so bad I thought I had been hit in the back by a blooper gun round by someone behind me. In hindsight, from the angle of the round, the sniper must have had my head in his sights and just missed. I also think the round must have ricochet off my shoulder bone causing that much pain.

We were withdrawing from the area and heading back to the perimeter and they were driving me nuts. Staying in the open areas and heading straight

back to the perimeter. A second enemy ambush could have been set up and, if they had caught us between the perimeter and the attackers, we could not have gotten any supporting fire and the enemy would have destroyed us.

I was medevaced and sent to the USS Tripoli for surgery. The surgeon told me he was surprised that I was so lucky and that he did not have to take my arm off. He also told me he was a funny doctor that kept all his patients in stitches. It sure is odd to remember those things. I left the Tripoli and spent the night in the Bravo Med Hospital at Da Nang and, of course, the base got rocketed that night! They told me I was going to Cam Ranh Bay and I

thought that they meant that I was going to Japan. Dumb grunt!

For years I have been obsessed with finding the church and I have



spent much time surfing the web looking for it. I am 99% sure this is a picture of the church we were at. The search was made difficult by so many

http://www.bobrohrer.com/sea_stories/four_gates_to_hell.pdf

The Four Gates To Hell—Rohrer, Bob Rohrer

The Four Gates To Hell By Dick Culver extreme Northern I Corps was hotter than the hinges of Hades in late June /July 1967, and the veterans of the 2nd Battalion of the 3rd Marine Regiment were looking forward to back loading onto our new amphibious shipping.

www.bobrohrer.com ■

Crossing McNamara's Line (Continued from page 36)

see that booby trap in the trees by the break?" I replied, "Hell no!" He went on, "The gooks put a wire attached to a grenade for your antenna to hit. It was right on the trail." He also said that the engineers were blowing it now. I decided at that immediate moment in time NOT to take another extension of my tour.

When the sun went down, it was pitch black. We couldn't see anything for the first couple of hours. The grunts had dug fox holes on both sides of our tank, which I liked. They had also dug one in the middle of the trail with an M-60 in it. About an hour after it got dark, we heard voices coming from where the gooks had disappeared. And

the voices were getting louder. Everyone took up positions and I thought, "Maybe they were trying to psyche us out like they tried at Con Thien. If you hadn't heard gooks talking in the dark, in the bush, it sounds like they are using loud speakers. I heard a grunt yell, "Halt!" and a split second later about a hundred rounds went off from the M-60 that was in the middle of the trail. A grunt brought an RPG over to our tank and said, "Those two gooks won't be shooting up any tanks tonight."

Later on, the moon came up and you could see a pretty good ways off. I was sleeping on the armor plate behind the turret when my loader woke me saying, "There may be something going on out front." I also heard movement out there. I called the gunny and I told him that I wanted to open fire

churches in I Corps being called "Four Gates to Hell." There were at least three churches in the area where we operated. I believe that the big one

was the (for real) Four Gates to Hell at the village called Thon Tan Hoa. There was a less impressive church at Nha Tho Bai Son, but documents say otherwise. But we know that "official" documents can be wrong. I am sure if I could find the rubble I would be able to identify the area. I am 70 years old now and unlikely I will make another trip to Nam. So little was written

about us, it seems most of the press was in Saigon. Here is an article by our CO, Captain Culver (deceased), I have posted many times before.

Chasing A Black Panther
(Continued from page 37)

the truck with the troops until we made the cutoff for the brig. Traffic had thinned outside the checkpoint and the driver sped up trying to catch the troop truck in the distance. A few minutes later, I waved at the Marines in the truck ahead as we turned off to the road to the brig.

The road wound up a slight rise to the 3rd MP battalion headquarters and brig. It looked like a large wire cage surrounded by a mine field and guard towers. Apparently, it was laid out to repel attacks from outside and keep those inside from leaving. Fields of fire were set up for an outside assault and secured inside with interior fencing and individual hootches separated and cordoned off.

Most of the prisoners resided in regular hardback structures. I wondered what the plan was if they were hit. Would the prisoners be given weapons? I would assume most would rather be prisoners of our side than the other. It was the site of a riot in 1968 which ended peacefully without fatalities. Apparently tear gas and billy clubs quietly took care of the situation.

