



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

TANKS ON THE DMZ - 1967

A Four Part Series by Jim Coan



Night Attack on Con Thien

Also featuring:

Ferguson pg. 8

History of the Patton Tank, Part II pg. 19

Plinkin' pg. 22

Thrasher 6 Update



Gentlemen,

I just wanted to give you an update on Thrasher Company. We completed our deployment and returned to Camp Lejeune on 11 May. Since then, we conducted a change of command where I handed the guidon to one of my platoon commanders, 1st Lt Matt Luke, and the company is now on block leave. I was selected for promotion and received orders to I&I duty in Broken Arrow, OK where I will run the Anti-Tank (TOW) Company 4th Mar Div (Reserves) which I'll be reporting to next month.

Let me bring you up to speed on what occurred during our deployment. I will start by letting you know that in Al Anbar province it has really transformed into more of a peace enforcement operation as the Iraqi government and forces slowly progresses. March 2008 was our most interesting month. During March, the company experienced our only 3 combat actions, one of which was an IED attack. The other 2 combat actions consisted of a couple of insurgents firing a few rounds at our Marines and tanks. We only had one WIA, a concussion from the IED attack. I would like to point out that due to a recent modification we received on our M1A1's in Feb, the Tank Urban Survivability Kit or TUSK, the damage from the

IED was minor and kept the injuries to the one concussion. This modification is an exceptional one that included thermal sights for our .50 cal's, loader's weapon, and a belly armor plate. It makes the M1A1 the most formidable weapon system out there today. The modification process was difficult (we had to rotate tanks through Baghdad and coordinate with the Army) but well worth it. I may be biased, but I would say the Marines of the company were the best tankers that have deployed since the war started. We conducted over 200 combat operations and had about a dozen combat meritorious promotions, including a platoon sergeant who was combat meritoriously selected for Gunnery Sergeant. To my knowledge, he is the first tanker to received that honor since the Vietnam War.

On behalf of the Marines and Sailors of the company, I would like to thank each and every member of the MCVTA for their unwavering support throughout the deployment through the various care packages and the books written by some of you. It was truly an honor for us and especially so due to our kinship as tankers.

Thank you again and Semper Tanks!

Capt Rob Burton
USMC

Letter from the President

Greetings,

By the time you read this the year 2008 will be half over (already?!!!). Back in April, I drove down to Washington, DC, and had a strategy meeting with Lt Col Ray Stewart, President, Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation. Ray and I wanted to meet face-to-face to hammer out some organization directional issues and to set some mutual goals for the future. Our members should be aware that when you are a member of the USMC VTA you are also a member of the Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation. We are beginning to see an increase in activity with the historical aspects of our organization. We are sending out a call for more and more of our members to get involved in recording the story of your time in-country before checking into the "The Big Tank Park in the Sky." We have already lost several members and with their passing so goes their unique personal history of their Vietnam combat experience. You should be aware that we plan to have a professional interviewer from the Marine Corps Heritage Foundation at our Charleston reunion and he will conduct personal interview sessions with those of you who would like share your stories. I plan to be one of those reunion attendees lining up to have this done.

Speaking of the Charleston reunion, the tentative dates have been set for August 19 – 23, 2009. These dates are completely dependant on the MCRD Parris Island recruit graduation schedule. The USMC has not yet published the 2009 schedule this far in advance so we may have to move the dates backward or forward a week if they decide to block off the Friday, Aug 21st date. We have many tentative activities to plan but the recruit graduation and lunch in the PI Mess Hall is on the schedule.

As some of you may be aware, it takes much effort and expense to send reminders and re-reminders to those of you who habitually forget to send in their dues at the beginning of each year. On top of the postage expense, the stationery expense, and the sweat equity of our volunteer Board of Directors, there have been many members who fail to notify us of their address change. When a letter or a Sponson Box news magazine is mailed to your old address and the forwarding process by the Post Office has lapsed, the VTA has to pay additional postage for the return to our headquarters address. We could have had a color cover for this issue as an example, but we had to spend too much money tracking people down. Please give us some consideration and alert us when you change your address, telephone number and your email addresses.

This coming October the VTA Board of Directors will be conducting it's required annual meeting to discuss and resolve problems and issues that face our organization. If anyone of the membership has a question, comment or issue that you feel should be resolved during our meeting then you need to contact one of the board of directors and state your piece. The meeting will be held in Atlanta this year because two of the board members live in that fair city so we can save on our expenses. We are also saving expenses by doubling up in the hotel rooms. Speaking of expenses, every other year we pass the hat for donations from you to help off-set the expenses of transportation and hotel rooms for our annual board meeting. We are asking again this year if you would consider making a donation. The checks should be made out to the VTA and can be mailed to my home address in New Hope, PA. We deeply appreciate your investment in the future of our brotherhood.

Semper Fi,
John

"The dustbin of history is littered with remains of those countries that relied on diplomacy to secure their freedom. We must never forget... in the final analysis... that it is our military, industrial and economic strength that offers the best guarantee of peace for America in times of danger."

Ronald Reagan

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🌸 New Member 🌸

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A Co, 5th Tank Bn '67
C Co, 1st Tank Bn '68
MOS: 1811
Wife: Patricia
DOB: 9/15/48
Recruited by: John Juarez

Albert K Christy

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Email: albertchristy45@msn.com
H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn '65 – '66
MOS 2141
Wife: Gayle
DOB: 5/11/45
Recruited by: Web Site

Tom B Crossman

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(850) 689-0818
A Co, 3rd Tank Bn '65 – '66
MOS: 2591
Wife: Carol
DOB: 2/7/40
Recruited by: Bob Embesi
**Sadly, Emil passed away about a month after joining the VTA.*

Anthony D Wills

62 Lamb Road
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B Co, 1st Tank Bn '66 – '67
MOS 1811
Wife: Peggy Sue
DOB: 7/28/47
Recruited by: John Wear

Letter to the Editor

Dear Vietnam Tankers,

We thank you very much for the beautiful cut flower basket. It was just so very pretty and truly enjoyed. The heartfelt warm wishes are felt also.

Wille has cancer now in both lungs. We have had hospice coming to our home since a couple of weeks before Christmas. He chose not to go through the surgery, chemo and radiation – feeling the “cure” was worse than the cancer. I do believe he was right, for many reasons.

We have been together for 30 years and it’s been the BEST years of my life. He is a tanker good and great. He gives his all to so many. I’m really grateful that he has been able to connect with so many USMC men from past times. Through the years I’ve heard and felt the love, respect and honor he’s had for so many. I’m so grateful he was able to connect with Bob Embesi once again. We “lost” Bob back in the 90s. Wille has a great love for so many. I am proud to take a second seat to all those men. I cherish and hold close to my heart every story and person he’s talked about over the years.

Wille has his good days and then

a few bad ones. Poor Kent Baldwin drove 800 miles to get to our home for a visit which lasted only 1-1/2 hours. I did feel so bad about that. Any and all calls and such would be most welcome by Wille.

God bless all of you. And again, thank you for the gift of love to Wille. He says he’s honored and humbled by so much.

Carol Wille

223 Sea Hero Lane
Crestview, FL 32539
(850) 689-0818

From our website:

Late last night I got a call from my old platoon commander who told me that he had made contact with the men who drove the tanks in Hue City. Like him, many times I have wanted to personally thank you guys for getting us out of there. It was a long time ago but I remember it like it was yesterday. It was my squad that went down the right side of Tran Cao Van street and proceeded to get pinned down for a couple of hours before they brought you guys up to get us out. I might not ever had

gotten out of there had it not been for your tanks. Charlie Campbell and I were pinned down over a wall and Louie Gasbarinni was wounded by a tree. We were the furthest down the street and pinned down by the snipers until you guys showed up. Charlie and Louie have since passed away but thankfully I am still here to say thanks to you men.

As Rich Horner told me you have a reunion every two years. This year Fox 2/5 is going to be in Washington DC. The planned events include the Friday evening Sunset Parade at the Marine Corps Barracks, a Saturday trip as a group to the new Marine Corps Museum at Quantico and a Saturday evening banquet. There will be trips to the Wall and a lot of hanging out in the hospitality room sharing pictures, memories and a few beers. If you can make it we would love to have you join us. The Fox 2/5 Association has about 500 members from the 1966 - 71 era. Not all are active but we usually get a strong showing at the reunions. If you are interested I would be happy

(Continued on next page)

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Mansfield, OH 44907-1933

Letter to the Editor

(Continued from page 5)

to send you the details. I am sending some black and white pictures that you may or may not have seen before. I helped a writer do some research on a book called Fire in the Streets and was able to put my hands on these pictures. They were taken by a UPI photographer named Sawada. Let me know if you do not get them. As you can see in the pictures we were putting some of our dead brothers up on the tanks as we pulled back. One of the guys actually was alive and remains so today and will be at the reunion. I am sure he would like to thank you as well. I hope some of you can make it.

Thank you again.
Semper Fi!
Chris Brown
9 Alister Circle
E. Northport, NY 11731
Phone: (631) 499-8739
Cell: (917) 913-4908

Bob Peavey, Gerry Hodum, Jim Coan and the many that have contributed to the Sponson Box, I thank you all for a quality Newsletter with very clear photos with information to ID the photos. Without input from membership it is a real struggle to have a representation of what happened on their tour of duty.

I urge all of the membership to dig into their locker boxes where they have stored photos and letters, share your stories and experiences with us.

Goodin & Sparrow... car problems and Gene "Doc" Hackemack, before and after humor is appreciated. But I know many of you have stories to share, please sit down and write a letter to yourself and mail it to the Sponson Box, you will feel light hearted in doing so!

Semper Fidelis in God and Country,
Donald R. Gagnon
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Cell-760-902-6683

I just received my copy of "Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam" by Ed Gilbert.

With regard to the part in the book about apricots, I had a brother Deputy Sheriff who was with the Marines that landed in Somalia in the 90s. He was the LT of an L.A.V unit. He asked me if in Nam we thought eating apricots would bring bad luck. He said that it's still a no-no to eat them if you are in any Marine Armor unit. I have to tell you that to this day I still do not eat them and I have an apricot tree in my backyard!!!

S/F - Guy Everest

My name is Jerry Horn and I am a former Marine (stateside pogue).

