



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



# You say Lejeune, we say Luh-Jern

By order of the Commandant, the pronunciation of "Lejeune" is to be corrected.



GREENVILLE, N.C. - We here at TV 9, have taken a beating from viewers because of the way we pronounce the name of the Marine base in Onslow county. Today we got some relief from retired general Michael Hagee. The 33rd Commandant of the Marine Corps sent a memo this weekend asking all news media to pronounce the name the way we do, properly.

So, I talked with a former marine who has spent a large part of his life traveling; telling the world, the history of the man known as "the greatest leatherneck."

For Patrick Brent, there is no other way to pronounce it but he admits it's tough to get others to do that. "Well, Allan, I thought it would be a lot easier than it has been. With Marines it's not that tough, but with civilians who have spoken something so incorrectly for such a long time, they have a hard time handling that," he said.

In fact, this businessman from Hawaii travels around the country at the request of the Marine brass to teach new recruits, seasoned vets and just ordinary people why you say the name "Luh-jern"

"The etymology of the word started in Italy then to France

hundreds of years ago. It picked up a soft R. That's the way the family says their name. And probably one of the reasons the name has been misspoken is because the family are kind and genteel people," he said.

Now a lot of people have asked me why I say the "R" when there is no R in the name. Well your right. But then again there is no "R" in Colonel either, and even "Marine Corps" has a P and S which you don't pronounce. And how about NFL great Bret Favre? In print the name has an R on the right of the V but say it with the R on the left side.

Then there is Duke Coach Mike Krzyzewski. There are a lot of unused letters there.

Brent said "It's about remembering, understanding and honoring a great American." And he spends his time doing just that. Brent will be at Camp Lejeune this week to give seminars to marines, the media and anyone else who will listen.

And the 13th commandant of the Marine Corps John Archer Lejeune has an amazing history. He has actually been credited with saving the corps from extinction. Lejeune was a French Cajun, born in Pointe Coupee Parish Louisiana in 1867. After World War One, the Army wanted to absorb the Marine Corps as a service, but Lejeune fought the brass and won.

Further, he was instrumental in instituting the marine basics such as amphibious assaults and keeping marine aircraft with the front line units to provide support. During his service in WWI he was awarded the French Medal of Honor. He is also credited with saving the Virginia Military Institute from going under financially when he as its Superintendent after his retirement.

John Archer Lejeune died in 1942.

## Letter from the President

I am currently reading a book called *The Politically Incorrect Guide to the Vietnam War* that was written in 2010 by a Vietnam Marine veteran, Phillip E Jennings. What a shot-in-the-arm it is to read his words! I was particularly interested in reading a historical fact that I never knew before: He writes that back in June of 1956, "... when most of us who ended up fighting in Vietnam were in elementary school, (then) Senator John F Kennedy attended a gathering that was called The Conference on Vietnam, which was held at the Hotel Willard in Washington, DC. During the luncheon, Sen. Kennedy gave a lengthy speech which contained the following: Vietnam represents the cornerstone of the Free World in Southeast Asia, the keystone to the arch, the finger in the dike. Burma, Thailand, India, Japan, the Philippines and obviously Laos and Cambodia are among those whose security would be threatened if the Red Tide of Communism overflowed into Vietnam." There you have it. Proof positive that as far back as 1956...as far back as ten years before the first combat troops were deployed in-country, the conventional thinking was to do all that we could to prevent the so-called, "Domino Theory."

Now I can get to a much lighter subject: Our forthcoming reunion in San Diego! This special issue of The Sponson Box was created as the "pre-reunion" edition. We researched and are reporting on all sorts of the most terrific sights & happenings that the amazing City of San Diego has to offer you & your guests. And this wide assortment of things to do is on top of attending our most awesome VTA reunion! We have set aside one and a half days for you & your guests to make your own plans to see and do practically what ever your hearts (and your pocket books) desire. If you will simply make a phone call directly to the activity provider or to the Town & Country Hotel concierge, that should be all that you need to cement your outside activity plans.

A word of explanation with regard to Friday's reunion activities: While most of us will want to attend the recruit graduation at MCRD San Diego, there are some folks who would rather do something else. That is why we decided to sponsor the Harbor Cruise. You can choose to do one or the other on Friday morning. If you feel compelled to take the Harbor Tour on your own time, you are very welcome to make your own arrangements. We provide the contact information in the reunion section of this issue of *The Sponson Box*.

Please take this next suggestion very seriously: One of the highlights of our reunions that I have personally experienced is looking at another attendee's Vietnam photo album & scrap book. What a kick in the pants for me to discover a photo of a young & skinny John Wear that I never knew existed...or if I happen to see a face in a photo that I recognize but need a name to help me recognize who it is. When I ask the owner of the photo where it was taken or who that person is...his reply opens a whole new floodgate of memories from that time so long ago. I highly recommend that if you have not done so yet, please gather up your old photos and other mementoes from your time in-country, get them into a loose leaf binder or a photo album and bring them with you to San Diego. Please be sure to have your name on the cover of the book...and if you care to, keep the album in your hotel room for safekeeping...but bring it with you to the Slopechute hospitality room when you come up...for others to enjoy.

A thought: We are so lucky to have made it out of our war alive and we are even luckier to be living in today's world. Most of us have our wonderful families, our really terrific friends and the unfailing brotherhood of the Vietnam Tankers Association. I cannot stress enough how much it will mean to you (and to all of us) that you are able to attend the reunion in San Diego this August and to meet & greet the members of your association.

Semper Fidelis,

John

"Liberty must at all hazards be supported...  
Liberty, once lost, is lost forever.  
Our obligations to our country never cease but with our lives."

John Adams

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ON THE COVER: The official logo for the 6th biannual reunion of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association to be held in San Diego, CA this August.

## New Members for 2011 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sponson Box

### Robert E Barnhouse

679 Castlecliff Rd.

Ballwin, MO 63021

Phone: (636) 256-9142

H&S – B Co, 3rd Tanks, '66 – '67

MOS: 1811

DOB: 1/30/48

Wife: Pat

Recruited by: Website

### William A Bartachek

2165 Kent Church Road

Chelsea, IA 52215

Phone: (319) 525-2658

A Co, 1st Tanks, '68

MOS: 0353

DOB: 7/23/47

Wife: Bev

Recruited by: American Legion magazine

### Steven L Hydinger

12967 Camino De Oro Way

Victorville, CA 92394

Phone: (951) 205-3802

B Co, ? Tank Bn, '67 – '68

MOS: 1811

DOB: 4/23/48

Recruited by: American Legion magazine

### Michael Kirk, Jr

10212 Elgin Road

Union City, PA 18438

Phone: (814) 438-2613

H&S Co, 3rd ATs, '61 – '62

MOS: 3516

DOB: 12/26/40

Wife: Candice

Recruited by: American Legion magazine

### David J Ralston

3837 – 177th Street

Hammond, IN 46323-3062

Phone: (219) 845-4046

A – B – C Cos, 3rd Tanks, '68 – '70

MOS: 1802

DOB: 12/20/44

Recruited by: Bob Vaxter

Please note: Most of these new members were recruited through a joint effort. The recruiters called or emailed John Wear or "Robbie" Robinson and the perspective member had a membership packet sent to them. The packet that was mailed included a sample of the Sponson Box news magazine, a membership application and a letter asking them to join. Anyone who knows a perspective member, please alert either Robbie or John.

## Letter to the Editor

Once again you guys have hit one into the "tank park." God bless you in the work you do. Some day maybe you will come to know just how many men you have brought back to them with the "Sponson Box."

Marshall Jameson

1st Tanks, '67 – '69

Gentlemen,

The last issue of The Sponson Box (Jan - Feb - Mar 2011) was EXCEPTIONAL! Enjoyed reading it. My compliments to all involved.

Semper Fi,

Tom Cassidy

Vero Beach, FL

John and Bob:

You-all do suchan outstanding job with the Sponson Box. The last issue was "outstanding" as usual. Thanks for all that you do.

Semper Fi my friends,

Col. "Casey" Casey

President MCTA

Gasburg, VA

John,

I hope all is well with you and your families. Mine are fine. You're doing such an outstanding job.

Thanks,

Bill Bisbee

Marion, MA

Thank you again and again for all that you-all are doing. The most recent publication of the "Sponson Box" was professionally done and covered a wide array of topics and concerns. Keep up the grand work

Semper Fi,

John Voss

Escondido, CA

Thanks for all of your work. We're back in Colorado until May and ready to work on a wood project for the Association auction in San Diego! We have a shop that engraved the USMCVTA logo on the 90 mm tank shell and it is available to help us with us out. I'll go visit him and take some pictures of what he can do. I'll then e-mail them to you and we can decide.

Semper Fi,

Rod Henderson

Johnstown, CO

(970) 587-9743

Thanks for all of your effort and your hard work.

John Cox

Morrison, FL

(352) 486-3199

Please accept my dues for the year 2011 and let me commend you guys on a great magazine. Just one thing: Does anyone check out some of these stories? I really have my druthers about that Ontos story ("Ontos at Con Thien and Khe Sahn" by Tim Craft that appeared on Page 34 of the most recent issue). It is just a little far fetched for me being an Ontos Marine. I know that some of those statements are flat out not true.

One of my pet peeves is people who lie or embellish stories or events more than what are real. To me it is something like the Stolen Valor Act. I got interested in this stuff when I started investigating applications for the local VFW. You would not believe how many REMF's there are out there, that could have won the battles if there were officers who would have listened to them!

Jack Arena

A Co, 1st Pit, 3rd AT Bn

SLF, Alfa Co, BLT 1/3 - 1967

I hope that this note finds you and the Association doing well. Winter has come early to North Central Florida. This year has set several records for low temperatures. It has been rough on Florida's produce industry.

A small reunion of four days was held here at the Clary ranch a few months ago. Donald Chester (Homa, LA), Robert "Bobby" Walker (Sarasota, FL), James "Ronnie" Williams (Ellerbe, NC), Johnny Evans (Thibodaux, LA) and I had a wonderful visit. We used the Clary hunt camp as our headquarters. We were all together in Vietnam and I had not seen Don Chester since he left Vietnam in September 1968. Where did the forty-two years go?

We talked about the few good times we had in "The Nam." Walker talked about some of my antics when we were on R&R in Bangkok, the other ones are sworn to secrecy!

We talked about the six Marines from H&S Company, 1st Tanks that were KIA in the rice paddy by the ville just south of "Outpost Bear." Bobby Walker had a program of the service we held for them two days later. That was a dark day

for everyone involved and it still is. We have all decided to get together at least once each year and change our meeting place each year. Time is growing short until the mail runs, so I will close this down.

God Bless and Semper Fi,

Tom Clary

Fort White, FL

(386) 497-1012

Here are my 2011 dues and a bit extra.

Really appreciate the job that you are all doing. I especially enjoy our email exchanges.

Ev Tunget

Freeland, WA

(360) 331-3559

Regarding the two photos of Marine casualties on the two tanks in Hue City...I cannot identify them but they belonged to Lt Jim Georgaklis. Our column headed for Quang Tri and dropped them off just before the 6th NVA Division shut the city down. Jim was last reported living in Beaufort, SC. I last saw him after I left 3rd Tank Bn to report to Task Force Robbie in Cam Lo. He had been wounded... but not seriously. I truly enjoyed the last issue of the Sponson Box. There were lots of names and events to recall.

Semper Fi,

Bruce McLaren, Col USMC (ret)

P.S. I am living at 5377 Loggerhead Place,

Ft Peirce, FL 34949 until March 2011.

Here are my 2011 dues and a little bit extra for the coffers. I trust that 2011 will be kind to us all. By the way, I just received my latest Sponson Box. It's another fantastic job. Thank you!

George Search

Green Valley, AZ

(520) 399-0230

I am making up a CD of pictures I had taken in Vietnam. I will be sending then off to you or I can send them to another e-mail address if you would like.

Gordon Hollister

Eastham, MA

*Editor's Note: Please send them to Bob Peavey, address is in magazine, pg. 4*

*(Continued on page 39)*

# What Members are Doing

## Kent Doetker

I just got off of the telephone with Kent Doetker's wife, Suzie. She said that Kent is in a care facility with a traumatic brain injury that is the result of falling off of an ATV on his cattle ranch. She commented that she reads The Sponson Box to him and he seems to enjoy it immensely. I am recommending anyone

who wants to can reach out to Kent by sending him a "Get Well" card and a few words of encouragement.

Kent Doetker  
c/o The Heritage of Wauneta  
427 W Legion  
Wauneta, NE 69045

## John,

Here is some information on my hobbies and things that keep me busy. The last picture is me on top of Mt. Whitney. I climbed it in 2009 and 2010 at 14,495 ft.



The motorcycle is a Husqvarna TE dual sport. I took up riding motorcycles when I was 60 years old. I am now 64. I first started on a Honda CRF, but I went with the "Husky", so I can ride both in the dirt and on the roads. While I consider myself an amateur, I ride with my son who is an expert. We do most of our riding in the deserts of Southern California. One of our friends, that sometimes rides with us, is a lawyer but he's also a Marine, so we tolerate him!

There is only one thing better than riding a motorcycle in the desert and I will let you figure what that is.

Last year, when getting ready for Mt. Whitney, we climbed

two other mountains over 10,000 ft. I carried a 40-pound pack up Whitney and am still suffering from the hike back down. Guess I am getting too old. The 40 pounds in the pack is not only hard on the knees, but on your back as well.



Not to brag, but on the way to the top of Mt Whitney, I did very well. Of the group of 6 people, two of us arrived on the top first--a 19 year old girl and me. Just before she and I arrived at the overnight cabin on Whitney, I asked her if she wanted to race the last few yards, I was kidding, but she looked at me like I was crazy!

Semper Fi

John M. Hunter  
(310) 530-3123  
1st Tanks B Co 3rd Platoon 65-66  
3rd Tanks B Co 3rd Platoon 66

## John,

Our new address is 10 W Gradwell Ave, Malpe Shade, NJ 08052. Our annual pigroast will be held at this new location on June 25th. We are right up the street from the old house. We will be getting married at the pig roast so make sure that you come again this year!