I presented my orders to an MP in the office and waited. A few minutes later he returned and explained the guards were having trouble getting the prisoner dressed. The prisoner I came to get that morning should have served as a warning to what was to happen in the States in the next few years. A black Muslim and wannabe Black Panther, he had been locked up for shooting up the barracks in Phu Bai. He was arrested and brought here to wait for trial. This morning he was having his morning prayers to Allah and refused to get dressed.

My mission was to get him back to Phu Bai today. After talking to the duty officer, I asked him to tell the prisoner that if he did not cooperate that he would be cuffed hands and feet and carried like a piece of luggage. The more he resisted the more the chances that he

could be injured during the process.

Soon they brought him out loosely dressed and in handcuffs. We put him in the passenger seat of the jeep and I got behind him with the shotgun. There was little traffic and the driver did not waste time getting back inside the perimeter.

The flight terminal was crowded when we pulled in. All eyes seemed to be on me as I walked him to the counter. A small group of black Marines that stared as we walked by. Looking straight ahead I marched by them with my left hand guiding the prisoner beside me and my right hand resting on my side arm holster.

I told the prisoner to stand by a nearby post while I got us on the next flight. Fortunately, the line for Phu Bai flight was short and a couple of Marines let me go to the front. I stepped to the counter and told the dispatcher that I needed to get on the next plane to avoid any delay and problems here. He glanced around and seemed to understand and confirmed that I was on it.

As I returned the prisoner had started to talk to a couple of other black Marines that were beginning to mill around him. I walked him away and told them to stay away or they could be brought up charges for interference with prisoner transport. Things got quiet as other Marines including a few NCOs and officers were watching. Hopefully, they would help me if things went south.

I grasped the prisoner by the arm to guide him away from the group that had now grown to four or five. He resisted initially but I managed to pull him away from the group to an adjacent area. They did not follow us but kept watching but continued talking and watching us. A young white Marine officer and older black NCO walked over to the group and spoke to them. The talking ceased.

The loudspeaker announced that our plane was ready for boarding and we should proceed across the tarmac. I asked the prisoner to stand up and tried to help him, but he resisted and tried to

pull away from me. I told him to get up, but he refused.

A WW2 vintage C-47 aircraft that we were assigned was parked about 100 yards away and being boarded. Knowing that I didn't want to miss this flight and go through the ordeal of waiting again in a potential racially volatile situation, I had to come up with new plan.

I told him. "If you don't get up and walk to that airplane, I am going to have pick you up and carry you. I could accidentally drop you on your head in the process!" He got up and we walked to the plane.

At the wide loading doors directing loading of the cargo stood the pilot. He was a no-nonsense looking Marine master gunnery sergeant. I later found that he was one of few flying enlisted men still in the Marine Corps. I asked him. "Top, I have this prisoner to take to Phu Bai for trial and he has been giving me a little trouble—where can I put him?"

A knowing look was followed by a slow and deliberate response. "Take them cuffs off him and set him up here next to the door." He paused and then added. "If he gives you any trouble throw him off my airplane. You got that corporal?" I shouted back. "Aye, aye, Top!"

Moments later, the cranking of the radial engines brought a slight relief. A few minutes later we were flying and the breeze was cool through open hatch. We leveled off a few thousand feet above the tree covered hills and valleys as we made our way to Phu Bai where my prisoner would face his fate.

I never knew what punishment he would receive or even what deeds he had committed to come to this moment. However, there is one fact that I can assure anyone or any court that might be interested. In that short period before we landed in Phu Bai, my prisoner exhibited behavior that can only be categorized as perfect. He was quiet, respectful, and compliant. It is amazing how a few chosen words from Master Gunner can change a person's attitude. ■

Tank Assault on "America's Mountain"

The Pikes Peak Hill Climb to help pay WWI costs

BY: M.L. CAVANAUGH

Special to The Colorado Springs Gazette newspaper

PHOTOS COURTESY OF Pikes Peak Library District SPECIAL COLLECTIONS



A woman, identified on back of the photo is Mrs. W. H. R. Stote breaks a bottle over a tank emblazoned with "Pikes Peak or Bust" and surrounded by a large crowd. She is christening the tank as 'Little Zeb' on April 14, 1919. Manitou water was used for the christening."



Man in tank shakes hands with Miss Virginia Moncravie, wearing a fur stole and large hat. "Pikes Peak or Bust" is written on the tank.