My brother-in-law and best friend, Jerry Gibbons, served with A Co., 3rd Tanks 66-68. He died from heart procedure complications in 1999. He often shared his tank stories with me. He saw a lot of action in his two tours. He was assigned to "Task Force Robbie" for a while and he generally spent most of his time up near the DMZ. He was a proud former Marine tanker. His widow recently found some pictures that he had taken in Vietnam. I've attached them to this message. Jerry is the Marine facing the camera in the two solo shots. I hope you can use them.

His son would also like to hear from anyone who served with him.

Thanks and Semper Fi.
Jerry Horn
117 Cherry Lane
Medford, NY 11763
Home # 631-654-9403
cell # 631-278-2837
jfhorn@optonline.net ❖



Fox 2/5 Marines taking cover behind F32 and Y52 in Hue City

Book Review

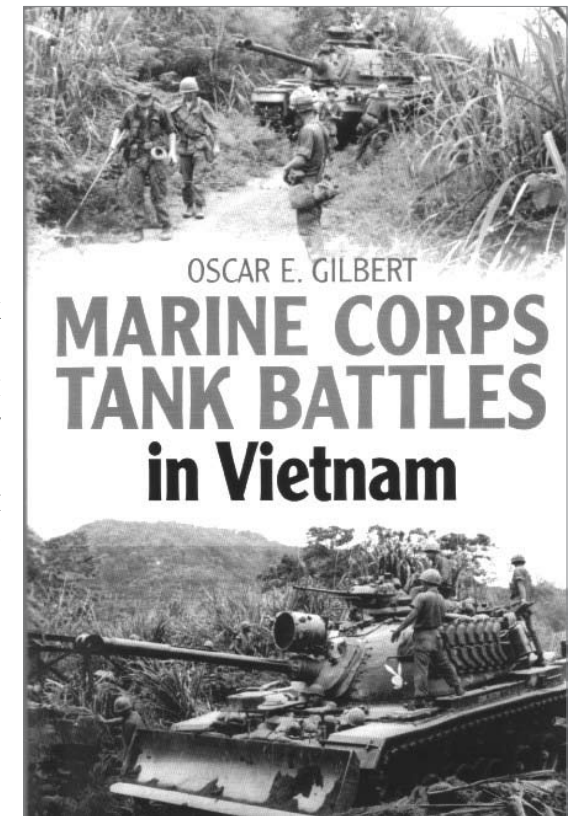
Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam

BY OSCAR E. GILBERT

The author Ed Gilbert attended the past three USMC Vietnam Tankers Association reunions spending countless hours interviewing many members gleaned the details of their combat experiences... as well as their Marine Corps careers, long and short. He then took the "official" Command Chronologies of the USMC in Vietnam and he pieced together the "official" history of tanks and their involvement in the Vietnam War. When he had the pieced together the history book version of the various tank battles he then wove the personal histories into the fabric blending the two into a riveting quilt work that is (for me) a first class page turner. The book is profound, profane and somewhat humorous. And for me, being personally acquainted with the majority of the players in the book is wonderful thing.

The book is available on <http://www.amazon.com>

Semper Fidelis,
John



Ferguson

Remembering those you didn't even know

BY MICHAEL NORMAN



Artwork by Roland Castanie

A COLLEAGUE DROPPED BY ON A RECENT DAY TO TELL me that it was the third anniversary of her son's coming home from Iraq. That stopped me. It's been 40 years since I stepped off the battlefield, and I'm not home yet. I can still feel the muck of rice paddies pulling on my boots, still hear the jungle hiss and snap in the dark. Even after the night dreams and day drifts have stopped and the loud noises no longer startle, you still press your chin against your shoulder and look back.

In those days, we had no time for the dead: Jim Payne from Glendale, California, Tommy Gonzales from Beeville, Texas. It was hard losing those good men, hard watching them fall. But we were too busy to grieve or to toll the knell. We wrapped the bodies in muddy ponchos, tossed them like sacks of rice into a helicopter and moved on.

We couldn't cry for them until we came home, and then we couldn't stop crying. I cried because they were dead and I was alive, and I could not shake the feeling that I had somehow purchased my life at their expense. I wanted to tell them how sorry I was for living when they could not, sorry for my beautiful wife, for my sweet sons, my wonderful career. For a long time, I lived my life for my fallen comrades. For Worley and Parsons and Ferguson. Ferguson? I knew him all of a minute.

We were on some barren, windswept mound of dirt, and the enemy had been raining mortar and artillery fire on us daily. Here came this replacement walking up the road as if he were out for a Sunday stroll. I was sitting on a wall of sandbags next to my fighting hole with Squeaky Williamson of Oklahoma.

"Hey, Marine," the replacement said, stopping in front of me, "where's the company first sergeant?" I tilted my head in the right direction. "I'm Ferguson," he said. And just at that moment, as Ferguson was about to lean his rifle against the sandbag wall and shake my hand, I heard the soft *phft phft phft* of enemy mortars going off on the far slope of the hill opposite ours. "Incoming!" someone yelled. Squeaky flew into the hole first, I landed on top of him and Ferguson landed on top of me. The attack went for two, three minutes, then there was quiet.

Squeaky, in the bottom of the hole, with two of us on top of him, was yelling now for us to move, but Ferguson just lay there. "Tell that new (expletive) to get up," Squeaky yelled. I thought Ferguson was paralyzed with fear, so I jammed my elbow hard in his ribs and rolled him slightly up and off me. I could feel my shirt clinging to my back—fear makes the sweat pour out of you—and when I finally pulled myself out of the hole, I was covered in sweat and blood.

I rolled him back over and instantly saw the wound: shrapnel. He'd gotten hit diving into the hole on top of me and had been lying there on my back, dead, during the attack. Squeaky and I dragged the body out of the hole and laid it in the dirt beside the sandbags.

"Who the hell is that?" a sergeant said, checking for casualties.

"Said his name was Ferguson," I said. "Just got here."

"Well since you're the only one who can put a name to a face, you get to go to the morgue and ID the body."

"But I don't know him," I groaned.

The morgue in Da Nang was a refrigerated Quonset hut by the main airstrip. A pasty-faced corporal sat a desk filling out the forms. Behind him were racks of shelves holding scores of green body bags. "This way," he said. Ferguson was on a shelf in the back. The corporal unzipped the bag. I gave a quick look. "That's him," I said.

"You can't see his face," the corporal insisted. And with both hands he reached into the bag and tried to turn Ferguson's head toward me. Rigor mortis had set in, and the corporal kept trying to jerk the head around in my direction. "I'm telling you—that's him," I said.

When I got back, Squeaky was sitting on the sandbags around the hole. "What was that guys name again?" he asked.

"Ferguson," I said, setting my rifle down and taking off my helmet.

So I took Ferguson home with me. Who else was going to remember him? Who else among us "knew" him and could carry his good name, his reputation, the memory of him as a Marine? Remembering was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were willing to die for one another.

Michael Norman teaches journalism at the New York University. He is co-author of a recently completed book on the Bataan death march.

Reprinted with author's permission, Time Magazine, May 2008

Editor's note: Michael is also the author of, *These Good Men*, Crown Publishing, 1989. The book covers his time with 2/9 in 1968-69 and the battle for Bridge 28 on Route 9 between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh and finding his platoon members 15 years later. ❖

Looking For

James Thomas

I am helping my father, James Thomas, look for information about his tank (it had "Thor" on the gun tube) and his fellow Marines. My father is now living at Hines VA Hospital due to various forms of cancer caused by Agent Orange.

Contact me at my home address:

Michael J. Thomas
4105 S. Drexel Blvd (#2NR)
Chicago Il. 60653
SAMOHTLEACHIM@comcast.net
Thank you again and God bless

April 19, 1968 Route 9

I am looking for the tank and crew that was involved in an ambush on April 19, 1968 on Bridge #28 on Route 9, 8-clicks outside Ca Lu towards Khe Sanh. The grunt unit was 2/9 and the tank in question pulled forward onto the bridge as the grunts tried to recover bodies. Some grunts sought shelter next to the tank due to intense enemy fire. In his words:

"April 19th to be exact -- a tank on Route 9, the road between Khe Sanh and Ca Lu, saved my miserable rear end. NVA had set up a brilliant ambush and the peckerheads had us caught in a murderous cross fire. Many men had been killed, rounds kicking up the dirt in the road. I was wearing a ANPRC25 radio and, trying to crawl under that tank for cover, and I got stuck with my ass and legs hanging out there on the road. The gooks were having a great time shooting at me, and this sergeant -- I'll never forget the bastard, big, hairy, smile on his face -- opened the trap door in the deck of the tank, slipped out onto the road and dragged my ass under that big, beautiful hunk of metal. Tankers are some of my favorite Marines."

I am in contact with the individual and would like to hook you up if you were there. He has written a book and is now a Professor of Journalism at NYU. He is also the author of the article in this issue, "Ferguson".

Please contact Bob Peavey
repv@comcast.net OR 770-365-3711

James "Digger" Didear

I am looking for anyone who may have witnessed me being WIA and medevaced toward the end of the year of 1968. I don't remember alot about what really happened

that day but, here goes with what I have been able to put together so far.

I was the TC of C-53 assigned to "C" Co. 1st Tanks and we were working south of Hoi An, South Vietnam in late '68. The name on my tank was ("F*CK IT"). The "IT" part: was made up of two feet up and two feet down.

We where in our CP at the time when we started receiving in coming rockets and mortars. I remember running for cover and the next thing I knew I am came to in the NAS hospital in Da Nang. They where putting a cast on my left leg. A couple of days later a good buddy of mine was going to check on me and the vehicle he was in hit a mine. He ended up in the hospital bed next to me. I have picture of both of us in hospital together. He was short with time left on his WESPAC tour so they sent him back to the states. I can't tell you how long I was in the hospital. Upon my release I was sent back to our main CP, just south of Da Nang and got back with my unit.

The buddy of mine is John Maxwell. I finally made contact with him again several years ago. He wrote me a letter stating what he witnessed that day but, due to his current medical condition he doesn't remember any dates also. If I could ascertain the date of his injuries then I could pinpoint a date I got medivaced to Da Nang.