Semper Fi,

Ron Colucci  
Maple Shade, NJ

*Editor's Note: Ron donated a WW I Trench Knife and a WW II Japanese Imperial Army Bayonet for our fund-raising auction in San Diego!!!*

(Continued on page 38)

## GUESS WHO Photo Contest



### This issue's Guess Who?

This is the first time we have used a before-joining-the-Marine-Corps photo, but he still looks the same! The first correct answer will receive a priceless window sticker. Call Bob Peavey with your guess at 770-365-3711 or e-mail him at repv@comcast.net.

### GUESS WHO Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner of the Guess Who contest is Laura Riensche, wife of Harold Riensche. The photo is of Robert Mark Walkley (known as "Satch" to his friends). He was KIA on Harold's retriever, March 24, 1969. Photo taken by Chris Vargo.



### Back cover feedback

The picture taken by Chris Christy that we ran on the back cover had a response from a member.

Mark Anderson of Bay City OR wrote that the tank was Bravo 13 from 4rd Tank Bn. He said that he was the driver and Steve Baker was the TC. The name of the tank was *Misanthrope*.



# Route 9

## The Road to Khe Sanh

© JAMES P. COAN

### Part II: Tet and Beyond

According to John Prados, author of "Khe Sanh: The Other Side of the Hill," documents recently released by the Vietnamese government state that the People's Army created a new headquarters on 6 December, 1967—the Route 9 Front. Within a few weeks, two regiments of the NVA 325-C Division took up residence in the hills between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh.

The recently re-equipped NVA 304th Division moved down the Ho Chi Minh Trail to the Khe Sanh Front. Supporting the infantry were two artillery regiments and an engineer regiment. This amounted to a substantial threat to Khe Sanh, but not a potential Dien Bien Phu as feared by General Westmoreland and the White House. Nevertheless, heavy fighting lay ahead for the Americans in the coming months.

The 4th Marines moved into Camp Carroll on 20 January, 1968. To welcome them, NVA gunners rocketed Camp Carroll that night. This turned out to be the opening round of a concerted NVA effort to

isolate Camp Carroll and cut Route 9.

On 24 January, a routine artillery resupply "Rough Rider" convoy from Dong Ha to Camp Carroll was ambushed when the trucks were about to turn into the Camp Carroll access road. A reaction force of two tanks from Bravo Company carrying a platoon of Marines from H/2/9, and two Army "Dusters" headed out to the rescue. Harry Christensen was the tank commander of the lead gun tank. Captain Daniel Kent, CO of Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks, rode standing outside Christensen's cupola with his pistol drawn. He was also the reaction force commander.

The relief force halted about 100 yards from the ambush site and opened fire at NVA positions alongside the road. As Capt. Kent dismounted the tank to direct the infantry's fire, a bullet ricocheted off the tank striking Christensen above his right eye. Temporarily blinded by the blood pouring into his eye, he affixed a dressing over the wound and stayed in the fight.



Captain Daniel Kent

Capt. Kent remounted the tank and, together with one of the "dusters," they charged into the ambush zone. Kent was pointing out targets to TC Christensen when two bullets struck the captain in the back, exiting his chest. Just as Christensen grabbed onto Kent and dragged him atop the turret, an RPG struck the tank, further wounding both tankers. Then, a recoilless rifle round exploded on the turret, wounding Christensen further and blowing Capt. Kent off the tank. That round set off a fire inside the turret and the crew bailed out. Christensen recalled that a second RPG then hit his tank and blew him out of the cupola. As he raised his head, he could see Captain Kent's body lying in the road.

A second relief force raced to the scene. By the time they arrived, the NVA had broken contact and retreated, taking their dead and wounded with them. The

Marines had suffered casualties of 8 dead and 44 wounded.

Marine Corps brass were growing alarmed at the NVA's ability to strike almost at will along Route 9 and potentially deny access to Camp Carroll and other Marine bases in the Operation Lancaster area. The 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines was choppered in from Leatherneck Square to beef up security. The battalion's mission was to secure Route 9 from the Khe Gia Bridge east to Cam Lo, a distance of 9 kilometers.

The 3rd Battalion's Mike Company was situated on a little hill just north of Route 9, near the 24 January ambush site. Early on the morning of 27 January, the NVA attacked Mike's Hill. India and Lima Companies joined the fray. In a fierce day-long fight for Mike's Hill, the NVA were driven off and Route 9 was once more open to traffic. That attack cost the NVA 130 KIA. The Marines lost 21 KIA and 44 wounded. The Marines once more controlled the vital MSR, but intelligence sources were reporting that large numbers of NVA had infiltrated into the area.

\* \* \*

Tet, the Vietnamese lunar new year holiday, fell on the last day of January in 1968. A countrywide Tet truce had been announced by the Viet Cong from 27 January until 3 February. The South Vietnamese agreed and offered their own cease fire. But on the night of 29 January, the truce was rudely shattered, first at Da Nang, then on the following day at Hue and Quang Tri City. By 31 January, almost all major cities, provincial capitals, and military installations throughout South Vietnam were being attacked by the NVA and Viet Cong.

Situated astride Route 9 was the Cam Lo District Headquarters compound. Expecting trouble soon, U. S. Army advisory staff at the district headquarters requested Marine reinforcements. All they had available to fend off an attack—which intelligence reports indicated was imminent—were a handful of U.S. Army personnel, a squad of CAC Marines, and a few marginally reliable Vietnamese Popular Force militia. In response to the request, an under strength 1st Platoon

(two squads) from Delta 1/4 was ordered to move inside the compound wire.

As evening fell the night of 1 February, an unlikely assortment of U.S. Marines, soldiers, and Vietnamese PFs found themselves spending the night together inside the compound. A squad of Marines from E/2/9 had unexpectedly wandered into the compound that evening, and they took up positions alongside the D/1/4 Marines. Also, an engineer mine sweep team was situated in the motor pool area across Route 9 from the main compound.

At 0215 on the morning of 2 February, the compound was hit by hundreds of rounds of recoilless rifle, rocket, and 82mm mortars. One recoilless rifle round smashed into the main command bunker, killing the district advisor and two PF soldiers, temporarily knocking out communications. The deputy district advisor, U. S. Army Captain Raymond McMaken, took charge. He found the only radio still functioning and began coordinating artillery fire missions from C-3 and Dong Ha.

The CAC Marines, along with the D/1/4 and E/2/9 Marines, poured a devastating wall of fire into the attacking NVA, stopping them at the wire. In concert with the Marine command post at FSB C-3, Capt. McMaken continued to call in artillery as close as possible to the perimeter. A steady rain of artillery fire from multiple batteries blasted suspected enemy assembly areas, weapons positions, and withdrawal routes.

Growing critically low on ammunition, the beleaguered Marines concocted a plan to have a resupply helicopter from Dong Ha crash land inside the compound. A Marine helicopter crew was on standby and ready to take off when Capt McMaken learned of the plan and put a halt to it. An Army NCO with the advisory team had remembered an old ammo bunker inside the compound. He and a Marine sergeant grabbed armloads of small arms ammunition from the bunker and dashed around the fire swept perimeter, distributing the desperately needed ammunition.

At 0430, the 9th Marines CO ordered a relief force from C-3 to go to the aid of the Cam Lo compound. Two platoons

from F/2/9, two Ontos, and three tanks from the bridge position moved out across previously reconnoitered routes through Cam Lo Village. Seeing the charging Marine armor/infantry force coming towards them, the NVA broke off their attack and headed north across the Cam Lo River, then west into the hills. A second tank/infantry reaction force departed Dong Ha at first light, arriving at Cam Lo in time for some "mopping up." The reaction force Marines were stunned at the devastation they encountered--bunkers and buildings destroyed, dead and dying NVA sappers in the wire.

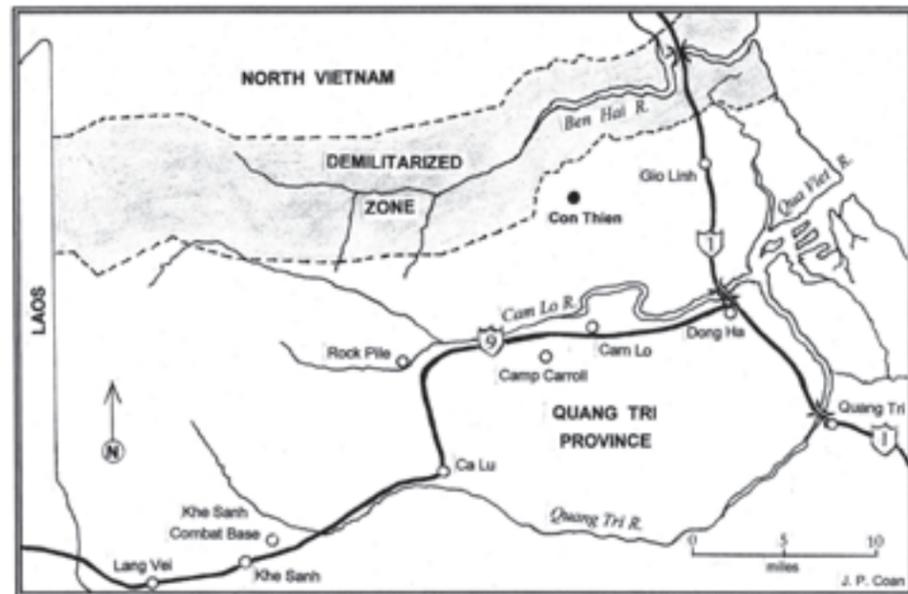
The outnumbered defenders of Cam Lo had triumphed against seemingly impossible odds. Fewer than 50 Marine grunts and combat engineers, plus a handful of Army advisors, had held off and defeated at least two NVA battalions and a sapper company. The official enemy body count was 111, with 34 captured. Capt. McMaken disputed that total, as he had supervised the collection of enemy dead from around the compound and he counted 156 enemy bodies being placed into a mass grave in the motor pool area. McMaken said later: "The Marines just stacked them up on the wires. They were magnificent."

Many of the soldiers and Marines were officially recognized for their valor at Cam Lo that night. Marine Corporal Larry L. Maxam received the Medal of Honor posthumously. Two other Marines received the Navy Cross. Captain McMaken and a half dozen other soldiers, Marines, and Corpsmen received the Silver Star.

\* \* \*

Since mid-January, the Marines at Khe Sanh Combat Base had been preparing for an enemy attack they knew was imminent. Were the Americans risking another Dien Bien Phu? General Westmoreland believed it was worth the risk because Khe Sanh would be a key asset in his planned invasion of Laos to cut the Ho Chi Minh Trail. Also, relinquishing the base at this time would be a major enemy propaganda victory. Thus, all the players were in place for a major battle to commence.

(Continued on page 30)





# BURIAL AT SEA

BY LTCOL GEORGE GOODSON, USMC (RET)

In my 76th year, the events of my life appear to me, from time to time, as a series of vignettes. Some were significant; most were trivial...

War is the seminal event in the life of everyone who has endured it. Though I fought in Korea and the Dominican Republic and was wounded there, Vietnam was my war.

Now 42 years have passed and, thankfully, I rarely think of those days in Cambodia, Laos, and the panhandle of North Vietnam where small teams of Americans and Montangards fought much larger elements of the North Vietnamese Army. Instead I see vignettes: some exotic, some mundane:

- The smell of Nuoc Mam.
- The heat, dust, and humidity.
- The blue exhaust of cycles clogging the streets.
- Elephants moving silently through the tall grass.
- Hard eyes behind the servile smiles of the villagers.
- Standing on a mountain in Laos and hearing a tiger roar.
- A young girl squeezing my hand as my medic delivered her baby.
- The flowing Ao Dais of the young women biking down Tran Hung Dao.
- My two years as Casualty Notification Officer in North Carolina, Virginia, and Maryland.

It was late 1967. I had just returned after 18 months in Vietnam. Casualties were increasing. I moved my family from Indianapolis to Norfolk, rented a house, enrolled my children in their fifth or sixth new school, and bought a second car.

A week later, I put on my uniform and drove 10 miles to Little Creek, Virginia. I hesitated before entering my new office. Appearance is important to career Marines. I was no longer, if ever, a poster Marine. I had returned from my third tour in Vietnam only 30 days before. At 5'9", I now weighed 128 pounds - 37 pounds below my normal weight. My uniforms fit ludicrously, my skin was yellow from malaria medication, and I think I had a twitch or two.

I straightened my shoulders, walked into the office, looked at the nameplate on a staff sergeant's desk and said, "Sergeant Jolly, I'm Lieutenant Colonel Goodson. Here are my orders and my Qualification Jacket."

Sergeant Jolly stood, looked carefully at me, took my orders, stuck out his hand; we shook and he asked, "How long were you there, Colonel?" I replied "18 months this time." Jolly breathed, you must be a slow learner Colonel." I smiled.

Jolly said, "Colonel, I'll show you to your office and bring in the sergeant major. I said, "No, let's just go straight to his office." Jolly nodded, hesitated, and lowered his voice, "Colonel, the Sergeant Major. He's been in this job two years. He's packed pretty tight.

I'm worried about him." I nodded.

Jolly escorted me into the sergeant major's office. "Sergeant Major, this is Colonel Goodson, the new Commanding Officer. The sergeant major stood, extended his hand and said, "Good to see you again, Colonel." I responded, "Hello Walt, how are you?" Jolly looked at me, raised an eyebrow, walked out, and closed the door.

I sat down with the sergeant major. We had the obligatory cup of coffee and talked about mutual acquaintances. Walt's stress was palpable. Finally, I said, "Walt, what's the hell's wrong?" He turned his chair, looked out the window and said, "George, you're going to wish you were back in Nam before you leave here. I've been in the Marine Corps since 1939. I was in the Pacific 36 months, Korea for 14 months, and Vietnam for 12 months. Now I come here to bury these kids. I'm putting my letter in. I can't take it anymore." I said, "OK Walt. If that's what you want, I'll endorse your request for retirement and do what I can to push it through Headquarters Marine Corps."

The sergeant major retired 12 weeks later. He had been a good Marine for 28 years, but he had seen too much death and too much suffering. He was used up.

Over the next 16 months, I made 28 death notifications, conducted 28 military funerals, and made 30 notifications to the families of Marines that were severely wounded or missing in action. Most of the

details of those casualty notifications have now, thankfully, faded from memory. Four, however, remain.