Tank with "V" on side and "Pikes Peak or Bust" on front parked in front of Chamber of Commerce Building is surrounded by a large crowd. Building has number "121" over door and "Independence Building" painted on window at right.

“I know we can climb it. Given time, the tank could go to the top of the world.” Cpl. Howard Brewer wasn’t simply being macho. After a reconnaissance ride April 11, 1919, Brewer was sure his 14-ton Whippet tank could climb to the 14,115-foot summit of Pikes Peak. Another member of the team, Sgt. A.H. Worrell, told *The Gazette* that he had “driven tanks over trees and trenches on the western front and I am betting we get to the top.”

The mountain-climbing mission came at the nexus of money and morale — the U.S. Treasury Secretary was to announce a final “Victory Liberty” loan drive, starting April 21, to get Americans to buy \$4.5 billion of government bonds to close out the country’s final bills from World War I.

The Navy immediately announced a supporting campaign. A “Victory Ship” would depart from San Francisco, bound for New York, and would travel each day at the reported rate Americans bought the bond.

The Navy’s incentive scheme was speed. The Army’s was height. It would send a tank to the top of America’s Mountain.

Odds were against success. The *Gazette* reported local wagers gave the tank a 50 percent chance of reaching tree line (at about 12,000 feet), a 5 percent chance of reaching the summit, and “even money” the trip would include at least one casualty.

It’s not hard to see why. The road wasn’t paved and had been finished for only three years. The weather was rough. A nearby weather station recorded 4 feet of snow at 10,000 feet.

Plus, tanks featured new technology (and new drivers) in those days. Brewer had only been driving tanks for six months and yet would handle the British-made Whippet, slightly larger than to-

day’s 15-passenger vans, with a top speed of 8 mph.

On April 14, 1919, a crowd of nearly 1,000 watched the chairwoman of the city’s Victory Liberty loan committee, W.H.R. Stote, bash a bottle of local artesian Manitou Mineral Water on the tank and she said: “I christen thee ‘Little Zeb’” (after Lt. Zebulon Pike). “I charge you with making the trip to the summit. As the Victory Loan shall not fail, you must make it to the top!”

The tank started strong April 15, leading a 20-car entourage two hours ahead of schedule for most of the day. At the seven-mile mark (9,500 feet) of the 20-mile road, “100 people stood by to watch the battle” between the tank and a 10-foot snowdrift. The tank won.

Two miles later, the tank punched through 20-foot drifts.

There was so much snow that the cars had to stop at mile 11.

Then, just before mile 13 (at 11,440 feet), with the first day’s objective “in sight” — that’s when the “track-plate snapped” and Little Zeb was stuck atop a 10-foot snowdrift.

Repairs were difficult. Workers had to clear the snowpack under the tank to get to the engine. The cars carrying spare parts and oil were two miles away, and the temperature was often below freezing. They set up a tent to protect their lead mechanic and his helpers from the weather, and they worked through April 16.

“We go ahead,” the overall mission director declared, and Brewer told the press he wanted to make it “even if it means abandonment” of the rest of the stops on the loan drive’s schedule.

Once the repairs were complete, Brewer and Worrell climbed back into the tank and started again for the top, and progress came easy.

Unfortunately, around midday, the team received orders from the

Victory Liberty loan state chairman to “discontinue the ascent of Pikes Peak” so the tank tour could continue in other Colorado towns and cities.

The crew turned around and arrived in Manitou Springs at 7:15 p.m., in time to park the tank for dinner at the Cliff House. Brewer had to stay at the hotel for the night with a “light attack of pneumonia,” while Worrell drove to a garage in Colorado Springs after dinner to store the tank prior to loading it on a train for its next stops in Buena Vista, Leadville and Denver, among others.