I have asked for all my files and service records but I've only received to this date around 8 to 10 pages. If I though that if I went to St. Louis and get all my records then I would.

I am looking for anyone out there that may have any information that can help me with this matter. I would really like to hear from them. I want to thank you for any help possible.

Here is my contact information:
5757 S. Staples - Apt #2512
Corpus Christi, Texas 78413
(H) 361- 993- 7810 (C) 361- 877- 6685
mctanks@grandecom.net

Mameluke Thrust

I am looking for Marines that were on my tank crew when I was wounded. I was with 1st Plt B Co 1st Tank Battalion.

We were on Operation "Mameluke Thrust" escorting a convoy on 30 May 1968 when we were ambushed. I was wounded by a gunshot wound and I was contacted by one of my fellow tankers about a year ago saying that he

was on the tank with me the day I got wounded. I need to get in touch with him or anyone else that was on my tank and witnessed action. Unfortunately I have lost this individuals name and a-mail address. Could anyone who was with me at that time please contact me at the below contact numbers

Mark Damschen
(719) 481-9263
P O Box 948
Monument, CO 80132
mdamschen@msn.com

Daniel Matranga

Hello, my name is David Matranga. My father Daniel E. Matranga (aka "Pogo") served in Vietnam with 4th Platoon, Bravo Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division from July 1969 to July 1970. He served on Operation Pipestone Canyon on Go Noi Island south of Hill 55 and in Dodge City.

My dad died about 10 years ago of a heart attack. While he was alive he did not like to relive any of his experience in the war. My mom, brother and I have starting trying to find some of his buddies or fellow Marines that may have served with him or knew him. I would like to add a post with some pictures of the tank he commanded, "Miss Goodie Two Shoes", along with pictures of him and his platoon, to see if anybody out there might remember him.

My dad after coming home from Vietnam had a major battle with cancer that I believe he attributed to his exposure to Agent Orange. That was in 1984. He then he survived seven surgeries and went on to live until the age of 51, when he died of a sudden heart attack in 1998. My dad, like many Marines who were there, was pretty quiet about his experiences over there. But even with him keeping most of his memories inside, his love and loyalty for the Corps was extremely evident.

Recently my mom found a box that is almost 40yrs old that held many-many letters that he sent to her while he was over there. She hasn't read them since she received them back in 1969. We are finding out the names of a few of the men he hung out with and many of the "nicknames" of the men in his Platoon, along with bits and pieces of his experience over there. We would love nothing more than to find out the names of the men in his platoon and to contact as many as we could.

The 2 names of tanks that my mom has found are "Miss Goodie Two Shoes" and "Cheap Thrills Two". He mentioned the names of Lt. James Skoog, and Ron Kleffner and the nicknames of the men in his platoon

were: "Rock," "Andy", "Panther", "Brother Luv", "Gater", "Slim", "Bug Baron", "Raley", "Gunny", "Harry Harle" and "Stevie."

This is a direct quote from one of his letters to my mom about "Rock":

"This may seem hard for you to believe but other than you and my family, he means more to me than any other person in the world. We've been through some moments together that I will never forget. I have a feeling one or the other or both saved each other's life."

We would like to find out who "Rock" is and to be able to meet him.

I know that in September of 1969 while serving on his tank he was injured twice and received two Purple Hearts for mine accidents. He was then transferred to a book keeping job that he hated. He wanted nothing more than to get back to his platoon but it never happened.

If you need some more information please let me know.

My mom's name is Linda Matranga.
6 Chestnut
Aliso Viejo, CA 92656
(949) 362-6111
Email: lexamae@sbcglobal.net
I am Dan's son David Matranga
Email: dmsh2@aol.com
(512) 228-9181

John,

In the hospitality suite in Las Vegas I was talking to a tanker that had throat cancer surgery and was now getting 100% from VA. Our corpsman, Doc Forsythe, has throat cancer and he is getting a lot of crap from VA. He asked me if we could find the other guy & hook them up. I know it's fishing deep but maybe you can find out who the member is.

Doc Forsythe's email is: docnomo2@yahoo.com
Thank you.
(Cpl) Doug Scrivner
USMC 1967-1970 Semper Fi RVN 68-69
BLT 2/7 B & C Co. 1st Tanks (Zippo) 1st Mar.Div.
docascriv@fuse.net

The following VTA members have no mailing addresses on our roster. Anyone who knows any of these men, maybe you can contact them and fix this problem.

James M Ferrin, Gerald A Potts, John J Quindlen, Phillip S Weigand, & Lawrence W Zuley.

Meet Your Board of Directors

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

Robert (Bob) Peavey knew he would never join the Army from almost the day he was born in 1947 on New York's Long Island. Bob graduated from Valley Forge Military Academy in Wayne, Pennsylvania in 1965. Coincidentally, the guest speaker for the graduating class at this Army ROTC school was then USMC Commandant, General Wallace M. Greene. Bob would be the only one in his graduating class who decided not to go on to college that year. He knew that his draft board was breathing over his shoulder, but after years of Army ROTC training he decided he would never become a Dog Face. His father was a 2nd Marine Division veteran of Saipan and Tinian who knocked out three Jap tanks with a bazooka on Saipan, blunting a major enemy counterattack; it also made the MOS assignment for his future son all the more ironic. August 16, 1966 found Bob getting off the 0200 bus at MCRD Parris Island robbing the Army of another draftee by a single day.

A week before graduating "The Island" he learned about the strange numbers called MOS and what 1800 meant—tanks or amtracks. Shake & Bakes (as amtracks were called) didn't appeal to him, besides, being a taxi driver wasn't his cup of tea; tanks were more to his liking. Upon arrival at the Track Vehicle School in Delmar, California, he told anyone who would listen that he couldn't swim a lick. His rationale was that it might make him undesirable as an amtrack—and it worked! When confronted that his SRB showed that he had passed drown-proofing in bootcamp, he lied and said that the

DI's wanted everyone to pass so they could look good. He knew he did the right thing when an amtrack sank off Delmar during his tank crewman class. Bob only lied twice while in the Corps, the second time would occur at Con Thien two years later—but that's another story.

Bob's tank crewman class was unique in that it was made up of three future Vietnam Tankers Association Board of Directors with John Wear and Garry Hall. Upon graduating, their class was split between Vietnam and the recently activated 5th Tank Battalion in Camp Pendleton. All three future board members were assigned to the new battalion where they continued their friendship.

Bob was in California for 14 months but it was his love of auto racing and Riverside Raceway north of Pendleton where his interest in photography took root. Borrowing a fellow Marine's Nikon, his lowly E-4 paychecks were often spent on film and developing charges. While with 5th Tanks, he attended NBC School and was in the last day of NCO School when he abruptly mounted out with Bravo Co., 5th Tanks, in February of 1968 to support the 27th Marines outside Da Nang in the Dodge City area. He was a gunner and participated in Operations Allenbrook, Mameluke Thrust & Napoleon Saline. His platoon would later be assigned to support the Korean Marines for three months. When the elements of the 5th Marine Division were sent home in late August of 1968, Bob was transferred to Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks.



He finished the last seven months of his tour as a TC and Section Leader with 3rd Tanks. He rotated back to the world in March of 1968 with 3rd Tanks in Camp Lejeune where he was promoted to sergeant the day he checked in. He finished out his enlistment in August of 1969.

While in Vietnam, Bob had applied and been accepted to Rochester Institute of Technology which would start a month after his enlistment ended. His love for photography, discovered in the Marines, led to a Bachelor of Science degree in Professional Photography. Upon leaving school he accepted a position in Lorain, Ohio, and then moved to a larger photo studio in Rochester, New York and later to an even larger commercial studio in New York City. Much of what he was doing was more business than photographic related so he decided to go back to school for his MBA, again at RIT.

Eastman Kodak Company hired Bob in 1979 while still in school where he still works today as a Marketing Communications Manager. His love for auto racing never diminished and was realized by Kodak in 1992 making him Director of Motorsports for 3 years. He was fortunate to be

in the winner's circle for the 1994 Daytona 500 with the Kodak Racing Team and has the winner's ring to prove it!

Bob had been working on a manuscript for five years that was eventually picked up by Zenith Publishing in late 2004. Praying For Slack – A Marine Tank Commander in Vietnam was his telling of the story of Operation Allen Brook and the difference between the two wars being fought in I Corps. One veteran tanker best summed up his book when he said the book should have been titled, "All The Stupid Things One Can Do With a Tank." At first offended, Bob

could only smile and agree—he did do a lot of dumb things with those magnificent machines—but didn't we all? What do expect when you give an unsupervised 20-year old the ultimate 52-ton off-road vehicle!

Bob currently lives outside Atlanta with his wife Alica who is a Family Nurse Practitioner with over 30 years of E.R. experience. Bob also has two sons, Ian and Douglas who live in Fort Myers, Florida. Bob is an aspiring Ansel Adams and enjoys backpacking throughout the SW United States with a large 8x10 format camera shooting majestic landscapes. He has used Indian

guides to get him into the most unusual of locations. With a cost of \$25 per exposure, he has learned to be patient and wait for the exact moment when nature and light come together to make the perfect image. While others may be taking pictures over his set up camera, he is often in a lawn chair waiting for the precise moment. He is a firm believer that it is the second mouse that gets the cheese. He recently had a one-man show of his work in the Atlanta area.

He is currently the Vice President of the USMCVTA as well as the Editor and Publisher of the Sponson Box. ❖

WE NEED YOUR HELP

We are required by our bylaws and the IRS to hold a Board of Directors meeting every year. This is not a problem during our reunion year, but for the off year it requires additional expenses to hold the meeting; it means getting 10 people to a central location. This costs your organization around \$3,000 after you figure airfare, hotel and food. This is not a vacation. We value our member's contributions and we do our best to economize as best we can. We double up in rooms and we negotiate a favorable rate with an airport hotel for meeting space and room rates. This year we are holding the meeting in Atlanta since two of our members live there; we can also save on airfare because it is a hub-city. We have already booked the flights 3 months ahead to try and save as much as we can.

Here is where we need your help in order to keep this organization alive: we are seeking donations to help cover the expense of holding this required meeting. You have supported us in the past with similar requests and we are hoping you can support your organization once again. Please donate what you can to help offset these necessary expenses.