## MY FIRST NOTIFICATION

My third or fourth day in Norfolk, I was notified of the death of a 19-year-old Marine. This notification came by telephone from Headquarters Marine Corps. The information detailed:

- Name, rank, and serial number.
- Name, address, and phone number of next of kin.
- Date of and limited details about the Marine's death.
- Approximate date the body would arrive at the Norfolk Naval Air Station.
- A strong recommendation on whether the casket should be opened or closed.

The boy's family lived over the border in North Carolina, about 60 miles away. I drove there in a Marine Corps staff car. Crossing the state line into North Carolina, I stopped at a small country store/service station/Post Office. I went in to ask directions.

Three people were in the store. A man and woman approached the small Post Office window. The man held a package. The Storeowner walked up and addressed them by name, "Hello, John. Good morning Mrs. Cooper."

I was stunned. My casualty's next-of-kin's name was John Cooper!

I hesitated, then stepped forward and said, "I beg your pardon. Are you Mr. and Mrs. John Cooper of (address.)"

The father looked at me - I was in uniform - and then, shaking, bent at the waist, he vomited. His wife looked horrified at him and then at me. Understanding came into her eyes and she collapsed in slow motion. I think I caught her before she hit the floor.

The owner took a bottle of whiskey out of a drawer and handed it to Mr. Cooper who drank. I answered their questions for a few minutes. Then I drove them home in my staff car. The storeowner locked the store and followed in their truck. We stayed an hour or so until the family began arriving.

I returned the storeowner to his business. He thanked me and said, "Mister, I wouldn't have your job for a million dollars." I shook his hand and said; "Neither would I."

I vaguely remember the drive back to

Norfolk. Violating about five Marine Corps regulations, I drove the staff car straight to my house. I sat with my family while they ate dinner, went into the den, closed the door, and sat there all night, alone.

My Marines steered clear of me for days. I had made my first death notification.

## THE FUNERALS

Weeks passed with more notifications and more funerals. I borrowed Marines from the local Marine Corps Reserve and taught them to conduct a military funeral: how to carry a casket, how to fire the volleys and how to fold the flag.

When I presented the flag to the mother, wife, or father, I always said, "All Marines share in your grief." I had been instructed to say, "On behalf of a grateful nation..." I didn't think the nation was grateful, so I didn't say that.

Sometimes, my emotions got the best of me and I couldn't speak. When that happened, I just handed them the flag and touched a shoulder. They would look at me and nod. Once a mother said to me, "I'm so sorry you have this terrible job." My eyes filled with tears and I leaned over and kissed her.

## ANOTHER NOTIFICATION

Six weeks after my first notification, I had another. This was a young PFC. I drove to his mother's house. As always, I was in uniform and driving a Marine Corps staff car. I parked in front of the house, took a deep breath, and walked towards the house. Suddenly the door flew open, a middle-aged woman rushed out. She looked at me and ran across the yard, screaming "NO! NO! NO! NO!"

I hesitated. Neighbors came out. I ran to her, grabbed her, and whispered stupid things to reassure her. She collapsed. I picked her up and carried her into the house. Eight or nine neighbors followed. Ten or fifteen later, the father came in followed by ambulance personnel. I have no recollection of leaving.

The funeral took place about two weeks later. We went through the drill. The mother never looked at me. The father looked at me once and shook his head sadly.

## ANOTHER NOTIFICATION

One morning, as I walked in the office,

the phone was ringing. Sergeant Jolly held the phone up and said, "You've got another one, Colonel." I nodded, walked into my office, picked up the phone, took notes, thanked the officer making the call, I have no idea why, and hung up. Jolly, who had listened, came in with a special telephone directory that translates telephone numbers into the person's address and place of employment.

The father of this casualty was a longshoreman. He lived a mile from my office. I called the Longshoreman's Union Office and asked for the business manager. He answered the phone, I told him who I was, and asked for the father's schedule.

The business manager asked, "Is it his son?" I said nothing. After a moment, he said, in a low voice, "Tom is at home today." I said, "Don't call him. I'll take care of that." The business manager said, "Aye, Aye Sir," and then explained, "Tom and I were Marines in WWII."

I got in my staff car and drove to the house. I was in uniform. I knocked and a woman in her early forties answered the door. I saw instantly that she was clueless. I asked, "Is Mr. Smith home?" She smiled pleasantly and responded, "Yes, but he's eating breakfast now. Can you come back later?" I said, "I'm sorry. It's important. I need to see him now."

She nodded, stepped back into the beach house and said, "Tom, it's for you."

A moment later, a ruddy man in his late forties, appeared at the door. He looked at me, turned absolutely pale, steadied himself, and said, "Jesus Christ man, he's only been there three weeks!"

Months passed. More notifications and more funerals. Then one day while I was running, Sergeant Jolly stepped outside the building and gave a loud whistle, two fingers in his mouth. He held an imaginary phone to his ear.

Another call from Headquarters Marine Corps. I took notes, said, "Got it." and hung up. I had stopped saying "Thank You" long ago.

Jolly, "Where?"

Me, "Eastern Shore of Maryland. The father is a retired Chief Petty Officer. His brother will accompany the body back from Vietnam."

Jolly shook his head slowly, straightened, and then said, "This time of day, it'll take three hours to get there and back. I'll call the

Naval Air Station and borrow a helicopter. And I'll have Captain Tolliver get one of his men to meet you and drive you to the Chief's home."

He did, and 40 minutes later, I was knocking on the father's door. He opened the door, looked at me, then looked at the Marine standing at parade rest beside the car, and asked, "Which one of my boys was it, Colonel?"

I stayed a couple of hours, gave him all the information, my office and home phone number and told him to call me, anytime.

He called me that evening about 2300 (11:00PM). "I've gone through my boy's papers and found his will. He asked to be buried at sea. Can you make that happen?" I said, "Yes I can, Chief. I can and I will."

My wife who had been listening said, "Can you do that?" I told her, "I have no idea. But I'm going to break my ass trying."

I called Lieutenant General Alpha Bowser, Commanding General, Fleet Marine Force Atlantic, at home about 2330, explained the situation, and asked, "General, can you get me a quick appointment with the Admiral at Atlantic Fleet Headquarters?" General Bowser said, "George, you be there tomorrow at 0900. He will see you."

I was and the Admiral did. He said coldly, "How can the Navy help the Marine Corps, Colonel." I told him the story. He turned to his Chief of Staff and said, "Which is the sharpest destroyer in port?" The Chief of Staff responded with a name.

The Admiral called the ship, "Captain, you're going to do a burial at sea. You'll report to a Marine Lieutenant Colonel Goodson until this mission is completed..."

He hung up, looked at me, and said, "The next time you need a ship, Colonel, call me. You don't have to sic Al Bowser on my ass." I responded, "Aye Aye, Sir" and got the hell out of his office.

I went to the ship and met with the Captain, XO, and the Senior Chief. Sergeant Jolly and I trained the ship's crew for four days. Then Jolly raised a question none of us had thought of. He said, "These government caskets are air tight. How do we keep it from floating?"

All the high priced help including me sat there looking dumb. Then the Senior Chief stood and said, "Come on Jolly. I know a bar where the retired guys from World War II hang out."

They returned a couple of hours later, slightly the worse for wear, and said, "It's simple; we cut four 12" holes in the outer shell of the casket on each side and insert 300 lbs of lead in the foot end of the casket. We can handle that, no sweat."

The day arrived. The ship and the sailors looked razor sharp. General Bowser, the Admiral, a US Senator, and a Navy band were on board. The sealed casket was brought aboard and taken below for modification. The ship got underway to the 12-fathom depth.

The sun was hot, the ocean flat. The casket

was brought aft and placed on a catafalque. The Chaplain spoke. The volleys were fired. The flag was removed, folded, and I gave it to the father. The band played "Eternal Father Strong to Save." The casket was raised slightly at the head and it slid into the sea.

The heavy casket plunged straight down about six feet. The incoming water collided with the air pockets in the outer shell. The casket stopped abruptly, rose straight out of the water about three feet, stopped, and slowly slipped back into the sea. The air bubbles rising from the sinking casket sparkled in the in the sunlight as the casket disappeared from sight forever....

The next morning I called a personal friend, Lieutenant General Oscar Peatross, at Headquarters Marine Corps and said, "General, get me out of here. I can't take this anymore." I was transferred two weeks later.

I was a good Marine but, after 17 years, I had seen too much death and too much suffering. I was used up.

Vacating the house, my family and I drove to the office in a two-car convoy. I said my goodbyes. Sergeant Jolly walked out with me. He waved at my family, looked at me with tears in his eyes, came to attention, saluted, and said, "Well done, Colonel. Well done."

I felt as if I had received the Medal of Honor! ♦



## To the Great Tank Park in the Sky



### William "Dee" Duty

Anchorage resident William "Dee" Duty, 65, died at home Dec. 14, 2010, due to complications from cancer.

A funeral will be at 2 p.m. Saturday at the Anchorage Baptist Temple, with a potluck after the funeral. A public viewing will be from 4 to 7 p.m. today at Anchorage Funeral Home. Dee will be laid to rest at Fort Richardson National Cemetery.

William "Dee" Duty was born Sept. 4, 1945, at Vian, Okla., where he graduated from high school. Dee served his country by entering the U.S. Marine Corps in 1966. He distinguished himself by earning the Vietnam Service Medal, the National Defense Service Medal, the Vietnam Campaign Medal and a Presidential Unit Citation as well as a Purple Heart.

He is survived by his loving wife, Dolores "Kathie" Duty; daughter, Christina Duty; son, Bill Duty and daughter-in-law Sherry; and son, Thomas Duty and daughter-in-law Vicky. Dee was blessed with six grandchildren and one great-grandchild. He has six brothers and sisters, all in Oklahoma.

### Sharon Hancock

John Hancock reported that his wife of 26 years, Sharon, passed away on March 14, 2011 after a very long series of health issues that finally took her life.

### Fritz Firing



Fritz Firing Sr. 77, died at his home in Summerville, on April 2nd.

He was a graduate of Virginia Military Institute class of 1956. A proud member of the Marine Corps for 13 years, he served his country in Vietnam as an Officer in the 3rd Marine Division. He retired after 30 years of civil service and went to work as a security guard for USA Associates at CSU and Charleston Public Waterworks..

He is survived by his wife of 51 years, Mary Helen of Summerville, daughter Susan and husband Steven Strohm, son Eric and wife Jennifer, and son Fritz Jr; grand children, Bryan Strohm, Michael Strohm, and John Strohm; sister Sonja Purkey of Virginia Beach, Virginia.

A memorial service for immediate family and friends will be held in the chapel at Tri-County Cremation Center, 1100 Dorchester Rd., Summerville, SC on Saturday April 30th at 11:00 am. Donations in his name may be sent to the Marine Corps Toys For Tots or the Hospice Of Charleston.

Fritz would like to be remembered by these two words:

**"SEMPER FIDELIS"**

### Major H. G. Duncan



Major H. G. "Gene" Duncan-one of the last truly colorful Marine veterans, author of a series of self-published books that took hilarious, if often irreverent, pokes at the Corps he loved, a Korean War veteran and twice wounded veteran of two tours in Vietnam, consummate and gifted teller of sea stories, died Feb. 14, 2011, in Fort Wayne, Indiana. He was 79.

"Dunk," as he was called, was a lot of things, but politically correct was definitely not one of them. That is no doubt because he saw himself as part of the "old Corps." Duncan enlisted in 1950 at the age of 18. He learned from the old salts of World War II and served as a section leader for 81 mm mortars in 1st Battalion, 5th Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division in Korea. He took his walking papers after his initial tour as a staff sergeant and joined the Marine Corps Reserve. But, by then, the staccato drum roll of being a Marine played totally on his soul. He was a gunnery sergeant when he shipped over as a regular in 1961 and was augmented as a second lieutenant. He liked being a "Mustang" officer. He was a Marine who continued the persona of the Old Corps with professionalism, a capacity to imbibe and enjoy potent amber-colored liquid, occasionally offering colorfully coarse language and always passing along, as Marines are prone to do, tales and important lessons of men he served with in garrison and in battle.

As tours of duty passed, he learned more than what his military occupational specialty required of him. He was an experienced administrative clerk, Russian linguist and 81 MM mortar section leader. His officer assignments were with tanks, comms, naval gunfire, cryptology and ordnance. He held eight command billets for a total command time of more than 11 years. In between tours, he earned a Bachelor of Arts from Florida State University

*(Continued on page 43)*

## Membership Information Changes for 2011 – 2<sup>nd</sup> Sponson Box

**1st Sgt Jimmy J Balkcom,**  
**USMC (ret)**  
(385) 752-8336

**Ron Colucci**  
10 West Gradwell Ave  
Maple Shade, NJ 08052

**Norman W Crowe**  
363 Canterbury Rd  
Midwest City, OK 73130  
Phone: (769) 769-9990

**Douglas Hamilton**  
MOS: 1811

**David Scanlon**  
Recruited by Charles Musser

**Linda Holly**  
1921 – 88th Street  
Kenosha, WI 53143-6453

**Wes "Tiny" Kilgore**  
7202 Farmington Farms Drive  
Wilmington, NC 28411  
(774) 270-0777

**Timothy A Nichols**  
Cell Phone: (760) 807-3926  
MOS: 2847  
DOB: 06/30/47  
No spouse

**Todd Phillips**  
(740) 296-8184

**Bill Wright**  
PO Box 360944  
Melbourne, FL 32936  
Cell: (321) 986-7569

**LOST MEMBERS**  
(bad mailing addresses):

**Frank Demes**  
1080 Bal Harbor Blvd (Unit B)  
Punta Gorda, FL 33950-6551

**Norm Thompson, Jr**  
802 S Parsons Ave  
Seffner, FL 33584-4520

*If anyone has correct information  
please let us know.*

# Tanks & Medals of Valor

This is a new feature that will provide the citation for medals of valor that involved tanks – both tankers and or grunts where tanks are mentioned. If you were present during any of the actions let us know and add to the story for us.