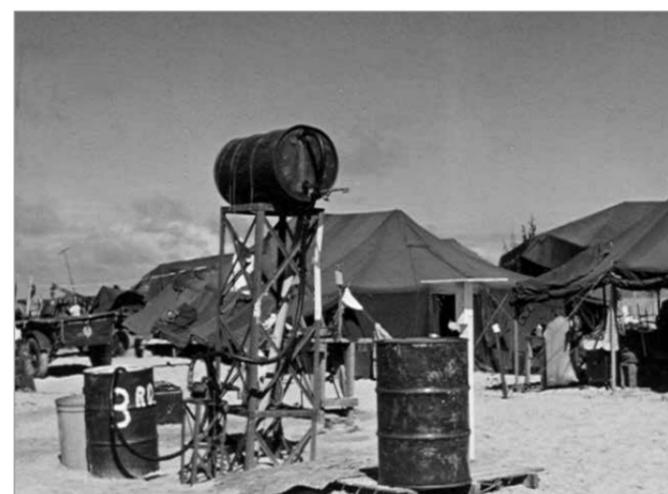
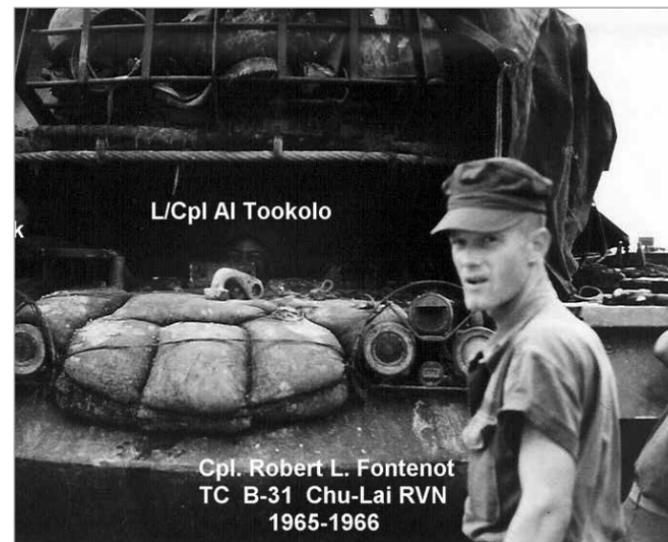
Though the tank didn’t reach the summit, the assault on America’s Mountain was a successful failure. Economist Richard Sutch notes that 20 million Americans bought bonds, which paid for more than two-thirds of the total war bill. The rest of the war was financed through taxes, an impressive accomplishment of fiscal discipline and patriotic support.

More than a stunt, Little Zeb’s mountain trek tested technology by breaking the elevation record for tanks (astoundingly, climbing higher than most airplanes of the day). It also set the record for continuous tank operation, and Little Zeb ascended higher than any other motorized vehicle at that time of year.

Fifty years before we put an American on the moon, we put a tank on America’s Mountain — a confident step forward for the country and a part of the interesting and impressive military history of the Pikes Peak region.

Lt. Col. ML Cavanaugh, PhD, is a non-resident fellow with the Modern War Institute at West Point, and co-edited, with author Max Brooks *Winning Westeros: How Game of Thrones Explains Modern Military Conflict* from Potomac Books. ■

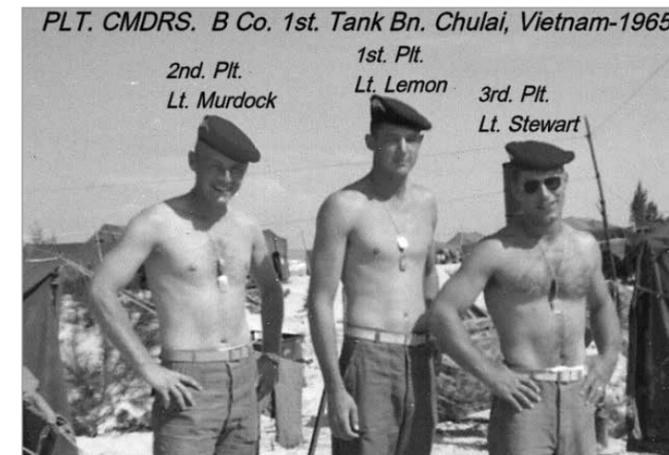
Photos from Vietnam



Bravo Co., 1st Tanks, Chu Lai 1965



Bravo Co., 1st Tanks HQ Marble Mountain, Da Nang 1966



Unloading from the USS Point Defiance 1965



PFC Epps was in 4th Platoon, Bravo Co., 1st Tanks. RIP Uncle James 3/3/50 - 5/15/69

Above & Beyond

Recognizing those members that have made financial contributions above and beyond their normal membership dues to help our organization grow. If per chance we somehow missed your name, please forgive the oversight.