Make your checks payable to USMC VTA and on the memo line of your check place the words, "Mtg. Exp." Send your donation to:
USMC VTA, 5537 Lower Mountain Rd.,
New Hope, PA 18938

Thank you for your continued support of our great organization.

Semper Fidelis,

John Wear

Tanks in Country DVD Offer

If you were at the Las Vegas reunion dinner, you probably saw the great home movie running during the cocktail hour of tanks in Vietnam shot on color movie film. Tom Snyder provided this fabulous footage to us as a fundraiser. It is 20 minutes long and features 2nd Platoon, C Company, 1st Tanks operating with 2/7 in 1968-'69 on Goi Noi Island. There is also footage of tanks and their crews on the USS Thomaston around the same time. Even if you weren't with 1st Tanks, it is a thoroughly entertaining and priceless record of tanks in action.

Send a check made out to USMC VTA for \$25.00 plus \$3.00 S/H to:

USMC VTA
c/o John Wear
5537 Lower Mountain Road
New Hope, PA 18938



Above & Beyond

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



Jack Arena
 Bill Bisbee
 Eddie Blanchette
 Robert Bonderud
 John Byrne
 Louis Cherico
 Albert Christy
 Frank Cotton
 Steve Curti
 Justin Donnelly
 Edgar Evans
 Guy Everest
 Danny Farrell
 Charles Fischer

Robert Gates
 Jeffery Griffith
 Jim Guffey
 Garry Hall
 Doug Hamilton
 John Hefferman
 Fidelis Jarnot
 Fred Kellogg
 Geary McCleery
 Armando Moreno
 Larry Parshall
 Bob Peavey
 Richard Peksens
 Jim Raasch

Dover Randolph
 Pete Ritch
 Doug Scrivner
 Ron Shuppy
 Frank Slovik
 James Stayton
 Edward Tierney
 Chris Vrakelos
 Charles West
 Emile Wille
 Stan Williams
 Ken Zitz

If we failed to recognize someone we are truly sorry for the oversight.



What members are doing?

Two Corporals in the Family

We now have 2 Corporals in the family.... My daughter Jill (USMC) was promoted to Corporal in Hershey, PA today.... Son-in-law Rob, and Col. Jeff Miller, Commander, PA State Police, Harrisburg, PA look on. Submitted by Tom Snyder



CLR-15 Mounts Out For Iraq

Many of you met my son Dominic at our last reunion. Since then Dominic became one of RB's (Sgt. Major R.B. English USMC Ret.) neighbors when he was transferred to the 15th Combat Logistic Regiment at Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center 29 Palms, or as we know it "the Stumps". On February 22, 2008 I was at the "Stumps" to wish Dominic well as he mounted out with his unit for his 2nd tour in Iraq. Dominic is a wheeled vehicle mechanic and outside the wire he is the fix it man who keeps the convoy rolling. Also, because he is one of only a few combat veterans in company he gets to be the 50 cal. gunner on the lead vehicle. Here are some photos of our young brothers getting ready to leave for the Sand Box, as well as a photo of an M 48 and an Ontos that are on display at the base.

Since Dominic has been in country I have had the opportunity to speak with him a few times. A couple of days after his unit arrived in country he called home. He said that the unit would be operating out of a former Iraqi Air Force Base up near Falljuah. The base is called Al Tagaddum or just "TQ". In our first conversation Dominic said "This is not the same country I left in 2006. It is quiet, boring and has become very garrison

like". He said that the unit they relieved had only found three IEDs during their entire tour and that it had been a long time since the base had been subjected to a mortar attack. "Reactive memory" caused me to tell him to enjoy the quiet because with the televised promises that some presidential candidates are making, and the soon to be televised anti war protest that would be taking place on the invasion anniversary things probably would not be quiet much for much longer. A few weeks later he again called home. That call took place about the same time that things were "heating up" in Basra. It was then that he informed me that he had survived an IED attack while on the road to Ramadi. Apparently the MPs who were suppose to "sweep" the road" missed an IED. Fortunately there was a problem with the IED and the entire thing did not detonate. So, Dominic and the rest of the Marines on the truck just got "banged up" and became a bit more religious. I have spoken with him since and he is doing fine, and things are no longer boring up in the Al Anbar. He said to say hello to everyone, and that he is looking forward to being with us at our next reunion.

Semper Fidelis
 Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri



Lookin' Good!

Lloyd "Pappy" Reynolds shows off his latest E-Bay acquisition. He never was one to keep up with the latest fashion trends.



Belmo & Son

TANKS ON THE DMZ

Part I
Night Attack
on Con Thien **1967**

BY JIM COAN

An isolated little hill, two miles below the southern border of the Demilitarized Zone dividing North and South Vietnam, became the scene of numerous battles in 1967. Many years before the Americans arrived, the French army had recognized the superior observation capabilities of the hill identified on their maps as *Nui Con Thien*. Eventually, after the French departed, it became an ARVN outpost.

In 1966, Secretary of Defense McNamara and his whiz kids in the pentagon decided that a barrier plan was needed to halt enemy infiltration south across the DMZ into South Vietnam. Hill 158, *Nui Con Thien*, was identified as a key strongpoint position. Work commenced quietly in early spring, 1967, to bulldoze a strip (called the Trace) two hundred yards wide from Con Thien to Gio Linh six miles to the east. The 11th Engineers, accompanied by Marines from 1/4 and the 3d Tank Battalion, finally completed that task the end of April. The next objective was to clear a 500-meter wide strip around Con Thien that would be filled with

barbed wire obstacles, anti-tank and anti-personnel mines.

Work commenced on bunker construction, emplacement of barbed wire obstacles, and mine installation the first week of May. The engineers and Navy Seabees were making progress, but much work lay ahead before the perimeter would be secure. The NVA were keeping a wary eye on this new development that threatened to impede their infiltration routes into the south.

The night of May 7-8, a combined force of NVA soldiers and sappers from the 4th and 6th Battalions of the 812th NVA Regiment gathered in the trees outside of Con Thien's perimeter, rehearsing their attack plans for the umpteenth time. The regulars would follow their highly trained sapper commandos through gaps blown in the concertina wire and quickly overrun what they believed to be weak ARVN and CIDG forces manning the base. What they did not know was that the ARVN had been replaced recently by two reinforced companies from the 1st Bn., 4th Marines, a platoon of engineers; and, three tanks manned

by combat-savvy Marines from Alpha Company, 3d Tanks.

At 0250 in the morning, a green flare shot skyward from somewhere beyond the southern perimeter. Almost immediately, sounding like dozens of kettle drums beating in the distance, the booming and thumping sounds of many artillery and mortar pieces could be heard all over Con Thien. Within seconds, a screeching roar of incoming descended upon the Marines. It was every man's worst nightmare—an all out attack—and it was coming right at them.

NVA sappers sprinted in under the covering barrage and blew several huge gaps in the northern perimeter wire with bamboo bangalore torpedoes. While the sappers did their dirty work, the waiting infantry laid down a fierce covering fire with their automatic weapons. Nearly all the young Marines had their heads down in a trench or were huddled inside a bunker. The sappers knew this. Creeping and crawling forward, tossing 1/4 pound blocks of TNT ahead of them to simulate mortar blasts, the sappers threw satchel

charges into bunkers and trenches as they passed by.

Three tanks were on the northern half of the perimeter, hunkered down



Blown Bunkers

Photo by Don Gehl

About 0400, the main force attacked, pouring through giant gaps blown in the perimeter wire. Three of the NVA were armed with flame throwers. Their blazing fuel suffocated and roasted several Marines crouched in their bunkers. Other NVA carried satchel charges or RPGs.



NVA Flame Thrower

in their firing slots when the attack began. Sergeant David Danner, the platoon maintenance man (“shit fister”), was in the gunner's seat on the center tank. An RPG penetrated the turret and exploded with a searing flash, blasting the crew with molten steel fragments. Despite being hit and burned severely, Sgt Danner got all of his wounded crewmen out of the tank and into a nearby aid station. He refused treatment, returning to his tank to retrieve the .30-cal. machine gun and as many boxes of ammo as he could carry. He continued to pour a heavy volume of machine gun fire into the ranks of the attackers despite being wounded many more times by shrapnel from exploding mortars and grenades. On one occasion, when he saw a seriously wounded Marine lying exposed in the open, Sgt Danner picked him up and carried him through intense enemy fire to the corpsman's bunker where he could receive first aid. Danner kept fighting until the attack subsided hours later; then he allowed his wounds to be treated.

A second tank commanded by Corporal Charles D. Thatcher

happened to be on the northeastern perimeter where the main assault came through the wire. Cpl Thatcher was asleep underneath his tank when the incoming started. He stayed put. To climb out into the open would be suicide. His gunner, L/Cpl David Gehrman, took the attacking force under fire with his .30-caliber machine gun. Suddenly, an anti-tank HEAT round pierced his turret and exploded. Choking smoke filled the turret.

Gehrman yelled, “Everybody bail out!” As he was leaning out of the tank commander's cupola, yelling at Cpl Thatcher to run, another explosion blew him out of the turret. The blast had mortally wounded the other two crewmen, L/Cpl J. E. Young and PFC J. C. Lester, Jr. Gehrman was hurt bad, but he managed to rise and stagger towards a nearby trench. Before he could reach safety, a bullet smacked into his leg, knocking him off his feet. He began crawling towards the trench, dragging his shattered leg, when a bullet struck him in his other leg. Two grunts reached out and pulled Gehrman into their bunker. He was out of the war.

Tank commander Thatcher was painfully wounded in the back and neck by shrapnel as he climbed aboard his still-smoldering tank. He gave first aid and attempted to comfort one of his dying crewmen as best he could. Then he fired off all of his remaining .30-caliber ammunition, inflicting heavy casualties on the attackers. He climbed down from his disabled tank and retrieved a rifle from a dead Marine. Observing an RPG team about to fire at the third tank, which was the only one still mobile, Thatcher gunned them down before they could unleash their anti-tank rocket.