## Michael L. Boatman

Home of Record:  
Lakewood, Colorado

### Awards and Citations

**Silver Star** The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Private First Class Michael L. Boatman (MCSN: 2373653), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Radio Operator with Company G, Second Battalion, Seventh Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 7 May 1968, during Operation ALLEN BROOK in Quang Nam

Province, Private First Class Boatman's unit was assigned to assist a friendly platoon, which had become heavily engaged with a large enemy force. En route to the friendly unit, the Marines and their supporting tanks came under a heavy volume of fire from a well entrenched North Vietnamese Army force. In the ensuing engagement, several men were wounded, including a tank commander manning his .50 caliber machine gun and another Marine who employed the weapon. Realizing the seriousness of the situation, Private First Class Boatman unhesitatingly exposed himself to the enemy fire and, after fearlessly mounting the vehicle, commenced directing .50 caliber machine gun fire upon the enemy. Disregarding the intense hostile fire impacting around him, he continued to deliver accurate suppressive fire, silencing several hostile emplacements, until his ammunition was depleted. Dismounting from the tank, he repeatedly maneuvered across the fire-swept terrain while assisting in the evacuation of the wounded. His superb leadership and aggressive fighting spirit were an inspiration to all who served with him and contributed immeasurably to the accomplishment of his unit's mission. By his courage, bold initiative and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of extreme personal danger, Private First Class Boatman upheld the highest traditions of the United States Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■ Action Date: 7-May-68 ■ Service: Marine Corps ■ Rank: Private First Class Company: Company G ■ Battalion: 2d Battalion Regiment: 7th Marines ■ Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF



## Gordon B. Matthews

Date of death: February 7, 1968  
Home of record: Bloomfield, Iowa

### Awards and Citations

**Silver Star** The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to First Lieutenant Gordon B. Matthews (MCSN: 0-97328), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action against the enemy while serving as Commanding Officer, Company B, First Battalion, First Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), in the Republic of Vietnam on 7 February 1968. During Operation HUE CITY, Lieutenant Matthews' unit was

assigned the mission of seizing a building in Hue. The position was defended by a numerically superior enemy force utilizing small-arms and automatic weapons fire from fortified and entrenched positions in and around the building. Observing that his unit's fire was ineffective against the fortified position, Lieutenant Matthews directed tanks to the scene and ordered the wall breached with explosives. He directed the fire of the supporting tanks on numerous enemy positions despite the intense enemy fire. Climbing to the top of the wall and firing his weapon, he shouted words of encouragement to his men and led a frontal assault on the enemy position. Disregarding the heavy enemy fire, he led his men forward until he was mortally wounded. By his superb fighting ability, bold initiative and loyal devotion to duty, Lieutenant Matthews reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country. ■ Action Date: February 7, 1968 ■ Service: Marine Corps ■ Rank: First Lieutenant Company: Company B ■ Battalion: 1st Battalion Regiment: 1st Marines ■ Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF



# M3 Grease Gun Stories

Two issues ago, we published a request for your Grease Gun stories and opinions both good and bad. Unfortunately the author never wrote the story that was promised, so we are asking you to resubmit your stories to Bob Peavey and we will publish them. The following are two submissions that we are aware of. Please send us yours.

## The M3 & Me

BY BOB PEAVEY

The first time I gazed upon an M3A1 sub-machinegun was in Tank School in December of 1966. I was curious as to why they were showing us a Chi-Com weapon, after all, it was crude and cheap looking. I knew, or thought I did, that the United States only turns out the finest of machined weapons like the M1, BAR, Thompson, M14, M16, etc., what's more, sticking a finger into the hole of the bolt to cock it had Chi-Com written all over it. You can imagine my surprise to learn it was American made.



My relationship with the Grease Gun went steadily downhill the more familiar I became with it. My opinion is that the M3A1 has to go down as the most unsafe weapon ever issued to U.S. troops. The weapon's "safety" was a hinged cover over the action, when closed it was "safe" (unless you dropped the weapon and the cover sprang open). Instead of a finger safety like other weapons, one had to reach way over the top of the gun, usually with the left hand, to pull up the hinged cover... not the fastest way of readying a weapon for immediate use.

My shooting experience with this extraordinary example of American gun-design gone cheap started on the range while in Tank School at Camp Pendleton. The guy next to me scared everyone on the line when his weapon discharged early. His finger had slipped out of the cocking hole, which was equivalent to that of a bowling ball.

He had pulled the bolt back with the one finger hole and just missed catching the sear that would hold the bolt back, and in so doing, the bolt flew home picking up a cartridge along the way. It was here that the gun's "elegant" simplicity really surfaced . . . it had a fixed firing pin, meaning the operator has no control over the firing pin! When the bolt went home, the weapon fired. The moving mass of steel that was the bolt did not help with accuracy; consequently the first round would often be low.

I had an occurrence with this dangerous design feature on an

operation north of Con Thien. I kept the Grease Gun on top of the turret more for the loader's use than mine for the M3A1 was difficult to use from the TC's position due to the length of the 30 round magazine sticking out of the bottom of the weapon. It



was there for loader to take on any last minute surprises on his side of the tank... like little people jumping up with RPGs. And for that reason, the "safety" was off, or "open" when we thought danger seemed imminent which, by the way, made for a great dust collector. During the operation the tank hit a low wall hidden by tall grass, probably a dried up paddie dyke, which sent the M3 sliding down the front of the turret and onto the fender where it promptly discharged a round. We were lucky that the driver wasn't hit! After retrieving the weapon, I told the loader to keep the cover closed or put it back inside the turret. I relied on an M14 I had picked up on an earlier op. While it wasn't the quickest thing to draw on a Gook, it did have a safety and a shorter magazine. Was I wrong to allow the cover to remain open – absolutely. But speed seemed to be the main issue in this case.

After the operation I became curious about the Grease Gun and who could have produced such a crude and potentially dangerous weapon. I looked all over the piece for the manufacturer's mark but could not find it... was the manufacturer that embarrassed to put his name on it? It took several inquiries but my persistence finally paid off. To my surprise the manufacturer's name was on the weapon but in the most hidden of places . . . which figured

*(Continued on page 43)*

BY CHRIS VARGO

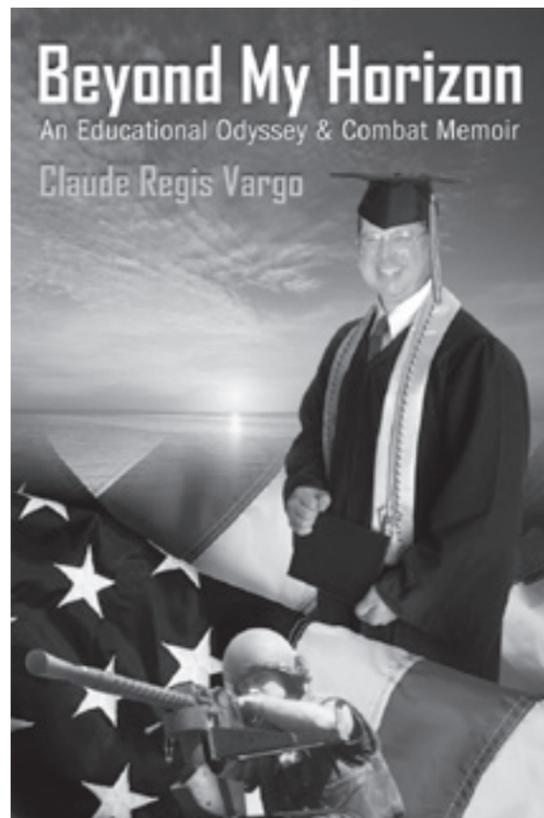
PART II

In January 1968, Khe Sanh was an unheard-of outpost, with an airfield defended by a couple of thousand Marines of the 26th Regiment. Shortly after I arrived there, my brother, Mark, the seminarian, mailed me a copy of Bernard Fall's Hell in a Very Small Place. Ironically, included with it was a note asking me if I knew where Khe Sanh was. In his note he told me that Jeanne Dixon, a noted prophetess and author of A Gift of Prophecy, had correctly foretold and warned then President Kennedy of his impending assassination. Mark further wrote that Ms. Dixon had also predicted that U.S. Marines would be overrun at Khe Sanh... exactly where I was standing. In Fall's book he gave a chronology of how the French had been driven out of Viet Nam after they had been slaughtered and almost annihilated at the battle of Dien Bien Phu. There was such similarity between the enemy garrisons at Dien Bien Phu and Khe Sanh, they were almost indistinguishable. The same General, Nguyen Van Giap, was also in charge of Viet Nam's battle plan for Khe Sanh, and now a lot wiser on how to defeat his second world-class superpower.

I don't think I had even finished reading the first chapter before a friend of mine named Dale Sandifer stuck his nose into the back cover and immediately ascertained these similarities. He was an incessant reader who quickly wanted me to tear the book in half so he could read it at the same time so we could exchange each other's halves later. Before we could do that, however, the scuttlebutt about my book had spread so quickly that, in no time, I was sent to the CP bunker and was standing tall in front of "the Man," who asked if he could borrow the book. Who was I, a private, to say no?



Vargo and Dale Sandifer



The battle for the hills surrounding Khe Sanh started before the Tet Offensive or my second set of back-to-back offensive siege of Hue City and defensive siege at hand. The hills surrounding Khe Sanh were named 1015, 950, 861, 881 North, 881 South, and 64, based on their corresponding elevation in meters. They were called hills but were really jagged mountain peaks with intermittent jungles surrounding them.

In the hills surrounding the "plateau of death," the mist and the clouds hung around the tops like doughnuts on sticks. We only had five tanks at Khe Sanh, three in the main compound and two on Hill 64, the "Rock Quarry," which was where I would be stationed soon. The lack of tanks had occurred because the NVA had "eliminated" the mountain road bridges and then methodically surrounded us with a couple divisions of troops and a couple more divisions (approximately four units of 11,000 men each against our 4,000 total troops) in reserve. The siege was on, and we had to work with what we had.

I remember discussing the battle tactics with a couple of my buddies, Bob Dougherty and Joe Harrigan, not long after and asking, "If you were the North Vietnamese general in charge, where would you attack next?"

They both replied, "Well, the lowest hill, surely not the highest." We all felt sick as I replied, "Yep, that's what I figured as well."

(Continued on page 34)

# Tankers Association History Project

BY PETE RITCH

As part of the USMCVTA Oral History Project, the following is a description of some of the actions that I experienced during my tour of duty (October 1968 to October 1969) in Vietnam.

The methodology utilized to develop these accounts was as follows: Researched 3rd Tank Battalion Command Chronologies (CC) from January to October 1969; utilized the enhanced maps of our area of operation and edits / recollections from some of my platoon members. In the CCs, there were few references to operations. Tank references were usually stated as "road sweep in support of Foxtrot Company 2/3" or "in support of a land clearance with Kilo Company, 3rd Battalion, 3rd Marines". Tank platoons seldom operated at full strength (i.e., five M48A3 tanks). During my ten months with Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks, we operated as two or three tank units assigned to support infantry operations in Northern I Corps that went from Ocean View in the east to Camp Vandergrift in the west, and from Gio Linh in the north to mountains south of Rt. 9 that were near the village of Cam Lo. On one specific land clearing operation, we had two U.S. Army armored personnel carriers (APC) under Marine command assigned to us.

I have listed the exact CC notations that are followed by "The rest of the story", which are my recollections of the events.

Background: I arrived at Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division Headquarters at Vinh Dai (the Rock Crusher) on or about 1 January 1969 after having spent 90 days as an infantry platoon commander. I was very grateful for my grunt experience but was even more grateful to have five M48A3's and a platoon of "salty" tankers to work with.

My first operation was located in the

mountains approximately five miles south of the village of Cam Lo. Three Bravo Co, 3rd Platoon tanks (B-33, B-34 & B-35) and an infantry platoon from Foxtrot Co., 2/3, provided a daily road-sweep from a base camp in the mountains to Rt. 9 that was near Cam Lo. The dirt road heading south from the intersection of Rt. 9 at Cam Lo rose swiftly into the mountains and it was full of switch backs and sheer cliffs. On the mountain top, the road leveled out and ran past a large banana plantation. The plantation was run by French priests, and on the south end of the plantation was a small village. Our base camp was approximately one mile past the village. The village was inhabited by some 300 old men, women and children. We never saw a male over the age of 8 or 9 in that village.

After the completion of the road sweep to Rt. 9, we'd return to our mountain base camp and run search and destroy patrols. Our patrols were limited to an area south and east of the base camp. An Army of the Republic of Viet Nam (ARVN) company ran patrols to the north and west of our location. Across from our base camp were a dirt air strip and an Army Special Forces encampment.

1. Command Chronology notation: 13 January 1969 - B Co. road sweep found one mine, approx. 12 inches in diameter, 4 inches high with an approx. weight of 30 lbs. at 101532. Blown in place.

The rest of the story - We had been running a daily road sweep from the mountain highlands down the winding dirt road to the intersection of Rt. 9, near Cam Lo, for approximately two weeks. Each morning children would line the road and ask for food. We usually tossed them something to eat and I thought that we had a good relationship with the villagers. On the morning of January 13th, as we began the

road sweep there were no children in sight -- not along the road, not in the village and not in the fields of the nearby banana plantation. Less than a half mile into the sweep, with the village to our left, the sweep crew found a land mine in the road. We blew it in place.

I felt that we were doing the villagers a service by clearing their road, which allowed them to go to the market at Cam Lo and also to reach Rt. 9 east to be able to travel to Dong Ha and to Quang Tri. The fact that there were no kids along the side of the road and no villagers in sight that morning, left me no doubt that the villagers knew that the road had been mined. I climbed down from my TC hatch, walked into the nearest hut and found an old man and woman with a small child. I yelled at them asking why they had not warned us about the mine and of course got no response. I waved my .45 in the air and got nothing but blank stares. I climbed back aboard B-33 and we completed the sweep.

2. Command Chronology notation: 14 January 1969 - B33, B34, B35 fired at a total of 7 NVA in a tree line at coordinates 114508. Results were 5 NVA KIA's and 2 probable's.

The rest of the story: B-33, B-34 and B-35 had been running daily road sweeps and daylight patrols with a Marine infantry platoon on a plateau that was approximately five (5) miles southwest of the intersection of Rt. 9, near Cam Lo. Near our base camp was a large banana plantation and small village of approximately 200 Vietnamese. There was a dirt airstrip on one side on our base camp under the control of an Army Special Forces Team. Our daily search and destroy patrols were limited to grids directly south and west of our base camp. An ARVN unit was responsible for day light patrols to our north

(Continued on page 40)

# "EOD PERSONNEL EQUIVALENTS"

(A Special Tribute to Vietnam Marine Platoon Tank Mechanics)

BY ROBERT SKEELS

At the outset, I would like to say that, since I kept a "tanker's daily diary" during my Vietnam tour with first platoon, bravo company, third tank battalion, third Marine division during 1969, and given its ample content, I should have been able to extract a tanker story that I thought might be of interest to the vast five hundred person membership of the USMCVTA. I have identified four incidents or situations (plus the above topic) that involved my tank platoon during 1969 and hopefully those recollections will, in turn, help you all recall some events or short stories yourself to post for the benefit of the rest of us.