Anderson Andrew	Gehrman Dave	Martin Gregory	Sausoman James
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Carroll William	Jameson Marshall	Moreno Arthur	Ullmer Leland
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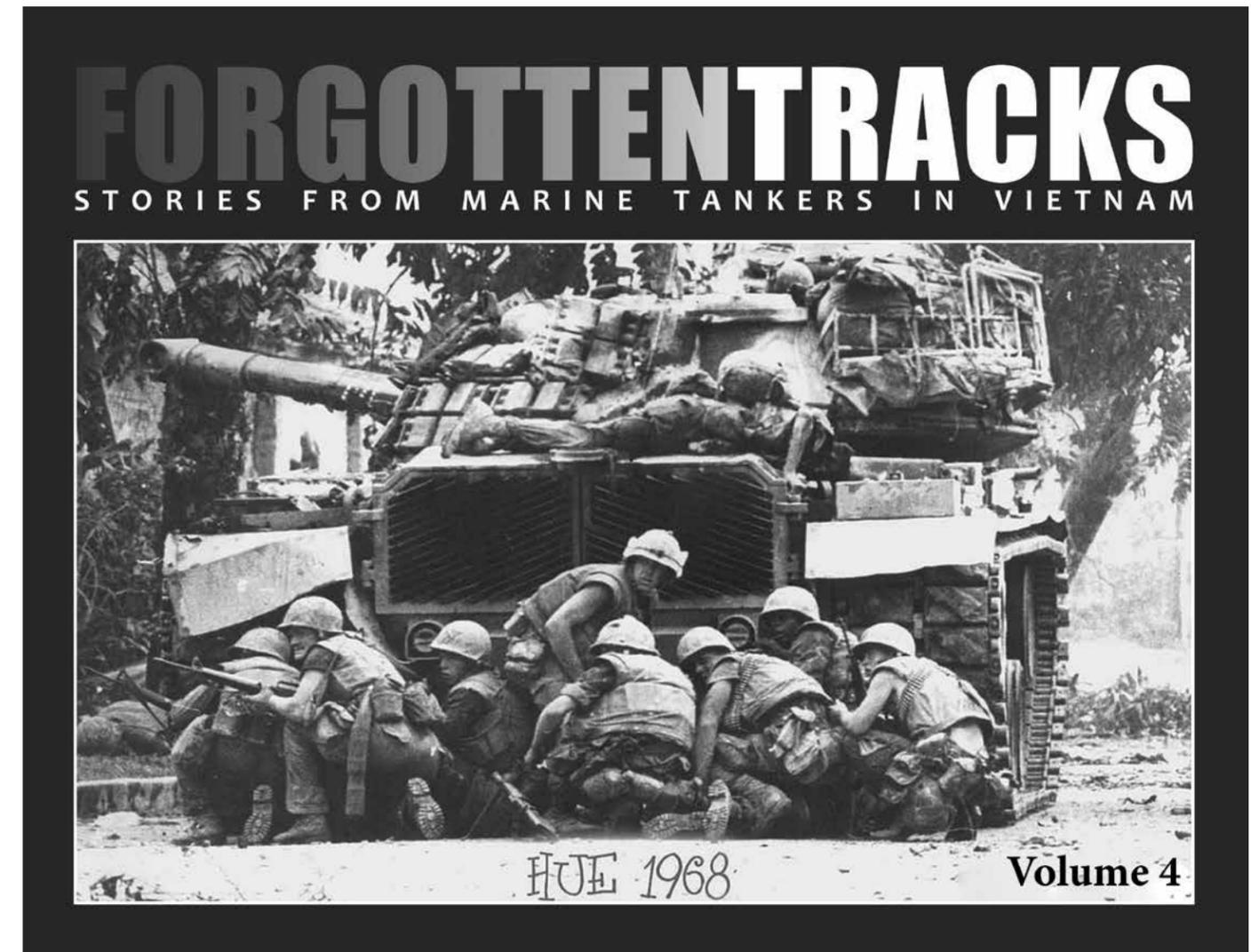
FORGOTTEN TRACKS VOLUME 4 IS NOW AVAILABLE!