The tank platoon sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Barnett G. Person, commanded the third tank. He was

located on the northwest side of the perimeter, away from the brunt of the main assault. He chose to button down his hatches and keep his tank moving, steering towards the main point of the attack where his other two smoking tanks lay immobilized. Several NVA crawled atop his tank, attempting to disable it with satchel charges, but he kept his 90mm main gun blasting out

accompanied by an Army “duster” and two LVTH amtracs, attacked across the old landing strip through the center of the perimeter. The “duster” immediately exploded into flames after an RPG struck it. The following amtrac caught fire when a satchel charge exploded underneath it, but the crew and passengers managed to escape.



Amtrac on Fire

Photo by Don Gehl

canister, and his two machine guns sprayed thousands of bullets into the determined enemy. His tank would be the only one of three still operable when daylight came.

Out of a dozen crewmen on the three tanks, only one man survived the battle unscathed. Three tankers were dead. Sgt Danner and Cpl Thatcher would survive their wounds and be awarded the Navy Cross. Gunnery Sergeant Person received a Silver Star.

Enough Marines from D/1/4 on the northern perimeter had survived the initial sapper attack to fight back fiercely, along with the tankers, and this slowed the momentum of the main NVA attack. On the southern perimeter, a severely outnumbered platoon from A/1/4,

The next amtrac was not so fortunate. While trying to avoid the other two vehicles, it was driven into a barbed wire fence, entangling the sprocket. Sitting there as helpless as a beached boat, another RPG flashed through the night exploding inside the “flaming coffin,” turning it into a death trap for the crew and squad of Marines

from Alpha’s third platoon. One man escaped before the amtrac exploded into flames, but he was riddled by machine gun bullets while attempting to run for cover. Horrible screams from inside the blazing amtrac died down quickly,



Fighting Holes

Photo by Don Gehl

but ammunition continued to cook off for hours.

As the sun rose in the smoke-shrouded morning sky, vengeful Marines attacked isolated pockets of NVA and shot them down as they tried to escape. With the perimeter sealed off, making escape impossible, it was either surrender or die. Most chose to die.

General Lew Walt flew into Con Thien by helicopter later that morning, landing near the still burning amtracs. Some isolated stragglers were still being hunted down and killed as late as 1100 that morning, even while General Walt was assessing the attack damage.

The human carnage was mind-numbing. Nearly 200 NVA bodies lay inside and outside of the perimeter. No doubt dozens more dead had been carried away by their “transportation unit” before dawn. The 4th Marines “guestimated” another 200 were probably killed by air strikes and artillery.

Marine losses were heavy, 44 killed and 110 wounded. Destroyed or damaged were two amtracs, three M-48A3 tanks, one road grader, one Army “duster,” two dump trucks, two jeeps, and one Ontos. Four green berets and five Navy Seabees were also wounded.

(Continued on page 24)

Part II

History of the Patton Tank

BY GERRY HODUM



The T48 design was an elliptically shaped hull and turret based on concepts forwarded from Ordnance Tank Automotive Command (OTAC) to the Chrysler Ordnance Development Department, designated as Vehicle Design Agency. These closely resembled the hull and turret shape of the T43 120mm gun tank. This shape provided for maximum armor protection at minimum weight. The vehicle was to be equipped with the same basic power package as the M47 to make the transition to the user easier and to answer user complaints about the questionable power of the

T42. The vehicle had six road wheels and a wider track (28 inch compared to 23 inch). The T48 had an 85-inch turret ring (M47-73.0 inch) the same as the T43, which allowed for heavier weapons systems in the future and for the turret walls to slope smoothly to the hull. The crew of four men consisted of a driver, who was positioned in the center of the hull eliminating the assistant driver/bow gunners’ position. This allowed main gun ammunition to be positioned to the driver’s right and left. The turret contained the rest of the crew, tank commander, gunner, and loader. The

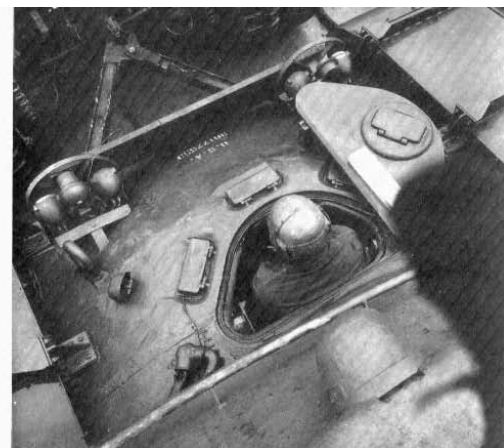
main gun was a lightweight 90mm T139 with a quick-change gun tube. The tube could be removed with out removing the breech ring or gun mount from the turret due to interrupted threads attaching the tube to the breech ring. Coaxially mounted with the main gun on the left were a 0.50 caliber M2HB machine gun (removed in production vehicles) and a 0.30 caliber M1919A4 machine gun on the right (moved to the left side and replaced by a telescope in production vehicles). At the tank commanders position a 0.50 caliber M2HB machine gun was mounted

to the commander's cupola in a manually controlled mount. This was called the Chrysler mount by the users and could be elevated/depressed and traversed from inside with the hatch closed. The 0.50 cal M2HB could be reloaded by using a crank to unlock the machine gun mount and then cranking the mount to pivot over the open loaders hatch where another 105 round (as 0.50 caliber was packaged then) box of ammunition could be installed. The mount was then cranked back, relocked and was now ready to fire. The tank was to be equipped with a range finder but the original T48s that were used in 2d Tank Battalion in the training platoon, under Gunny Dick Wenner, had the Phase 1 fire control. This was an off set telescope (T161) for the tank commander connecting to a ballistic drive unit (T24) that connected to a range drive unit (T25) and gunners periscope (T35). This simple fire control was replaced by a Phase IV fire control as more components were produced by industry. This had a stereoscopic range finder (T46), ballistic computer (T30), ballistic drive (T24) and gunner's periscope (M20) with a straight tube auxiliary telescope (T156). There were various marks of each instrument series until they were given model numbers. Hull design changed as a result of testing of the T48 at Fort Knox KY, Aberdeen MD and Chrysler proving grounds Chelsea MI. Some of the changes were the small drivers hatch and linkage operated driver's periscopes that had to be lowered before the hatch could be opened being replaced by a larger hatch and periscopes that remained in place during hatch opening and closing.

It was found that with the two gasoline heaters operating the short exhaust vents allowed heater exhaust to enter the crew compartment. The change made was to make the tubes longer and directing them to the sponson box area on the left side. Further testing revealed other shortcomings in the suspension and hull configuration. To reduce the chance of throwing track, a track tension idler was placed between the last road wheel and the sprocket and hub assembly. At the engine exhaust area it was found the exhaust was directed straight at the gun travel lock and gun tube. This caused a heat hazard unless asbestos gloves were used and the heat also "froze" the lock with the gun in travel lock. Deflectors were designed to aim the exhaust away from the travel lock and the gun tube. The original travel lock was short and a longer one soon appeared to lift the gun tube out of the heated area. As need increased and production of the M48 started to ramp up and testing continued it was found that casting of the one piece hull was limited by available facilities. A design study developed a hull that could be made from seven pieces and welded together and still provide the ballistic integrity required. This permitted hull availability and the tank to be being manufactured by

Ford Motor Company (Livonia MI) General Motors Corporation (Grand Blanc Tank Arsenal) and Chrysler Corporation (Chrysler Newark Delaware Tank Plant). (A little Tank Trivia: Chrysler made ALL their M48's at Newark Delaware. No M48's were ever made at Detroit Tank plant!!!) To avoid confusion on the part of the user it was decided that early vehicles with the small hatch and the Chrysler cupola were designated M48 (this included a number of mild steel "Non Ballistic" hulls and turrets that were designated M48C For "Training Use Only.") At Camp Lejeune you could find, in the mid to late '50's, T48's, M48's and M48C's at 2d Tanks. You also could find at 8th Tanks, Force Troops, 54 brand new M48A1's Chrysler manufactured (of which 50% were in open storage in the tank park). These were equipped with full up completed fire controls system with a stereoscopic rangefinder (T46 or M13), ballistic computer (T30 or M13), ballistic drive (T24 or M5) with elevation quadrant (M13), gunners sight (M20) and a straight tube telescope (T156 or M97) as an auxiliary sight. They also had the production version of Aircraft Armaments Industries Model 30 commanders cupola that was designated "Cupola M1". This cupola gave the commander the ability to

Redesigned driver's hatch



service his 0.50 cal under armor and with the hatch in the upright position protected his back somewhat. During testing, this cupola had a powered ammunition drum unit mounted on the turret basket that held 500-600 rounds feeding up thru a flexible chute to the M2HB 0.50 that was mounted horizontally in the cupola. Feed was from the right side of the receiver with link and brass being "flex link chuted" from the right side out of the cupola. It was found that the feed system interfered with the access of the gunner's area and the commander's use of the range finder. This system was replaced by an ammunition box, attaching to the cupola edge, with 105 rounds (as packaged then per box) available for use. The box lay along the left side of the head of the commander when he was at the sight. The ammo fed forward into a flexible link chute, went forward, did a 180 degree turn to the rear, a 90 degree turn to the



viewers right and up in the receiver (now mounted at an angle towards the left side so the cover could be opened somewhat) where the rounds (DOUBLE LINK INBOARD AND FORWARD!!) could be laid in the receiver. The charging handle, a very small wire called a "Charging Cable" was used to arm the weapon. The trick we learned early on, if your weapon fired at all, was to remember to stop with two rounds hanging before the

end of the chute so you could juggle a 105 round box with one hand while pushing a round through the double link of the fresh ammo and the single link tail hanging from the flexible link chute with the other hand. Simple, right? As you can see I'm a great fan of this cupola and it didn't get any better. Many suggestions were submitted regarding this cupola (some not printable) and efforts were made to alleviate the situations but NONE proved satisfactory, the worst (in this writers mind) was the 50 round ammo supply box and the continued use of the small cable charger. When 8th Tanks was stood down the tanks (including all the storage ones) were taken up by 2d Tanks, which had become the Force Troops unit. It might be of interest to know that the Marine Corps pushed for flame tank development right along with the T48-M48. The T67 was a Chemical Corps Flame Unit M7-6 mounted in a T48 modified structure.