I agree with John Wear when he asks us all to participate with personal stories as he and the founders have put together such a great organization for all of us and also future generations to enjoy in both the USMCVTA.ORG and its sister historical foundation, the USMCVTHE.ORG. It's incumbent on the rest of us to at least share one story. For example, it could be a worst moment, a humorous incident, or a story to honor a fellow Marine or even your favorite R&R bath-house, if you spent more than one tour. I think that most of the membership reads the "Sponson Box" quarterly issues from cover to cover, so let's keep this great publication going strong.

I just mailed all my Vietnam photos to Bob Peavey to share with the historical foundation as they were doing me no good parked at my home. They include snaps of places such as: the Marketplace, Con Thien, C2 outpost, C3 Bridge, the Outpost of Gio Linh, "B" company's HQ in Cam Lo, the Ocean view outpost and the Seabee's hill at Vinh Dai, my first platoon on a sweep patrol NW of Con Thien, and two PT46 NVA tanks with burnt out hulls on the DMZ. I bet all of you have some great photos of your Vietnam tour that you could tie to a story

for the next issue. I don't know about you, but this forum where we can all share stories with each other through the Sponson Box is pretty good therapy, as we all have periodic flashbacks; more importantly, it's a way of both honoring and keeping alive the memory of those brother Marines that didn't make it.

I am starting to do more volunteer work at the very active, local VFW Post#3272 in Avon, CT that I joined two years ago. I'm invariably asked by a post member "when were you in Vietnam?" and I say back to them, probably "last night." We will probably never totally erase all those images from our tours of duty that reinforce the fact that war is hell, but then, maybe we should just embrace it all as a way of continuing to honoring all that served over there in that unpopular war.

I am in total awe of those Marine armor and Marine infantry units that served before I did in Vietnam, that is, during the 1966 to the mid-1968 time period. I have read both Jim Coan's book "Con Thien: The Hill of Angels" and Bob Peavey's book, "Praying for Slack" and a few more that related to the big enemy contact battles during that time as in Hue City, Con Thien, Cam Lo, Dai Do and those near Da Nang etc. Due to those units great successes, the infiltration of NVA to South Vietnam was forced to switch to the Laotian route ( Ho Chi Minh trail ) from that of infiltrating into the South through the DMZ and saved us the job of making them pay heavily a second time.

I transitioned to my 1802 MOS job and to the 1st Platoon, Bravo company, Third Tanks on January 3, 1969 with a bad case of "jungle rot" and a non-functioning, worn out, and stiff sphincter muscle from serving my three months with the Marine infantry leading a top notch rifle platoon. No amount of stateside Marine training could prepare

you for jungle warfare in Vietnam, which included jungle ambush situations, leeches on your private parts (not a great photo to send to your girlfriend), tigers harassing your LP's at night at FSB Alpine & Argonne, big hungry night-active rats that were after the left-over c-rat food on your teeth as you slept in your poncho liner, huge black and white bamboo spiders, getting your jungle rot lanced nightly by the corpsman to keep infection at bay, heat exhaustion and 10 inch poisonous red centipedes. In short, I had just finished three months of temporary active duty in the jungle just South of the DMZ setting up some of those mountain-top fire support bases namely, FSB Alpine, FSB Argonne and FSB Russell (Go to this great website, lzrussell.org, with volume up, if you want to read about my old infantry unit getting overrun by sappers on the night of Feb 25, 1969 on FSB Russell through the voices of 200 Marines that were on the hill that night). I was highly honored to have served alongside the grunt Marines of 3rd Platoon, Echo Company, 2nd Bn, Fourth Marines just prior to reporting to tanks. Amazingly, through the power of the internet, I have been able to reconnect with many members of my infantry platoon and infantry company in the last eight years.

Bob Peavey, VP of the USMCVTA and editor of the Sponson Box, gave a high tribute to the Marine infantry and the situation the grunts endured in the jungle environment in Vietnam in his respectful review in this last issue of the Sponson Box of the 2010 best-selling fictional novel "Matterhorn" by Karl Marlantes, who himself was a highly decorated Marine infantry platoon commander during his tour in 1969 and served in our area of operation in Northern I Corps. If you look

*(Continued on page 32)*

# WHY REUNIONS?

BY BOB VAXTER

For a long time I always wondered why veterans go to reunions. I used to think that it was to sit around with other veterans and drink adult beverages and tell sea stories.

As I have gotten a little older and hopefully a little smarter. There is no question on the former but a lot of controversy on the latter. After having attended several reunions, Third Marine Division, USMCVTA, I think I finally know the reason why veterans attend reunions.

We attend reunions to once again to bathe in the camaraderie that we knew when we served with these men in our youth. It is once again to feel that bond that we felt such a long time ago. It is not to feel young; it is to feel that bond again. The feeling of closeness, of knowing that your life depended on someone else and that their life depended on you.

So we go to our reunions, sit with our brothers in arms telling stories of long ago. It matters not whether the stories are true or simply exaggerations. It is the sitting, and the telling that is important. For these are men who were there with us. Who carry our memory with them, and we carry their memory with us.

We sit with our brothers and remember those who are no longer with us. We wax nostalgic for their presence in our memories. We tell tales of them. We speak of them with hushed voices. We speak of them with laughter and pride because we knew them.

For the past couple of years I have been attempting to locate the men I served with in the Third Platoon Charlie Company Third Tanks Third Marine Division. I have been able to locate many of them and they now attend our reunions.

With sadness I have learned that many of them have transferred to the tank park in the sky. So I raise my glass in a toast to those that have gone before. Semper Fidelis my brothers. As long as our memory exists you exist along with us.

Jimmy Jaynes	1968
Tom Freeman	1996
Donald Bell	1996
Neil Trudeau	2004
John Rodriguez	2009
Kurt Foster	2010

◆

**PLEASE NOTE: If you are planning to attend our 2011 San Diego reunion, in any capacity, you still need to fill out the Reunion Registration form and send the completed form to the mailing address indicated. If you plan to partake in only one or two of the events, we need your name on the registry roles ahead of time. For example, all events are ticketed including the barbeque and farewell dinner on Saturday night. We need to know ahead of time who is attending an event for headcount purposes. Non-attendees are only welcome to the Slopchute with an attendee present; we will ask a non-attendee for a \$10 donation be made to the Slopchute fund for each day they show up in the Slopchute. If you have a problem or question, please call John Wear at 215-794-9052 to discuss your special needs and/or consideration.**

**The VT Historical Foundation will be holding oral history interviews during the reunion. If you wish to share your "story" please contact Jim Raasch at 319-551-1675 or e-mail him at: jbraasch@ia.net to set up an appointment during the reunion.**

## San Diego is in just two months!

We are getting ready to hold our 6th Biennial Reunion in just a matter of weeks! It will be the largest reunion to date and is a convenient location for more of our members than any reunion we've previously held. We are expecting over 300 attendees. This is one not to miss.

San Diego has an unlimited number of sites and attractions and we think you might want to add a few days onto your stay. You can still get the special hotel rate when you add a few days to either side of the reunion date. If you are booking on line and happen to experience trouble booking an early room, please contact the hotel via telephone since there may be another convention at the hotel and the spare rooms may be held for them.

Got grand kids? Bring them with you to see Legoland, or the 27,000 sq.ft. Model Railroad Museum, or visit the world famous San Diego Zoo & Wild Animal Park, or SeaWorld, or tour the aircraft carrier USS Midway, or for a once in a lifetime opportunity take them on a ½ day sport fishing trip they will never forget.

## We need Auction Items!

We are looking for auction items. We need Marine or Vietnam-era items you would like to donate for our auction. The auction is our largest grossing revenue generator and is only held once every two years. We have sold everything from tank ballistic computers to 90mm HEAT and canister rounds- empty of course! We need you to search your attic and send us any gems you can find. This year for the first time there will be a few jewelry items included for the ladies! Any donated items that you can't carry can be shipped to:

1st Sgt. Rick Lewis, USMC Ret.  
5663 Balboa Ave. #366  
San Diego, CA 92111  
858-297-8909

Make certain you label the outside of the box: FOR AUCTION

If any of you who are from Southern California and are planning to be with us in San Diego but who are either not going to stay at the reunion hotel or possibly not partake of some of the other reunion activities, we need for you to please be sure to fill out the reunion registration paperwork and send it in with what you intend to do. We need for every attendee who is going to be with us to tell us so. Perhaps you only want to attend the Farewell Dinner or the Thursday evening BBQ. There are costs involved with these activities that need to be covered ahead of time.

Also, if you intend to stay at the reunion hotel, my suggestion is that you book your room directly with the hotel. Unfortunately at the 2009 Charleston reunion one or two members elected to combine their airfare and their hotel booking with one of the Internet travel companies and they did not get our special reunion hotel room rate. There is nothing we can do if you do not follow the proper procedure and book your room yourself with the hotel.

Just so you know, the first day (August 17) is a "Travel to The Reunion" date and the last date (August 21) is the "Return Home Date" so no major activities will be planned for those two "down" days. If you would like to make personal plans for those days, you can contact the hotel's concierge service (1-800-772-8527) and they will be more than happy to help you with your activity plans.

One word of caution: Travel to Mexico is not recommended. If you want to relive any of your past visits to "TJ"... this is NOT the time to go. Drug gang murders are one of the many deterrents that keep casual visitors on our side of the US - Mexico border.

### ELECTION OF USMC VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

To run for a position on the Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, you will need to submit your name and the position you seek. Elections will be held during the business meeting of the reunion in San Diego, California. Positions available are: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and six director chairs. You must be a current member in good standing to run for office. Only nominations submitted

in writing by July 1, 2011 will be considered at the meeting. Nominations cannot be submitted directly from the floor. All who want to be considered for election must submit their request in writing to:

SgtMaj William Carroll, USMC (ret)  
2396 Heath Ave North  
Oakdale, MN 55128  
651-773-8279

All submissions must arrive no later than July 01, 2011.

## THINGS TO DO IN SAN DIEGO

### The USMC VTA San Diego Reunion Activity Suggestions

The USMC VTA does not endorse nor is it being underwritten by any of these San Diego attraction and tours. We simply are showing a small sampling of the vast array of activities that you could avail yourself and your families. If you want to make arrangements then we suggest that you contact these activities directly or call the Town & Country hotel concierge service at 1-800-772-8527.

#### SEA WORLD SAN DIEGO

##### Address:

500 Sea World Avenue  
San Diego, CA 92109

Phone: 1-800-257-4268

Website: <http://www.worldsofdiscovery.com>

##### Hours of Operation:

Saturday Hours

9:00 AM to 11:00 PM

##### Single Day Admission:

\$69 - Guests age 10+ years

\$59 = Guests ages 3 - 9 years

Free = 2 years and under

#### SAN DIEGO ZOO

##### Address:

2920 Zoo Drive  
San Diego, CA 92112-0551

Phone: (619) 231-1515

Website: <http://www.sandiegozoo.org>

##### Hours of Operation:

(Open every day of the year, including all holidays)

Current Hours/Nighttime Zoo (through September 6):

9:00 AM to 9:00 PM

##### Single Day Admission:

\$37 = Guests ages 12+ years

\$27 = Guests ages 3 - 11 years

Free = 2 years and under

#### SAN DIEGO ZOO SAFARI PARK

##### Address:

15500 San Pasqual Valley Road  
Escondido, CA 92027-7017.

Phone: (760) 747-8702.

Website: <http://www.sandiegozoo.org>

Note: The distance between the San Diego Zoo and the Wild Animal Park is 35 miles. Please allow 45 minutes to 1 hour travel time.

##### Hours of Operation:

Open every day of the year, including all holidays.

Current Hours/African Summer Festival (through August 21): 9 a.m.-8 p.m.

##### Single Day Admission:

\$37 = Guests ages 12+ years

\$27 = Guests ages 3 - 11 years

Free = 2 years and under

Multiple Parks - Multiple Days passes available.

USS Midway Aircraft Carrier & Museum

#### THE USS MIDWAY AIRCRAFT CARRIER MUSEUM

##### Address:

910 N Harbor Drive  
San Diego, CA 92101

Phone: (619) 544-9600

Website: <http://www.midawy.org>

##### Hours of Operation:

The USS Midway Museum is open from 10:00 AM to 5:00 PM daily. Last admission is at 4 p.m.

##### General Admission:

\$18 Adults

\$15 Seniors (62+) and students (with valid ID)

\$10 Retired military (with valid ID)

\$10 Youth (Ages 6-17 years)

##### Complimentary Admission

Children 5 years or younger

Active-duty military personnel (including Reservists) with valid ID (Daytime admission only)

#### LEGOLAND CALIFORNIA

LEGOLAND California® is located at One LEGOLAND Drive, just off Interstate 5, in the seaside village of Carlsbad, 30 minutes north of San Diego and one hour south of Anaheim.

Phone: (760) 918-LEGO

Website: <http://www.legoland.com>

##### Hours of Operation:

10:00 AM to 7:00 PM

##### Admission:

Legoland - Water Park - Sea Life (All 3 included)

\$77 = 3 - 12 years

\$87 = 13 - 59 years

\$77 = Seniors

Free = 1 -2 years

##### Legoland Only

\$57 = 3 - 12 years

\$67 = 13 - 59 years

\$57 = Seniors

Free = 1 -2 years

##### Sea Life Aquarium Only

\$12 = 3 - 12 years

\$19 = 13 - 59 years

\$16 = Seniors

Free = 1 -2 years

#### SAN DIEGO MODEL RAILROAD MUSEUM

##### Address:

1649 El Prado  
San Diego, CA 92101

Phone: (619) 969-0199

Website: <http://www.sdmrm.org>

##### Hours of Operation:

Saturday - Sunday 11:00 AM to 5:00 PM  
Admission:

Adults - \$7.00

Seniors (65+) - \$6.00

Students (with ID) - \$3.00

Active Military (with ID) - \$2.50

Children under 15 - FREE when accompanied by an adult

#### MARITIME MUSEUM OF SAN DIEGO

##### Address:

1492 North Harbor Drive  
San Diego, CA 92101

Phone: (619) 234-9153

Website: <http://www.sdmaritime.org>

##### Hours of Operation:

Open every day of the year

9:00 AM to 8:00 PM

##### General Admission:

\$7 - Child

\$10 - Active Duty Militar'

\$10 - Senior

\$12 - Adult

General admission includes admission to our fleet of historic ships and the exhibits on board.