This is the fourth edition with a large collection of USMC VTA members' personal stories ... and this time we are featuring a large amount of full color photos from many of the past VTA's reunions. The format and layout of Volume 4 is similar to the design of our previous three Forgotten Tracks books. Many of the stories and all of the reunion images were previously published in our award winning magazine the Sponson Box. Just so you note that copies of Vol. 4 will be sent to the Archives of the USMC Museum and Library at Quantico, to the Library of Congress in Washington, DC and to the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archives. We want to preserve our heritage. The cost of Vol. 4 is \$30 which includes the shipping cost.

If you need more information, please contact Pete Ritch at Phone: 850-734-0014 or via email: goldendog@mchsi.com

You can also purchase any volume of the Forgotten Tracks series on-line at the VTA online Store at <http://www.USMCVTA.org>

ALSO NOTE: There are still a few copies of Forgotten Tracks Volume 1, 2 and 3 available at \$30.00 each that includes the shipping cost.



VTA Mini-Reunion Ft Benning

**Sept 9 – 13, 2020
Schedule of Events**

NOTE: Subject to Change

Wednesday, Sept. 9th	Arrival day–Dinner on your own.
Thursday, Sept. 10th	Morning–Tank School Graduation (2 hrs.) Tour Tank School, picnic lunch provided. Meet new tankers and school staff. (3 – 4 hrs.) Evening–Pizza together at Tank School with all of the USMC Tank School staff. (2.5 hours), plus presentation to tank school from VTA.
Friday, Sept 11h	Morning–Tour Tank Restoration Museum (2 hours) Later: Working Party to work on tanks. Evening: Dinner on your own. Tour of the Infantry museum on your own.
Saturday, Sept 12th	All Day–Working Party – Work on tanks Dinner on your own.
Sunday, Sept 13th	Day of departure

TRAVEL SUGGESTION:

Fly to Atlanta–(ATL) Hartsfield–Jackson **Atlanta International Airport**

Go online or call to arrange for limo/bus to drive from ATL to Columbus (\$86 round trip) from:

Gromme Transportation

2800 Harley Court
Columbus, GA 31909

Phone: (706) 324-3939

Email: columbusoffice@grommetrans.com

Website: <https://grommetransportation.com/>

LODGING:

Hampton Inn – Columbus South – Ft. Benning

2870 South Lumpkin Road

Columbus, GA 31903

(706) 660-5550

Special Room rate: \$119 per night + taxes, etc.

Rate includes:

Two queen beds–Free hot breakfast–Free Wi-Fi–Free Parking

Room reservation cutoff date: 08/05/20

COMMENT: We really need a head count. If you are remotely interested in attending the 2020 event then please call or email:

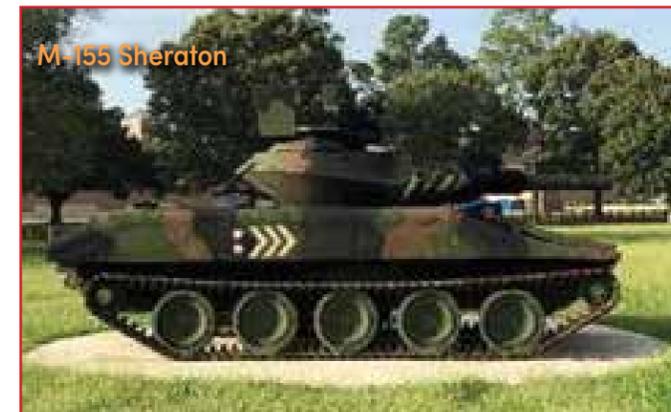
John Wear at 719-495-5998 or email Johnwear2@verizon.net

Or Rick Lewis at 858-735-1772 or email RICKLENT@aol.com and let us know your plans.

PLEASE CALL TODAY!!!

Photos from the 2018 Ft. Benning Mini-reunion

And when you come to the 2020 gathering you'll see all of these and more!!!



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

Please note: If the last two digits of “EXPIRE” on your address label is “19” then your 2020 membership dues are now payable.

**Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30* and mail to:
USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611**

***Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.**

VIETNAM VETERANS

**We were forgotten by our country.
Disrespected when we returned home.
Nevertheless we still loved our country,
Even when our country didn't love us!**



**It seems that back then,
...our nation forgot...**

that we were Americans too.

Delta Oscar November Tango / Mike Echo Alpha November / Alpha / Tango Hotel India November Golf