This had a reduced crew of three (no loader) and mounted, beside the flame unit, a 0.30 caliber machine gun and a 0.50 caliber M2HB in a Chrysler cupola. In 1955 the vehicle was designated the M67 (on modified M48A1 structures). These units saw substantial service in the Marine Corps in the mid 1950's and early 1960's. (The flame tank developed from the below mentioned M48A2 was the designated M67A1 which

saw no service in the Marine Corps). Continued testing of the M48 series vehicle showed that limited operational range had to be addressed. Improved engines and transmissions were tested at the proving grounds. The Army accepted a fuel injected gasoline engine AVI-1790-8 and a CD-850-5 transmission along with improved fire control Instruments and Cadillac Gage turret power controls, after much testing as the M48A2. Improved suspension components included an upgraded front idler mount and arm along with added snubbers and reduction of the support rollers from five to three. M48A2's were not used by the Marine Corps, as they did not give that large an improvement for the Corps investment. The Corps followed the developments of the Army's up grade program. The Corps finally looked at the M48A3.

Next issue: The M48A3.

Editor's note: The designer of the cupola mounted .50 should have been made to take a tank into combat with only a working .50 and nothing else. A fix would have come about real soon. ✧

Plinking TANKER STYLE

BY MOSTLY CAJUN

I had the privilege of being an armor crewman (that's a tanker, ya'll) instructor at Fort Knox, Kentucky from 1972 to 1974. Yeah, that's the place where they keep the gold. The Gold Depository is just across the street from the Post Laundry and surrounded by the Officer's Club golf course. At least it WAS when I was there.

We trained young soldiers fresh out of basic training, showing them the basics of becoming useful armor crewmen. They generally left our care and went to regular line units where they became loaders on M60A1 Patton tanks. But we taught them a bit of every aspect of tanking: driving, mechanical maintenance, radio communications, care and feeding of machine guns and personal weapons. Back then, a tanker's personal weapon was the M1911A1 .45 pistol and the M3A1 .45 caliber sub machine gun, affectionately known as the "grease gun" for its remarkable mechanical beauty.

And we gave them an introduction into firing the 105mm main gun. Just a taste, mind you, a few rounds at stationary targets out to 1200 yards or so, and a moving target at around 800 yards. Since our tanks back then did not possess stabilized turrets, we did this from stationary positions. Tank gunnery is FUN! But because we were supposed to be teaching the trainees how to shoot, we instructors did not normally get a chance to do a lot of shooting ourselves. Okay, we did occasionally get to pop a round or too, but never enough...

Now if you recall your history, you'll remember that in 1973 Egypt and Syria attacked Israel in what became known as the Yom Kippur War. When the war kicked off, we were in the process of commissioning new tanks.

They were still M60A1's, but with improvements, including a stabilization system that made it

possible to fire the main gun accurately while the tank was moving. These new tanks came from the factory with all the accessories neatly boxed, and the barrel of the main gun in a big box on the fender. We went to Boatwright Maintenance Facility, the big shop on post where these new tanks were parked in the big lot of the motor pool. There, the mechanics installed the gun tube in its proper place and we did the myriad tasks necessary to take the tank from its storage condition to ready for use.

This was happening in the two weeks between the time one set of trainees graduated and the next group showed up. We called this "cycle break". We had two weeks to get 15 tanks ready for use. We worked steadily all the first week, and left the motor pool on Friday for a deserved rest. Coming back Monday, all the new tanks were gone. -POOF!!- Disappeared! Nobody in my chain of

command ever admitted it officially, but these tanks went to Israel during the Yom Kippur War. They made a difference in the outcome. Israel went on to kick Arab butt, stopping short of Cairo and Damascus only when the Soviet Union started rattling atomic sabers.

In return for us giving the Israelis our tanks, they gave us some suggestions on how to make them better. They should know. After all, the Egyptian and Syrian armies were using Soviet T-54's, T-55's and T-62's, the same tanks we'd face if we went to war in Europe. We also got a lot of Soviet T-54's, T-55's and T-62's, but that's another story.

One of the things the Israelis straightened us out on was the fact that the hydraulic fluid used to move the turret around, elevate the main gun, and absorb the recoil when the 105 went off, this fluid was a flammable petroleum product. Furthermore, the hydraulic system of the tank put this fluid under a pretty high pressure, around 1400 pounds per square inch, so that a tiny leak resulted in a fine, and very flammable, cloud of oil droplets. This is not a happy thing to have in an environment wherein your opponent delights in punching holes in your vehicle with incandescent metal projectiles.

"No problem", said our experts. "We have a non-flammable hydraulic fluid." So they changed. Worked fine, too, with one small exception. The new fluid was NOT compatible with the seals in the recoil mechanism.

Allow me to clue you in on this recoil system thing. Most of you know that when you fire a gun, it kicks back as the projectile goes forward. The magnitude of this recoil is a function of the weight and velocity of the projectile and the weight of the powder charge. A

light 12-gage shotgun shooting an ounce and a quarter of shot at 1200 feet per second can bruise you with the energy of its recoil, so picture the recoil involved with sending a twenty something pound projectile out the barrel at 3850 feet per second. Even though the main gun weighs in thousands of pounds and it recoils against a coil spring four feet long wound out of inch-thick steel, it requires hydraulic oil to dampen its travel. Several gallons of oil. Oil that heats up quickly as the gun is fired, both from the heat of firing and the huge amount of recoil energy it has to handle. And this oil is held in the sleeve of the gun mount by seals made of synthetic material.

I'd been tanking for a few years and had NEVER seen one of these seals leak more than a couple of drops. But when we changed to the non-flammable fluid, they started failing. We went to the range with a mixture of new tanks with the new fluid, and our tired old tanks with the old fluid, and every one of the new tanks had recoil seal failures.

So the experts went back to the drawing boards and came up with two things: A new seal that shouldn't react adversely with the new fluid, and a proposal for a test. And when they reached these conclusions, they caught us on our next cycle break, so we got tapped to run the test.

They sent us out to the range with four new tanks: two with the original seals that had been failing, and two which had their seals replaced with the new composition that wasn't supposed to leak. They sent eight of us young instructors, a range safety officer who was one particularly good lieutenant, a senior drill sergeant and a platoon, fifteen trainees. And the kicker. Two semi trailers loaded with 105mm main gun ammo. Four tanks.

1500 rounds of ammo. Trainees to do the heavy work. It's beginning to look really good. The range was set up for us when we got there: six by six foot panels stationary at 1200 meters and a four by eight foot moving target making two passes, one at 600 meters and one at 800.

Our instructions were to shoot all four tanks, counting rounds, and note if and when the seals failed. We thought we'd died and gone to heaven. I know some of you shooters enjoy plinking, you know, just throwing out random targets and pumping rounds at them with a .22, or maybe even a high-powered rifle. We'd just been given orders to plink with a 105.

And we did. Boy, did we ever! 1200 yards with a 105 is like 50 yards with a .22. If you miss, you just ain't paying attention. We didn't miss. We played. The 1200-meter targets were canvas, stapled to a wood frame. A hit on the canvas left a four inch hole you could see through the magnified gun sights. This wasn't enough action for some. We wanted to see things fall down. So after a couple of shots to fine tune the weapon's zero, we went after the 4" lumber used to hold the canvas up. That's how good these guns are. You aim at a four inch wide board 1200 meters away, and you hit it more often than not. Soon there were no more 1200-meter targets standing. We shot at pieces on the ground.

And we got the range folks to start up the moving target. We had speed-loading contests to see how many rounds we could get at the target on one pass across the range. A pass took maybe a minute and a half, and in this case the tank commander and the loader, both experienced instructors, both knew what they were doing. A round went downrange every three or four seconds, and at 600-800 meters, all hits. The moving target was a four

by eight sheet of plywood. A hit took a four-inch circle out of the panel. We weren't missing. Aiming at the center of the target lost its challenge, so we started cutting a horizontal notch from the leading edge back to the middle, the from the top down to the horizontal notch. And this knocked out a two foot by four foot chunk of the target. The fun continued.

About sixty or so rounds into the day, the first seal failure came as expected on one of the tanks with the original seals. About thirty rounds later, the second failed. They had to stop shooting. We figured that this is where the exercise would end, but

when we asked, we were told that we could just shoot up the rest of the truckload of ammo. Apparently the paperwork to turn it back in unused was too inconvenient to fill out.

So we kept on shooting. WE shot up a second panel off the moving target. And a third. We shot so much, so fast, and the guns got so hot that the olive drab paint on the barrel charred to a deep coffee brown. The recoil system on my tank got so hot that the oil expanded in its reservoir until it bled out, and when it squirted onto the hot shell casings lying shin-deep on the turret floor, it gave off voluminous clouds of acrid

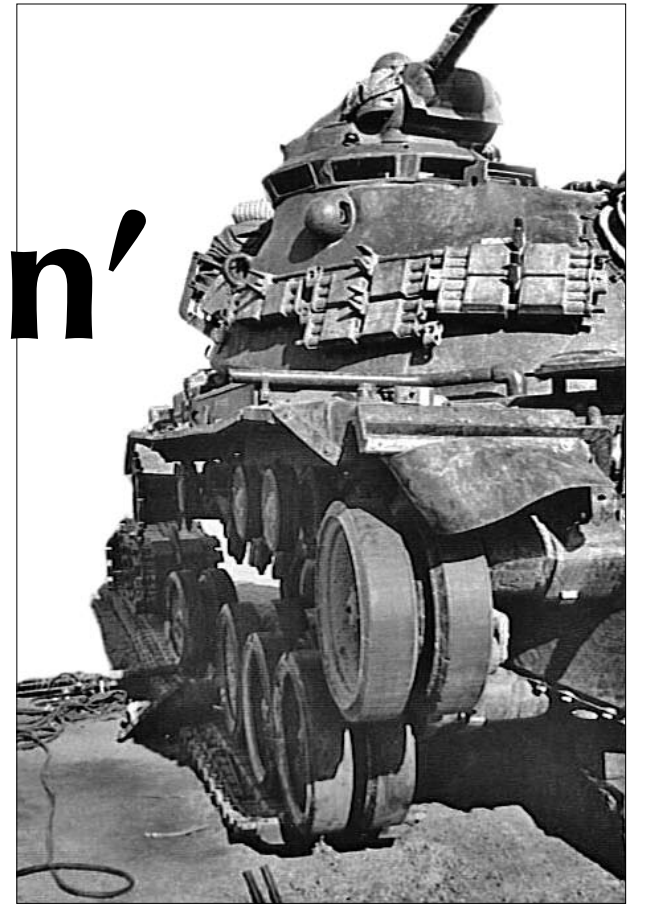
smoke. We just turned on the turret evacuation blowers to clear the air and kept on shooting, stopping only long enough to offload the spent casings and to take on more ammo. And we shot it ALL up.