Children 5 and under are free at the Maritime Museum, although a Bay Cruise requires a paid upgrade of \$3.00. Call for details.

#### **SAN DIEGO HARBOR CRUISES**

##### **Address:**

1066 N Harbor Drive  
San Diego, CA 92101

**Phone:** (619) 725-8888

**Website:** <http://www.hornblower.com>

##### **North or South Bay**

One Hour Cruise - Start 10:00 AM up to 5:30 PM  
Adult: \$20

Senior/Military: \$18

Children (4-12): \$10

Kids (under 4): FREE

##### **Both Bays**

Two Hour Cruise - Start 10:00 AM up to 4:15 PM  
Adult: \$25

Senior/Military: \$23

Children (4-12): \$12.50

Kids (under 4): FREE

#### **BREWERY TOURS OF SAN DIEGO**

**Phone Number:** 619-961-7999

**Neighborhood:** Ocean Beach

With over 30 craft breweries in San Diego County, a beer enthusiast culture is on the rise. San Diego is the home to some of the World's top breweries. Brewery Tours of San Diego provides a fun, safe, inexpensive way to visit San Diego's breweries, and taste many of their award winning beers.

There are several different tour options available depending on the day of the week, and the size of the group. The Public Tours are set routes that join small groups together to showcase some of San Diego's award winning breweries. These daily tours are offered in the day or evening, and visit 2 or 3 breweries. The Private Tours are also available 7 days a week. Private Tours are available for groups of 2 to 200 people. These tours are customized to fit the needs of the group. Both the Public and Private tours include round-trip transportation, knowledgeable and engaging Brewery Tours of San Diego host services, a guided tour, a souvenir glass, beer tasting at each brewery, and several of the tours include lunch or dinner.

Enjoy a day sampling a variety of award winning beers made in "America's Finest City". For reservations and information please visit [www.BreweryToursofSanDiego.com](http://www.BreweryToursofSanDiego.com) or call 619-961-7999.

#### **A BALLOON ADVENTURE & BIPLANE BY CALIFORNIA DREAMING**

##### **Address:**

33133 Vista del Monte Road  
Temecula, CA 92591

**Phone Number:** 800-373-3359

**Neighborhood:** Carlsbad

Hot Air Balloon Rides or Biplane Rides are great for any event whether it's on your "Bucket List" or to celebrate an Anniversary, Birthday, Family Fun, or even the reason of "Just Because". California Dreamin' is here to make your Hot Air Balloon or Biplane Ride an experience you'll never forget. Let our pilots navigate you to an unforgettable experience in man's oldest form of flight or travel on our 1928 Travel-Air Biplane. It's up to you to call today for an experience of a lifetime...

With California Dreamin' Hot Air Balloon Rides, you'll escape from the ordinary to fly like a bird and sail among the clouds! There's simply nothing better than a Hot Air Balloon ride in the Wine Country of Temecula or near the Coastal Valley in Del Mar California. Or try our Biplane rides over Temecula's Wine Country to capture that perfect romantic moment with someone special. Up here, the air is clear, the sun shines brighter and a sense of relaxation overcomes you. How about spending a birthday sipping champagne above the Temecula Vineyards and Wineries? Or spending an anniversary ballooning over the expansive valley floor, taking it all in? Make your Southern California vacation complete by coming aboard with us for a balloon flight experience that you'll remember for a lifetime. Plus, you can have the complete hot air balloon ride experience by including wine tasting tickets, bed and breakfast accommodations and winery tours as a part of your balloon and/or biplane adventure. Be sure to ask about our spectacular Sunset Flights over the Del Mar Coastal Valley near San Diego. Balloon flight prices: \$138 - \$158 Biplane flight prices: \$248 - \$448  
**Website:** <http://www.californiadreamin.com/>

#### **BASEBALL: SAN DIEGO PADRES vs. FLORIDA MARLINS**

##### **Address:**

100 Park Boulevard  
San Diego

**LOCATED in DOWNTOWN SAN DIEGO**

**Phone Number:** 619-795-5000

8/18/11 – 8/21/11 - Catch the San Diego Padres take on the Florida Marlins at PETCO Park.

Game Day Promotions & Events

Friday, August 19 - Friday Night Fireworks

Saturday, August 20 - Postgame Concert featuring Dierks Bently

Sunday, August 21 - Padres Backpacks for Kids, Military Appreciation Series: Honoring the CA National Guard  
Price: \$10-\$71

#### **WHALE ADVENTURE-NEWPORT LANDING WHALE WATCHING**

##### **Address:**

309 Palm St - Suite A  
Newport Beach, CA 92661

**Phone Number:** 949-675-0551

Blue Whale Migration Summer 2011

Price: \$30 Adults \$25 Juniors (12 to 3 years)

**6/01/11 – 8/20/11** The summer of 2010 had over 650 giant blue whales viewed with multiple blue whales sighted during one whale watching cruise. These giants of the sea reach lengths of 100 feet. See what made Southern California a top destination for whale watching.

#### **A TASTE OF SAN DIEGO**

**Phone Number** 619-517-4930

**Neighborhood:** Downtown

**Hours:** Open Monday to Friday from 9AM to 4PM Open Saturday from 9AM to 1PM

Our Food Tours are all about the Great Food that San Diego has to offer.

Welcome to San Diego's First and Original Food Tour.

If you have a Passion for food or just want to try new things, then this may be the tour for you.

On our Food Tasting Tours, you will visit some of San Diego's oldest authentic restaurants, family owned places, neighborhood restaurants, some hole in the wall favorites, diners and dives that only

the locals know about...

Let us introduce you to some of San Diego's hidden treasures that have stood the test of time.

##### **We offer four tours:**

Two Driving Tours at \$ 99.00 per person:

"Hometown Tour" you will visit 7 to 8 places from 9:30AM to 2:00PM.

Offered Wednesday, Friday and Saturday Only

Minimum 2 per booking with a max of 10 per driving tour.

"Triple D & Hometown" (the best of both tours) you will visit 7 to 8 places from 9:30AM to 2:00PM.

Offered Tuesday and Thursday Only

Minimum 2 per booking with a max of 10 per driving tour.

Two Walking Tours at \$ 75.00 per person:

"A Taste of Downtown" is a walking tour of approx 1.4 miles through the other side of Downtown San Diego visiting 5 to 6 places for a variety of tastings.

Offered on Tuesday, Wednesday & Thursday Only at 3PM. Tour can be 2 ½ to 3 hours.

We also offer a 3 Beer and 2 Wine Addition for \$ 25.00 per person.

Max of 8 guests per tour. Single Booking available on this tour.

"A Taste of Mission Hills" where we stroll through the Heart of Mission Hills visiting 5 places for a variety of tasting at each location.

Offered Sunday, Monday & Tuesday Only at 3PM. Tour can be 2 to 2 ½ hours.

We also offer a wine tasting paring on the Mission Hills Tour for \$25.00 per person.

There is a minimum 2 per booking with a max of 8 per walking tour.

We also offer Private Custom Tours. You must have a min of 6 guests for a private tour.

Visit our website at [www.atasteofsd.com](http://www.atasteofsd.com) for more information or to book a tour.

#### **WEBSITES YOU CAN CHECK OUT FOR THINGS TO DO IN THE AREA:**

##### **Museums:**

<http://www.sandiego.org/nav/Visitors/WhatToDo/ArtsCulture/Museums>

##### **Theatre:**

<http://www.sandiego.org/nav/Visitors/WhatToDo/ArtsCulture/Theatre>

#### **Tours and Sightseeing:**

<http://www.sandiego.org/nav/Visitors/WhatToDo/ToursSightseeing>

#### **Sports and Recreation:**

<http://www.sandiego.org/nav/Visitors/WhatToDo/SportsRecreation>

The SD Visitors Bureau recommends:

**Balboa Park** – San Diego's cultural center, houses 15 museums, three theatres and several gardens - [www.balboapark.org](http://www.balboapark.org)

**Old Town San Diego** – <http://www.oldtownsandiegoguide.com/>

**Old Town Trolley Tour** (Hop-on, hop-off tour of San Diego) – <http://www.trolleytours.com>

**Coronado** - <http://www.coronadovisitorcenter.com/CVC/index.html>  
For an even more extensive listing of things to do in San Diego please go online to: <http://www.sandiego.org/nav/Visitors/WhatToDo/ToursSightseeing?page=1> ♦

#### **WHERE TO EAT WITHIN WALKING DISTANCE**

**California Pizza Kitchen** (Fashion Valley) (619) 298-4078 A family styled restaurant that specialize in personal gourmet pizzas. <http://www.cpk.com/menu/>

**Uno Chicago Grill** (Fashion Valley) 619-298-1866 Legendary for its Chicago-style deep dish pizzas. Artisanal fare, casual and fun environment. Wide range of menu items. <http://www.unos.com/menus/>

**Boudin Bakery** (Fashion Valley) 619-683-3962 Specialty soups, salads, sandwiches and chilis. Signature sourdough bread bowls. <http://www.boudinbakery.com/locations/bakery-cafes/menu>

**Cheesecake Factory** (Fashion Valley) (619) 683-2800 Serves various dishes from American to Chinese, always will have a wait and does not accept reservations. Worth the wait and located in Fashion Valley Mall. <http://cdn.thecheesecakefactory.com/resources/8bc93780405bc23e82cdea74cabaed23/StandardMenu.pdf>

**P.F. Changs Chinese Bistro** (Factory Valley) (619) 260-8484 A trendy place that serves great food <http://www.pfchangs.com/menu/>

#### **WHERE TO EAT ALONG TROLLEY ROUTE**

**Maria Maria** (1 stop away) 619-574-6800 Owned by Carlos Santana. Modern Mexican cuisine, colorful environment inspired by Carlos Santana's music. [http://mariamariarestaurants.com/low/?page\\_id=7](http://mariamariarestaurants.com/low/?page_id=7)

**All American Grill** (1 stop away) 619-296-9600 All-American favorites, sports vibe. <http://aagrill.com/about.php#>

Barra Barra (Old Town San Diego, 2 stops away headed West) (619) 291-3200 Rancho-California cuisine, rustic ranch environment <http://fiestadereyes.com/>

**Casa de Reyes** (Old Town San Diego, 2 stops away headed West) (619) 220-5040 Fresh Mexican cuisine, outdoor seating in <http://fiestadereyes.com/>

**Casa Guadalajara** (Old Town San Diego, 2 stops away headed West) (619) 295-5111 Family-style Mexican cuisine inside hacienda <http://www.bazaardelmundo.com/dining/guadalajara/>

**Seau's Restaurant** (619) 291-7328 Famous Charger linebacker opens a family restaurant accented with football memorabilia in Mission Valley Mall. <http://www.seau.com/> ♦



ATTEND THE  
**TANKER'S  
REUNION**  
& SEE  
**SAN DIEGO**





## 2011 San Diego Reunion Tentative Schedule

**WEDNESDAY  
AUGUST 17**

0900–2330 Arrival Day – Town & Country Hotel  
Pick up reunion welcome packet at the VTA Reunion Registration Desk

1300–1600 The “Company Office” will be open in “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room for problem resolution and questions answered.

0900–2330 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open  
**Lunch & Dinner on your own**

**THURSDAY  
AUGUST 18**

0800–1030 Reunion Kick-off Meeting and VTA Business Meeting  
**Win a FREE stay!**

0800–1030 Ladies Coffee (Hospitality Room)

1100–1115 Board buses to visit 4th Tanks tank park. Then tour of the Miramar Marine Air Station and Marine Air Museum

1230–1330 Lunch at the Miramar Officers Club

1600–1615 Board buses for return to hotel

1700–2330 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open

1800–2100 **VTA Sponsored Poolside BBQ, Group Photo and Auction**

**FRIDAY  
AUGUST 19**

**Choose ONE of These Morning Trips**

**TRIP 1 MCRD San Diego**

0715–0730 Board Buses for MCRD San Diego

0800–0815 Arrive - MCRD

0900–1000 Recruit Graduation

1030–1130 Guided Tour MCRD & Museum

1145–1200 Board buses for hotel

1230–1300 Arrive at hotel

**Lunch & Dinner on your own**

1330–2330 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open

**TRIP 2 San Diego Harbor Tour**

0815–0900 Board Buses for San Diego Harbor

1000–1215 Boat tours conducted (lunch **not** provided)

1215–1230 Board Buses for hotel

1245–1300 Arrive at hotel

**Lunch and Dinner on your own**

1330–2330 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open

**SATURDAY  
AUGUST 20**

0900–1700 **Free Time** – See the City or Golf or Deep Sea Fishing or Sea World Tour or San Diego Zoo or shopping.

0900–1700 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open

1730–1815 **Reunion Banquet** – Cash Bar

1830–1845 Presentation of Colors & Remarks

1845–1930 Farewell Dinner

**Please note: Dress for the Farewell Dinner will be a shirt with a collar, dress slacks and shoes. Coats and ties are optional.**

- 10 minutes Break
- 5 minutes Charleston Reunion Review
- 10 minutes Awards Presentation
- 30 Minutes Guest Speaker
- 30 minutes Fallen Heroes Presentation

2200–2330 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open

**SUNDAY  
AUGUST 21**

0900–1200 “The Slopchute” Hospitality Room Open

*\*Anyone who would like to volunteer to help clean up, it would be greatly appreciated.*

Departure Day

### HOW TO WIN A FREE HOTEL ROOM!

**You can win a free hotel stay for this year's reunion when you bring this coupon to Thursday's Opening Meeting no later than 07:59 PST**

Rules: This coupon is your raffle ticket to be given at the door of the meeting room before 07:59 PST for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic room rate (\$109 + tax).

**Prize value: 436.00 + tax.**

Drawing will be held at the conclusion of the same meeting. Tickets will be awarded **only** to people who are in the meeting room prior to 07:59 PST. No latecomers will be permitted in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President's watch set to atomic clock standards.

Doors will close at exactly 08:00 PST to determine who is in the room on time. Winner **MUST** be in the room when the bell rings. If someone is almost at the door when the bell rings and he is not physically in the meeting room, he is **NOT** eligible for the drawing. No exceptions will be made. Only one (1) entry per person allowed.

Name \_\_\_\_\_  
Room # \_\_\_\_\_



## OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM FOR THE San Diego 7<sup>th</sup> Biennial Reunion

Towne & Country Resort & Convention Center  
August 17–21, 2011

**GET A FREE REUNION T-SHIRT WORTH \$25.00!**  
When you prepay your registration fee by **June 17, 2011**

Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_ This is how your name will appear on your name tag \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

Guest's Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_ and relationship \_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

\_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

\_\_\_\_\_ Name \_\_\_\_\_ Relationship to you \_\_\_\_\_ Shirt Size: \_\_\_\_\_ S, M, L, XL, XXL

Address: \_\_\_\_\_ Unit#: \_\_\_\_\_

City: \_\_\_\_\_ State: \_\_\_\_\_ Zip: \_\_\_\_\_

Day Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Evening Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Vietnam Tank or AT Bn: \_\_\_\_\_ Co: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in-country: \_\_\_\_\_  
(Circle one of the above) 1<sup>st</sup> 3<sup>rd</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> Example: 65–66

Is this your first USMC VTA Reunion? Circle One YES NO

You must be a **current** 2011 USMC Vietnam Tankers Association member to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent please mail your dues with this registration or the dues will be collected at the sign-in desk. No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions, transportation & lunch, meeting facilities, hospitality room & beverages and other expenses associated with the cost of hosting the reunion. Registration fee does not include your sleeping room and taxes.

**See Free Shirt offer on back inside cover**

## OPTIONAL ACTIVITY LIST for Friday, August 19<sup>th</sup>

Please circle the trip number you want and indicate how many people will be taking that trip (including yourself) if you have guests. Your guests can choose a different trip if they wish.

**Trip #1** MCRD Graduation & Tour with lunch provided in chow hall  
Buses depart hotel at 0815 and return to hotel by 1300.

How many? \_\_\_\_\_

**Trip # 2** San Diego Harbor Tour (lunch not provided).  
Buses depart at 0915 & return to hotel by 1300.

How many? \_\_\_\_\_

### Your total reunion fees

**My Registration Fee:** ..... \$ **140.00**

**Number of guests** \_\_\_\_\_ X \$ 140.00 = ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Registration fee is required for each guest including children if they are attending ANY of the scheduled events.

**Grand Total** = ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional:** Would you like to donate a few dollars to help with the beer & soda fund? ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_ Thank You!

**GROSS AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel reservations by **July 17th** to get the low room rate!  
Call: 1-800-772-8527 ask for the "2011 USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion" for the special room rate of \$109.00 per night or make reservations online by going to:

[https://resweb.passkey.com/Resweb.do?mode=welcome\\_ei\\_new&eventID=3091941](https://resweb.passkey.com/Resweb.do?mode=welcome_ei_new&eventID=3091941)

**CAUTION:** Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration free T-shirt offer which has a **June 17th** deadline. These are two different offers.

Submit this form along with your payment by June 15th to get a free Reunion T-shirt worth \$30.

Send check or money order made out to: **USMC VTA**

Then send form and payment to:

**USMC VTA**  
**c/o Ron Knight**  
**720 Quail Run Ct.**  
**Alpharetta, GA 30005-8920**



# How to get a **FREE** 2011 REUNION **SHIRT!**



Front



Back

**When you get your paid registration form in by June 17<sup>th</sup>**

***Yes! We know, we know! The reunion is still 3 months away, but . . .***

...we wanted to start planting the seed now for those on a fixed income and give time to begin planning. And for this reunion we need the registration forms turned in early so we can plan for bus transportation and other coordinated activities. Consequently, we are offering an incentive to get your registration forms in 60 days early—a free reunion shirt with a retail value of \$25.00!

You should have heard by now that our next reunion is being held in San Diego on August 17 – 21, 2011. We are excited because it should be our largest ever! The hotel is the finest we have ever used and they are renowned for catering to military veteran organizations. There will be a 3,000 square foot ballroom just for the "Slop Chute" hospitality room that will have plenty of seating to share our stories and our Vietnam photo albums. It is twice as large as the room we had in Charleston! We will have another special room for the fun-filled auction where we will also be offering a few items specifically for the ladies for the first time.

Another First: We are offering an alternative side trip for those who wish not to go to MCRD since we did Parris Island at the last reunion.

To be able to offer all these choices requires us to get your registration turned in early. -

To provide an early register incentive, we are giving away the official reunion T-shirt to each registered person (including all registered spouses, friends or family members) whose **order and registration check is received before June 17, 2011 (...which is 60 days prior to the reunion start date)**. This cut off date will not be extended. Your envelope must be postmarked no later than June 17, 2011. The reunion t-shirt, (shown above), will be another first as it is a two-sided, full color design! We think that it will be the coolest shirt we have ever done and it will have a **retail value of \$25.00!** Your shirt will be inside your reunion check-in bag for those meeting the June 17 deadline. Use the official reunion registration form at the back of this issue and submit your registration form along with a check on or before June 17<sup>th</sup>, 2011. Please make certain you choose the activity choices that you and or your guest(s) want as well as each individual's men's T-shirt size. Please note that ladies need to order in Men's sizes and that men's Small is the smallest size offered. ♦

## The Road to Khe Sanh (Continued from page 9)

On 20 January, the siege of Khe Sanh commenced with NVA attacking several hill positions. Khe Sanh Village fell to the NVA a few days later. The Special Forces Camp at Lang Vei was next, overwhelmed by a numerically superior NVA force supported by ten PT-76 tanks. Throughout the remainder of February and March, the siege continued. A major operation was necessary to finally break the siege.

Operation Pegasus, a joint U. S. Army, ARVN, and Marine Corps operation, commenced 1 April, 1968 with the objective of lifting the siege of Khe Sanh and opening Route 9. The 11th Engineers, supported by armor and infantry, performed admirably, removing mines and repairing bridges, culverts, and by-passes. By 11 April, Route 9 was open all the way from Ca Lu to Khe Sanh for the first time since September, 1967. The tanks from 3rd Platoon, Bravo Company, were finally able to leave Khe Sanh and return to Camp Carroll for much overdue maintenance and damage repair. They were replaced by the 1st Platoon of Bravo.

The cost of Pegasus had been high. The U.S. Marines and Army lost 92 KIA and 667 WIA. The ARVN lost 51 KIA. Estimates of NVA losses ran as high as 1,100 KIA and 13 captured.

Hardly a week after the end of Pegasus, the NVA ambushed another ammunition resupply convoy at bridge #28, half-way between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh. To thwart any future NVA plans to cut Route 9, Task force Hotel was implemented, consisting of several Ontos and one tank platoon each from Bravo and Charlie Companies, 3rd Tanks. They commenced patrolling Route 9 to prevent enemy buildups along

the MSR. That appeared to working well until 14 May, when the NVA sprang another ambush between Ca Lu and Khe Sanh. Again, the Marines responded, and after a fight that lasted into the next day, the NVA retreated, but not before the Marines from 2/3 lost 7 KIA and 36 wounded. This 14 May battle signaled the onset of increased enemy activity in the area. During the evening of 18-19 May, the NVA moved a battalion to within two kilometers of the Khe Sanh Combat Base.

\* \* \*

The morning of 19 May, a mine sweep team from F/2/1 departed the gates at Khe Sanh. Two tanks from the 1st Platoon, Bravo Company, went along as security. A convoy had formed up inside the compound, awaiting word from the mine sweep team that the road to Ca Lu was clear.

About 300 meters from the intersection with Route 9, the Marines triggered a massive ambush. Camouflaged NVA opened fire from 25 meters away. RPGs,



Fred Kellogg

grenades, and mortars rained down on the Marines diving for cover.

Fred Kellogg commanded one tank, Buzz Conklin the other. As Kellogg's tank opened fire with its .30 caliber coaxial machine gun, an RPG struck the main gun shield, rocking the tank. Fred's gunner yelled over the intercom that he

could see the RPG team reloading. An HE round was already in the main gun chamber. A second later, the RPG team vaporized as the fired cannon round exploded at their feet.

The Marines were pinned down by NVA firing from numerous bomb craters. Kellogg maneuvered his tank close enough so that he could fire his M3A1 "grease gun" and throw hand grenades into the craters. He did this until his cache of 19 grenades was exhausted. Then he traversed his turret so the blast from his main gun would stun the NVA down in those craters.

Seeing that the second tank's main gun blast deflector appeared damaged, Kellogg radioed Conklin, telling him not to fire his main gun. Conklin replied that he and his crew were seriously wounded, and that his tank was out of action. Just after Kellogg moved his tank over to provide protection for Conklin's disabled tank, another RPG struck the turret of Kellogg's tank, just behind the range finder blister. Kellogg was standing directly in the path

of the plasma jet that exploded through the armor, seriously wounding him and his other crewmen.

The tank platoon leader, Lt. Harris Himes, and a second Bravo Company tank were back at the combat base awaiting word to depart with the convoy for Ca Lu when the ambush was triggered. The two tanks got permission to join the fray along with the rest of F/2/1. Even with G/2/1 assisting the Marine assault, the NVA counterattacked. The CO's of both infantry companies were killed and their command groups decimated.

Lieutenant Himes led his two tanks into the battle, all weapons blazing. Though seriously wounded by an RPG, Lt. Himes stayed in the fight, directing the fire of his two tanks as the infantry around them was engaged in hand-to-hand combat with the close-quarters enemy. Himes' tank caught fire after taking 13 RPG hits. Some rounds

penetrated the engine compartment, rendering the steering mechanism inoperable. All electrical power was gone. Himes told his crew, "We have two choices: stay here and risk being burned alive, or abandon the tank and risk getting shot." The crew donned gas masks and manually fired their 90mm main gun and .30 cal. machine gun. Lt. Himes' loader, Rene Cerda, severely wounded by the numerous RPG hits, continued to load and fire his guns. He would later be awarded the Silver Star for his heroism. Returning to the combat base after the battle, Himes' tank was so damaged that it was stripped and buried in place.

Fixed wing napalm strikes, some only 50 meters from the Marine positions, finally broke the enemy will to stand and fight. Eight Marines were killed and 34 wounded. The Marines reported killing 113 of the enemy and capturing three; one of whom stated

that the enemy mission was to stop all movement along Route 9.

\* \* \*

Operation Charlie, the dismantling of Khe Sanh Combat Base, began on 19 June. On 5 July, the base officially closed. The following day, the 1st Marines left by convoy for Ca Lu. As the last trucks rumbled over Route 9, engineers removed and recovered the tactical bridging equipment they had installed during Operation Pegasus back in April.

The decision to evacuate Khe Sanh so soon after the massive commitment of men and material to hold the base is difficult to understand. One likely explanation is that, with General Westmoreland out of the picture due to having been relieved by General Creighton Abrams, MACV no longer had to adhere to the belief that Khe Sanh was strategically important.

General Westmoreland would go to his grave convinced that Tet was a massive

ruse to distract attention from Khe Sanh, and that a war of attrition was the key to victory. History would later prove that he got it wrong on both counts.

Resources: Shulimson, et. al., *U. S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year 1968*, pp. 119-126, 284, 316-17, 318-19; Gilbert, Oscar, *Marine Corps Tank Battles in Vietnam*, pp. 143-145; Coan, James, "Tet Attack at Cam Lo," *Leatherneck*, Jan., 2010; Kellogg, Fred, personal communication with the author; Himes, Harris, "What Members are Doing?" *Sponson Box*, Vol. III, 2008, p. 11. ♦

## J KE

A ragged, old, derelict shuffled into a down and dirty bar. Stinking of whiskey and cigarettes, his hands shook as he took the "Piano Player Wanted" sign from the window and handed it to the bartender. "I'd like to apply for the job," he said. "I was a Marine F-4 driver, flying off carriers back in 'Nam, but when they retired the Phantom all the thrill was gone, and soon they cashed me in as well. I learned to play the piano at O-Club happy hours, so here I am."

The barkeep wasn't too sure about this doubtful looking old guy, but it had been quite a while since he had a piano player and business was falling off. So, why not give him a try. The seedy pilot staggered his way over to the

piano while several patrons snickered. By the time he was into his third bar of music, every voice was silenced. What followed was a rhapsody of soaring music unlike anything heard in the bar before. When he finished there wasn't a dry eye in the place.

The bartender took the old Marine fighter pilot a beer and asked him the name of the song he had just played? It's called "Drop your Skivvies, Baby, I'm Going Balls To The Wall For You" he said. After a long pull from the beer, leaving it empty, he said "I wrote it myself." The bartender and the crowd winced at the title, but the piano player just went on into a knee-slapping, hand-clapping bit of ragtime that had the place jumping.

After he finished, the Marine pilot acknowledged the applause, downed a second proffered mug, and told the crowd the song was called, "Big Boobs Make My Afterburner Light."

He then launched into another mesmerizing song and everyone in the room was enthralled. He announced that it was the latest rendition of his song, "Spread 'em Baby, It's Foggy Out Tonight and I Need To See The Centerline", then excused himself and headed for the head. When he came out the bartender went over to him and said, "Hey fly boy, the job is yours, but do you know your fly is open and your pecker is hanging out." "Know it?" the old Marine replied, "Hell, I wrote it!" ♦

## “EOD Personnel Equivalents”

(Continued from page 18)

at the map in his book, the fictitious name Matterhorn that he used was at the right location, but was in reality, FSB Argonne, four miles east of Laos near the DMZ. I agree with Bob, it was really hard to put this book down once you started and was all, in my opinion, non fiction material except for the racial conflict as I saw none of that in my platoon. Thanks to Bob for this review of the book and his high tribute to the Marine infantry in Vietnam. By the way, the Marine infantry was totally in awe of and held the same great respect for their brothers in Vietnam Marine Armor in Vietnam.