For years after I got out of the army, I had little interest in shooting rifles because of the impact of this day. After you've been plinking with a 105, it's hard to get excited by a .22. Or a .30-06.

So that's the story of the day we went plinking with 105's.

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Those freakin' Torsion Bars



BY ROBERT PEAVEY

Tank on the DMZ

(Continued from page 18)

A relief crew of tankers came up from Dong Ha that afternoon to replace the wiped out crews from the three tanks and to determine if any of their equipment was salvageable. L/ Cpl Ken "Piggy" Bores, a tanker from Alpha Company, was shanghaied to be part of a working party retrieving NVA bodies. While going through their personal effects, Ken noted that many had photos of themselves with girlfriends and family. He then helped load the bodies on trucks and ride out to the burial site with them.

An engineer bulldozer operator had scooped out a wide ditch north of Con Thien in the newly cleared perimeter that encircled the fire base. Bores was part of the gruesome detail that tossed

the bodies off the trucks into the ditch. He watched in numbed silence as the dozer operator pushed dirt over the NVA corpses, noting that here and there a hand or foot protruded up out of the mass grave.

The May 8 attack on Con Thien had been a disaster for General Giap's North Vietnamese Army. The better part of a reinforced battalion plus a sapper company had been sacrificed; they left half of their dead behind to be buried by the Marines. Everything was planned down to the last detail, except what would happen when they encountered a force of U. S. Marine grunts, tankers, and engineers who fought like cornered badgers.

His devastating defeat at Con Thien convinced General Giap that he would not be able to attack and overrun the U. S. Marines dug into those barrier system strong points.

Their tenacity and overwhelming fire support was too tough a nut to crack. Instead, he would carry out his war of attrition through ambushing patrols outside the fire bases and by shelling the Marines with his artillery, rockets, and mortars. He planned to keep the Marines tied to defending their bases below the DMZ, where his supply lines were short and he had a safe haven immune from ground interdiction. But all that would soon change, as immediately after the May 8 attack, MACV authorized General Walt to commence planning an invasion of the DMZ. That next operation would be named Hickory and would actively involve all three companies of 3d Tank Battalion.

Source: Coan, James P., *Con Thien: The Hill of Angels*, University of Alabama Press, 2004. ❖

I was in the Corps for only three years but I feel like I had seen it all when it came to torsion bars or as the book called them, "Torsion Bar, Suspension, 2510-00-703-5899". These were the 6-foot long, 100 pound, 2.35 inch diameter steel rods that actually carried the weight of the M48 tank—all twelve of them. And in case you are not an aficionado of the "Torsion Bar, Suspension" the two ends were NOT the same: one end had 57 teeth and the other 55 and they were not the same diameter. I know my torsion bars!

A year with 5th Tanks in Pendleton before going overseas gave me a good indoctrination into the trials and tribulations of removing torsion bars—and that represented the best of conditions! Now, I know I will get some arguments from career tankers who spent a lot more time around tanks than I did about what was the worst job for a crew, but a

stuck torsion bar had to be at the top of a tank's long list of potential maladies. It seemed that every broken torsion bar was unique, each with its own story of just how it wanted to be extracted; I never experienced one that came out easily.

My first indoctrination to a broken torsion bar was at Camp Pendleton, home of B, C, & D Companies of 5th Tank Battalion; Alpha Company was already in Vietnam.

It was on the ramp at Los Flores, right behind Battalion Maintenance where I got my lesson in: Torsion Bar, Suspension, Extraction. Keep in mind that we were only 100 feet from every tool the Marine Corps issued a tank battalion, we had all the 2141's you could shake a stick at, and experts up the wazoo in the form of recently returned combat veterans. It was the ideal condition under which to learn how to remove a T-bar.

Staff Sergeant Embesi hollered

at someone to run to Maintenance to get a "slap-hammer" from the battalion shop but the runner thought his Platoon Sergeant was putting him on, after all, a "slap-hammer" sounded like one of those ramp jokes often pulled on newbie tankers as in, "Go to Supply and get me a bucket of muzzle blast" or "Get me some high frequency grease for the aerials"; a box of ground guides was another frequently sent for item. So the runner hesitated and smiled back at Embesi thinking, "I'm not falling for that one." Little did he know that there really was such a tool; it was Embesi's look that got the runner to move. It was that look that said you are about one second from reaching your maximum pain threshold. Embesi called it, "Command Presence". Snuffies had a different name for it: "Command Intimidation".

A slap-hammer is a 1.5" diameter rod with a T-handle at the top; the

other end was screwed into the exposed face of the torsion bar (after removing the suspension arm and its roadwheels). There was a sliding weight on the rod that the user would pull towards him “slapping” the weight against the T-handle thereby banging on the torsion bar to pull it out. The tank crew used this tool for over an hour with no luck. They had squirted what seemed like a gallon of penetrating oil into the little access hole on the other side of the hull in the hope to persuade its release. This was always a long process but it was the way “the book” said to do it. Finally an acetylene torch was wheeled over and used to heat up the anchor well that held the torsion bar fast as the crew pounded away for another hour to no avail.

Then someone got the brilliant idea to chain the end of the slap hammer’s T-handle to an M51 Tank Retriever and see if brute force could pull the bar out. The retriever was backed up perpendicular to the side of the tank, a chain was wrapped around the slap-hammer handle and we stood back. The retriever took up the slack and then strained as it wound up its engine. Anyone who ever doubted the power of an M51 was forever changed that afternoon as it began to drag the tank sideways across the concrete ramp! Still that dam bar wouldn’t let go. The entire platoon spent the rest of the day beating on the bar, adding more oil, and using up all the acetylene we could find until it finally surrendered—and this was under the best of stateside conditions!

Then there was the night I had guard duty on the ramp at Los Flores. It was dark and I was walking between the rows of Delta Company’s “Ramp Queens”. These were the M103 Heavy Tanks that seldom left the safety of the ramp as if too fragile to

be moved. I discovered the purpose of their stationary lifestyle while walking between rows of 103s. There was a sudden and very distinctive gunshot-like “Crack!” that rang—it scared the hell out of me! The tank I was next to had suddenly decided to unload a torsion bar! The M103 was famous for consuming torsion bars in prodigious quantities—even while sitting still.

Obviously Vietnam was anything less than “ideal” conditions under which to pull a T-bar. Battalion Maintenance was often 10-plus miles away. As part of a platoon that was spread between Con Thien, C4 and Oceanview, I had the luck of not having the platoon’s 2141 in my section. A supply run from Dong Ha brought a torsion bar all the way up to Oceanview, the most northern outpost on the DMZ—but without a slap-hammer! What did the idiots think I was going to do with a new torsion bar and no slap-hammer? I resorted to something I had heard veterans talk about back on the ramp at Pendleton. It was always spoken of in the quietest of tones, always looking over one’s shoulder before mentioning it—C-4. They had shared with me the secrets of how to “blow” a T-bar.

Keep in mind that the tanks in Vietnam had been there for years; they had endured monsoons, floods, mud, and saltwater runs down the beach and occasional beach landings through saltwater. The torsion bars in these tanks had become one with the hull, fused by rust better than any arc welder could achieve. The method of removing such a steadfast bar certainly wasn’t taught in any tanker manual. Even if you had a slap-hammer, you weren’t getting a rusted bar out with one of those toys. It required field expediency—and was highly illegal.

Packing the access well with a small amount of C-4 and adding a blasting cap with a short time fuse was all that was needed to loosen a stuck bar. Sometimes it took two or three charges to break it loose, but this method worked every time. After the charge went off, the bar could often be found protruding a foot or two out of the tank.

But there was one story that I would love to know if any of our members could verify for me; I would love to hear from anyone who might have been there. The story has even found its way into Oscar Gilbert’s new book, Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam. It involved a second lieutenant (it’s always a second lieutenant, isn’t it?) that had tried the C-4 procedure with an ornery torsion bar. As the story goes, the crew warned him about the prodigious amount of the white putty he was applying. When the charge went off it was said that the torsion bar flew out of the tank like an arrow and was immediately followed by a rumbling, gurgling sound, like that of an oil well about to erupt, followed quickly by what sounded like an uncapped fire hydrant as 375 gallons of diesel fuel rushed out of the ruptured hull and fuel cell.

Think ya used enough C-4 there, L.T.? ❖

How Lucky Was I?

By Graham Nuttall – Government advisor to Tony Windsor
Member of Parliament
Australia, 5/12/2008

The other night I stood in a full room in our Parliament House.
The blokes were all smiles and the women looked grouse
All wearing their best frocks, the men in coat and tie
And I couldn’t help thinking, How lucky was I.

The Prime Minister came into the hall to polite applause,
Closely followed by the Opposition Leader without a pause
And the clapping got louder as the two other blokes passed by
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

The PM and his Opposite expressed the Nation’s thanks to all in the room
But it wasn’t till these two other blokes spoke that reality hit home.
They spoke of a Battle that they had shared by and by
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

They spoke of Vietnam and the Battles of Balmoral and Coral
Where Aussie troops fought a war while many at home questioned the moral
These blokes in the room though knew they could die
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

Twenty-five of them did die and over one hundred were wounded
But all who took part were forever bonded.
They fought off the enemy and could hold their heads high
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

As I looked round the room the looked like ordinary blokes enjoying a drink
But they bore on their chests many medals and it made me think
Of what they had gone through under that foreign sky
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

I didn’t have to go to war and put my life on the line
As all the blokes did who I was now standing behind.
I don’t know the pressure to come under fire
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

To see these blokes now as they’re getting a bit older
And hear stories of their times when they had to be bolder
Was truly an honor, and as we said thanks, I gave a sigh,
And I couldn’t help thinking, how lucky was I.

Submitted by our Australian correspondent, Doug Scrivner.

Editor’s Note: Balmoral and Coral were two firebases in Vietnam near Bien Hoa. A total of 496 Australians were KIA and 2,398 wounded during their time in RVN (1966 – 1972). A little known fact: Australia actually sustained a higher percentage of casualties than U.S. forces during the Vietnam War.

to the Great Tank Park in the sky



GY/SGT. JOHN C. OSBORN

Gunnery Sgt. John C. Osborn died March 28, 2008 in the Ottawa County Hospital. He was born June 14, 1934 in Fairbury, NE. He and his brother spent their early years in Salina, and the west coast awaiting their fathers return from WWII service in the U.S. Army as a dental surgeon in India.

John and his family moved to Oakley, KS near the end of high school where he graduated and joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He was trained as a combat tanker and served with his brother in the 3rd Marine Tank Battalion in Japan and with the 1st Marine Tanks, FMF, during the Korean War.

During his career of 20 years, he also served in Vietnam where he was wounded several times, rehabilitated and volunteered for another tour. He was trained by the State Department and served as the Senior Staff NCO at the American Embassy in Seoul, Korea, he served as a nuclear weapons courier for the Marine Corps. He concluded his career as an instructor in tank warfare at Schools Battalion,

Camp Del Mar, and in the deserts of California. He was a founding member of the U.S. Marine Corps Tanker Assn. and the Vietnam Tanker Assn.

His retirement life was dedicated to taking care of his mother, Sophia Osborn, in her Salina home for 16 years until her death. He became totally incapacitated following surgery spending his final days in the Good Samaritan Facility. The body was cremated.

His brother, Dr. Vernon Osborn and wife Sara Osborn and their sons John, David and Thomas survive John. He was a great man and a hero of this country. A memorial service was held on Saturday, April 5, 2008 at Ryan Mortuary, Fr. John Wolesky officiating. Inurnment will be in the Gypsum Hill Cemetery, Salina, KS. Memorials may be made to the Marine Toy Box in care of Tri-Rivers Detachment, Marine Corps League, @ Mr. Don Vineyard, 1016 Burr Oak Lane, Salina, KS, 67401.

The USMC VTA made a contribution.



SAMS, COLONEL MELVIN PAUL, USMC (RET.), 65, of North Kingstown, R.I., died unexpectedly at home on January 17 with his loving wife Mary by his side.

He was the son of Melvin and Eleanor (Cross) Sams. He was born August 19, 1942 in Greensburg, PA.

He is survived by his loving wife Mary Mudge Sams of North Kingstown and two children; Michael and David Sams,

and three step children he loved as his own, Richard Hoke, Michael Gates and Amy Gates.

Colonel Sams retired as General Manager of RI Water Resource Board. He served as Vice Chairman of the Quonset Development Corporation, Vice Chairman of the states Planning Technical Committee, Interim director for the Rhode Island Economic Development Corporation, Executive Director for the Blackstone Valley District Commission and

Human Resources Management Director for the town of North Kingstown.

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

Colonel Sams also served as the Senior Marine Officer, US Army Tank & Engineer Command, Fort Knox Kentucky and as the Operations Officer, Marine Corps Base Camp Lejeune when he retired in May 1984.

Colonel Sams was awarded 22 combat decorations including the Silver Star, Meritorious Service Medal, Navy Commendation Medal with 2 Stars & Combat V, 5 Presidential Unit Commendations, 4 Navy Unit Commendations, 3 Meritorious Unit Commendations, the Vietnam Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Ribbon, and the National Defense Service Medal.

Paul loved his God, country, the Marine Corps, his wife, family, friends and his dogs; Duke, Dutchess and less we forget his new 'man-dog' Nicky. He loved to hunt and fish. He loved nature and poetry. Paul served his country, his state and his community with honor and integrity. He was a consummate Marine: Semper Fidelis! All who know of him respected and loved him and will miss the joy, and smiles he bought into our lives, as well as his gentle wave.



Marine tank sergeant's INNOVATION in COMBAT saved day in Fallujah

BY STEVE LIEWER STAFF WRITER

November 9, 2007

Marine Gunnery Sgt. Nick Popaditch didn't like what he saw ahead of his tank in Fallujah, Iraq. It was late afternoon April 6, 2004, two days into an offensive to retake the city and avenge the four U.S. contractors whose burned bodies had been hung from a train trestle. Popaditch commanded a pair of tanks sent to relieve an infantry unit.

A tanker truck, probably booby-trapped, was blocking an alley. Insurgents had strung a spider's web of electrical wires across the entrance to a nearby courtyard.

Popaditch knew he was moving into the kill zone of an ambush. He wouldn't turn back and abandon the grunts who needed him, but to bull forward meant suicide. So he called for an airstrike. An AC-130 blew up the tanker truck, the power lines and an insurgent post packed with weapons.

With those obstacles cleared, Popaditch received permission to push forward with the gunship overhead

— an untested tactic at the time. Together, his tanks and the AC-130 cleared block after block of insurgents and relieved pressure on the embattled infantry platoon.

"(We were) just inflicting a devastating number of casualties on the enemy, and we did it in a way that no one had ever done before," Popaditch said. The thrill of victory soon gave way to gruesome injury. As Popaditch stood in the turret of his tank during a battle the next day, a rocket-propelled grenade exploded next to his head.

"(I saw) a really bright light, like a flash, and then nothing," he said. "It was like getting hit in the head with a sledgehammer."

Popaditch continued to guide the movements of his tank and called for a medical evacuation despite being blinded and temporarily deafened.

Shrapnel from the blast fractured his skull and lodged around his eyes and nose. Physicians couldn't save his right eye, and they barely salvaged the left. →



NADIA BOROWSKI SCOTT / Union-Tribune

Gunnery Sgt. Nick Popaditch's prosthetic eye is etched with the Marine Corps' eagle-globe-and-anchor emblem.

For his innovative combat tactics and leadership even when wounded, Popaditch received the Silver Star, the military's third-highest award for valor.

Though legally blind, Popaditch has learned to use the 8 percent of sight he has left. He's aided by tools such as a video screen that enlarges printed materials and a pair of what he calls "telescope glasses."

But as much as he loves the Marine Corps, he found he couldn't stay in. "I didn't want to be a straphanger,"

he said. "The military is not an adaptive world, and it shouldn't be."

So in 2005, Popaditch left the Marines for college. He's now a junior at San Diego State University. Inspired by his time as a Marine drill instructor, he is aiming to become a high school teacher.

"You do a lot of teaching when you're a DI, along with everything else. (At a high school), you may be teaching algebra or the War of 1812, but it's all teaching," said Popaditch, 40, who lives in Linda Vista with his wife, April, and son, Nick Jr. His Marine Corps career began nearly 22 years ago, when a recruiter talked him into enlisting after high school graduation. Popaditch quickly took to the life of brotherhood and discipline, even though he describes himself as having been bookish and shy as a boy growing up in Indiana.

He commanded a tank in the Persian Gulf War. By the time of the Iraq war, he was serving as a gunnery sergeant – an elite enlisted class that is

revered in the Marine Corps.

Popaditch's tank platoon was among the first few to cross the Kuwait-Iraq border and reach the Iraqi capital of Baghdad in March 2003.

A news photographer snapped a picture of him smoking a victory cigar in his tank turret in front of a statue of then-President Saddam Hussein just as it was being toppled. The photo became a symbol of the heady early days of the war. Popaditch's unit returned to Twentynine Palms in July 2003. He then volunteered to go back to Iraq the following winter. His battalion took responsibility for the Fallujah area a couple of weeks before the attack that wounded him.

Popaditch now speaks frequently to military groups, and he has joined SDSU's student veteran's organization.

What will he do when he graduates? Maybe smoke a cigar.

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Short Story

Incoming

The shrapnel hums a deadly song that sounds like a crazy boomerang that won't return home. I try to make my body small my hands clasped over my head to protect my ears and neck. Hot waves of concussion blow overhead you keep your mouth open so it won't explode your head. You want to scream or shout but the fear and dust won't let the words come out. Each explosion pushes you ever closer to the bone deep terror that comes back in your dreams long after the war is over. Each man is in his own private hell. After each salvo you dare to look around the ravaged ground to see which friends went down. You look at the ones going

out in body bags with names you don't want to remember and at the ones that are screaming as the medics attend them. Then the shells start to fall again, sending you back in your hole curled into a little ball holding on to your soul and fighting the fear with all your might. The fear never ends you can see it naked and haunting in the eyes of your friends. They have that 1000 yard stare as if everything inside has got up and went leaving a empty husk of a person with one desire, for the shells to stop or maybe live for a few more hours. We lay here and endure this hell for a piece of muddy ground just so we can give it back when we think we are finished. Men are screaming that

haven't been hit pushed over the edge into the pits, where insanity sits. Some never to come back while others are ravaged for life in one way or another. I consider all of them my brothers.

Written from the heart by Harvie Lance
Purple Heart Marine S-2 Scout 1/9 68-69



Platoon Reunion

Harvey "Robbie" Robinson had tried for years to track down his fellow members from 2nd Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Tanks. Beginning in 2003 he started calling around to Dick Carey for member information who directed him to Gunner Embesi. Between Dick and Bob, Robbie was eventually able to track down many of the 20 members and then held a reunion this past April in Farmington, Missouri. Eight members showed up for the reunion. Robbie says that the best time of his life is seeing old friends.



From L to R: Danny Martin, Herb Steigleman, Jim Hobson, Robbie Robinson, Paul Emmitt, Gary Gibson, Gary Crutchlow, Larry Roalson, Randy Conrad

Pickup Art

Harvey "Robbie" Robinson used artwork of Bruce Van Apeldoorn and Bob Peavey that was originally created by Roland Castanie to customize his new truck. Robbie says he wants to give Marine tanks their due. There is also a picture of his tank platoon on the rear window. Robbie was with A Co., 1st. Tanks, 1965 - '66.

Art was done by Service Graphics of Beaumont, TX (409-860-4005).





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

Please check your address label. The number next to your name is the year that your dues are paid up through.
The next mailing in November will ONLY be sent to members with an "08" after their name.