When the Bravo company skipper, Captain Miller, brought me over to first platoon and I first saw those tanker Marines, let me tell you that I had a grin from ear to ear due to the experience and confidence they exuded. That's when I knew we would all make it back to the world. You might be familiar with some of the names of members of my platoon as some are USMCVTA members: Al Soto, Wayne “The Hulk” Smull, Dale Sandifer, Richard Myrick, Larry “Tiger Doctor#1” Parshall (mechanic/driver), Mike “Boris” Bolenbaugh (radio man/gunner), Gilbert “Dudley” Ramirez, Gunny Hall, Tommy Lewis and Sgt Dale Reichert. I sent a photo of my five tank commanders about a year ago to Bob Peavey and maybe he'll post it in an issue. As we always operated with only three-man crews (no gunner) we, obviously, were not up to the Marine table of organization in manpower, so that was always a problem for us combined with a perennial lack of tank parts. My diary reminds me that in late March 1969, they decided to close down Charlie Company, Third Tanks -- just to get parts for the other two companies -- so that meant just Alpha and Bravo were the only companies that were operational North of Dong Ha. It seemed that half of my tanks were always dead-lined due to mine hits. Again, thanks to Hanoi Jane for helping to stir up the media which led to the lack of support from back home – three man crews and lack of parts wasn't healthy for the guys that wrote the proverbial check that we all

talk about to the U.S. government... up to and including our lives.

Basically, my entire tank platoon was full of heroes. They were all fearless, confident and outstanding at their jobs and I was proud and honored to serve alongside all of them. This story though is about one of them who was a specialist and because of all the mine hits that we had (12), I totally relied on his fearlessness, sense of urgency, extra brass and training to get us out of these dangerous situations and on with our important missions. This Marine's name was Larry Parshall, AKA Tiger Doctor#1 and he was both my capable tank driver and our platoon tank mechanic. By the way, he always got us a “satisfactory” at the “Q” and CG inspections and he could easily fix a tank's broken oil cooler or starter blindfolded. I should have written him up for a decoration, but if you knew his character, just a nod of respect was all that he required as he dismounted the tank and carefully stepped around an area potentially full of plastic AP mines and went on about assessing the damage, and the process of re-tracking the tank so that we could continue with our mission.

I was easily inspired to write this story after I watched the Oscar winning, blockbuster motion picture of 2010 called “Hurt Locker”. The movie is all about Army EOD specialists ( in this movie it starred Jeremy Renner in this role ) operating in Afghanistan who had the ultra dangerous job of first safely clearing the immediate area and then walking straight up to a site where the bomb was buried and diffusing it. I immediately had a flashback to Vietnam and about hitting all those mines, and that someone initially had to step out into that potential minefield and get the tank back up so we could continue on with our mission. We were always afraid that the NVA would cluster the mines on us. Everyone in the platoon was aware that the sweep teams couldn't pick up the plastic anti-tank and plastic AP mines the NVA were using on Route's #1 and 9, and to the west and east of Con Thien and Gio Linh. Radar technology could pick up the incoming 140/107/122mm rockets which gave us 10 seconds to hide and Topsy could help us with picking up enemy infiltration and movement that might be

coming down on us, but obviously, neither technology could pick up these land mines. This made the aftermath of a tank hitting a mine even more dangerous as someone had to jump off the tank as soon as the thick black plume disappeared and “not diffuse a bomb”, but to hurriedly assess the damage and then assemble some crew to get it re-tracked and help us get on with the mission which was typically in reaction to a unit in trouble. In my honest analysis, this job was so very similar to the danger EOD specialists faced in the movie as my EOD equivalent Marine had to tip-toe around a potential mine field while trying to get a tank back up. My diary says that most of the times that we hit mines we were acting as a hastily put together “reaction force” to some unit that had been ambushed (for example, S/Sgt Harold Riensche on 3/24/69 or Lt McCarty's ambush on 3/13/69 at the Ocean view post which was just 1,000 meters East of Gio Linh, or another tank that had hit a mine and needed security, or that a Marine or ARVN squad or listening post outside the gate was in trouble. It seemed that it was always usually close to dusk that we would get radio “comm” about going on reaction to trouble, with the location coordinates, and we'd blow out the gate at C2, Con Thien, Bravo CP or Gio Linh with only what we had, which was sometimes only two tanks, two APC's and usually a squad of those mostly ineffective ARVN's (PF's).

So, again, in my platoon, the Marine that had this most dangerous job (similar/equivalent job to Army EOD personnel) was required to first disembark the tank, begin to assess the damage, and make the decision whether to call the Ox retriever and haul it all the way back to Dong Ha maintenance (48 Forward), or decide that he could re-button the tank back up himself. Once more, this was our platoon mechanic, Larry Parshall. The rest of our rapid response team, obviously, had to be prepared for the follow-up ambush potential. As a side note, just in case a VC tried the old spider hole routine, I kept a virtual weapons arsenal near the .50 caliber machine gun and TC turret area on my tank: a 12 gauge sawed-off shotgun given to me by Gunny Burr when he rotated, a Thompson sub-machine gun, an M3 carbine, an M79 Blooper, a grease

gun down below, and usually six to ten of the M-30 baseball grenades.

I can tell you it was clear that Larry had a little more of oooh-rah stuff going on compared to me, and for that matter, I guess they all did in my platoon. So, Larry, welcome home, brother Marine! As I said, all the Marines in the platoon were exceptional, but he just had an extra set of them. Early on when we were hitting mines, I used to be a little formal and say “Parshall up”, but for all the remaining mine hits and since he was my driver, I would just give him a respectful “nod” watching every step he took once off the tank.... and the “notorious sphincter moments” that were always present during my Infantry experience would be back with a vengeance!

As a side note, I wanted to mention some of the assignments we would get as a tank platoon during my tour in Vietnam:

- Scouting & recon patrols/sweep patrols from all bases/search & destroy
- Recon and prep fire for big operations
- Convoy escorts to primarily LZ Stud, med evacuations, perimeter watch duty
- Blocking force during enemy cordon operations; constantly picking up & bringing in possible Viet Cong ( called Suspectee's ) to Mai Loc for interrogation
- Fast reaction force from any outpost to anyone that might be in trouble
- Security for the bases, sweep teams and other tanks that had hit mines, and for the army bulldozers involved in the land clearing operations for the placement of SID devices used to pick up infiltration across the DMZ
- Armor support for bigger operations with the Marine infantry units (2/9, 2/3 and 3/3 infantry battalions) and the Army (Big Red One mechanized)

Before I sign off, I wanted to comment as a side note about the ineffectiveness of the ARVN's (PF's) of which you all were aware:

- They wouldn't operate in the rain
- They fired at anything they suspected
- They stole us blind at the outposts; for example, tank equipment, radios, c-rations
- (We had to employ our own 360 degree perimeter inside the outposts)
- They had mandatory “leech checks” on patrol sweeps.... all clothes off!

▪ They were known to be composed of 20% VC sympathizers and 10% VC

In summary, I'd like to again say how proud and honored I was to have served with those Marines in the 1st Platoon, Bravo Co., 3rd Tank Bn. In this first story for the USMCVTA, my intention was to give a special, strong salute to Larry Parshall for the superb job he did in the service to his country in Vietnam. I plan to tie a story to virtually each page of my diary and most of the pages relate to these men and others in Bravo Company during 1969. There's a humorous story about working with the ARVN on sweep patrols and their need to do periodic “leech checks” that involved totally stripping down to the underwear in the bush which included checking each other's privates. They also insisted that we tow their live chickens behind the tanks!

Then there was General Davis's plan in February 1969 when he was able to get the ARVN brass to agree to change the existing eligible rules about going into the DMZ. We were getting incoming fire almost daily from the DMZ while on patrol sweeps and we couldn't fire back at them even though we could see their mortar flashes, red flags and tanks (the Paris Peace talks turned out to be very ineffective). This plan was to be called “Destructive Extraction” where Lt. Pete Ritch, Lt. McCarty or I would go into the “Z” with just an agreed upon limited decoy force of two tanks and two APC's with only an agreed total of 14 men. Then, obviously, with a known regiment of NVA near the Ben Hai River, we would have gotten hit very hard, but, our surprise response would be in the form of a huge mechanized force (tanks, dusters, Ontos, APC's) to extract us. Additionally, the Army was to sit on the ridge as a back-up force to this plan. The large NVA regiment known to be there in the DMZ would have been decimated.

Another story to write up would be 1st Platoon's operation with the Marines of 2/3, which was towards Khe Sahn on Route #9. We couldn't cross the bridge so we set up for the night. I left tanks by the bridge and took two tanks up on the hill near the Duc Truong River. We received 82mm mortar incoming and the infantry first sergeant came running up the hill and told me to start firing. We finally caught the outgoing flash and Mike Bolenbaugh, the capable

tanker on B-12, got credit for the hit (we saw the secondary explosion). The Marine infantry had searched the area and gave him four confirms. Don't forget: send in some tanker stories for the “Sponson Box.

Semper Fidelis,

God Bless the Marine Corps

God bless Marine Armor and Grunt Units

God Bless America and all those in the American military service

Bob Skeels,

Bravo one, Bravo Company, Third Tank Battalion, Third Marine Division

### NEW E-MAIL ADDRESS POLICY

**You may have noticed that the last issue did not offer the e-mail addresses for the new members and we also removed them from our website. We have had several requests from members not to publish e-mail addresses, nor share or sell them. You can rest assured that your e-mail address will remain confidential with the Vietnam Tanker's Association. We will only supply and share the name, address and phone number of all members as directed by our charter. It is up to you if you wish to give out your e-mail address. You can obtain a list from our website or the hardcopy list we provide at every reunion. Your privacy is our main concern. The VTA asks for your e-mail on the application form only for internal VTA messaging.**

We then ascertained very quickly that we had better get ready. We were on Hill 64, the lowest and the most vulnerable of the hills.



"John Wayne" Vargo in front of the dirt cave.

A few days later in early February 1968, we were hit hard and partially overrun on Hill 64, in what would turn out to be one of the heaviest single days of fighting in the heaviest battle engagement of the war. We spotted different colored sparkling flares and quickly used one of our tank's radios to call the CP and determine the meaning of the different colors, as this was no birthday party. Next, I distinctly heard the NVA bugles over our wire in the background and knew exactly what they meant. As a young man I had played trumpet in the band, but in the Scouts I had blown a bugle. I could "Name that Gook Song" in three



Two hard-core Marine battle tanks, Rock Quarry, Khe Sanh, DMZ.

notes, because I knew exactly what those staccato notes and that crescendo meant in any language—CHARGE!

We had been assigned and attached to the First Battalion Ninth Marine Regiment, 1/9, respectfully and reverently nicknamed the Walking Dead because of the fierce fighting they had encountered and the number of casualties they had taken. We were constantly at point-blank range and always expected any moment that the NVA's sapper squads and rocket-propelled grenade (RPG) units would wipe out our two tanks. But we held our line that day and throughout the siege and never were completely overrun like they had been on other hills such as 881 and 861, or like the French at Dien Bien Phu.

The commanding officer, Colonel John F. Mitchell, later wrote about that day:

*"The total KIA of NVA soldiers exceeded 150 on this day. The 1/9 battalion received over 350 rounds of enemy supporting arms fire in their [our] command perimeter."*

In the two tanks on the Rock Quarry, I was a gunner and a loader. That night, I can remember a senior infantry officer who stuck his head into the turret and said, "Good shooting, boys. Change your skivvies and carry on."

He didn't know how right he was, because I again had bladder trouble. But we would not have to worry about changing skivvies much after that, because, one by one, all our underwear would drop out our trouser legs after having rotted off during bouts of diarrhea and constipation and from us not having taken our trousers or boots off for weeks on end.

#### BETWEEN ROCKET ATTACKS

After I had been at the Rock Quarry for about two weeks, I was continuously on shitter duty, even after that job should have been rotated, but I acquiesced to get along with living in the dirt cave with several other grungy tankers. I really didn't like the cave for three reasons: the dirt was always lightly falling from the ceiling, which told me it could cave in by itself or with an explosion above; no one could stand up in the cave, especially me; and the cave was on the direct arc path of the incoming rockets, mortars, and artillery from Co Roc, Laos. I didn't feel like dying crushed below a mountain of dirt. The other side of the Rock Quarry was just opposite the arc of incoming missiles, and it was all rock. Other tankers had earlier attempted to dig a cave on the other side with several types of explosives, but to no avail.

I thought otherwise. Sleeping under a probable mudslide or cave-in was not in my best interest and I started digging into the rock side by hand, using a tank chisel and an eight-pound sledgehammer. To protect the blisters on my left hand, I would wrap the hand with grungy rags, which were really just old rotted skivvies and T-shirts too dirty to wear that could stand up on their own as if they were heavily starched. I tried chiseling with the hammer in my left hand, but that beat my knuckles up worse than the blisters, so I wrapped the skivvies around my left palm and continued banging with my right hand.

After about three to four weeks and after developing new blisters underneath all the calluses, I

was able to curl up in a ball and sleep in a fetal position in my newly cut rock womb, uninterrupted save for guard duty. After another couple weeks of chiseling, I was able to almost stretch out my legs without my final teenage growing cramps. Next in my cave, I made a dissecting right turn so a direct explosion outside the cave would not have an effect inside; I didn't worry about my ears at the time.

Another couple weeks went by, by which time I had made a left-hand turn in the mountainous rock and had a descending Z-type configuration. It was at about this time that the other seven tankers on the quarry also became convinced that the rock side meant a better chance of survival from the rockets and missiles. The first person to ask about joining me in my cave was Dale Sandifer, so I told him we would both dig until we could stretch out. Before Dale was finished with his part of the cave, Larry Basco pronounced, "Three digging is better than two," while jokingly calling me Huckleberry.

About the time Larry came on board, the other tank crewmen decided to dig their own caves as well. As it turned out, before we left the Rock Quarry and our rock caves, the dirt side, which we had by then converted to munitions storage, got hit, and the entrance totally collapsed on top of where we would have been.

When we were digging, the clanging went on twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week. What we did not know at the time was that the North Vietnamese were also digging, but more rapidly, in the soft dirt that led up to our defensive lines and perimeter. The perimeter had a triple strand of razor-sharp concertina wire, which we knew would only slow them down in an attack because they had offensive sapper units and RPG battalions that could melt through our defensive positions like a hot knife through butter.

*"We've gotta get out of this place  
If it's the last thing we ever do.  
We've gotta get out of this place.  
Girl, there's a better life for me and you."*

Eric Burdon & the Animals

In spite of the dire situation we were in, life in and around the cave was somewhat tolerable, and the camaraderie almost reminded me of being in the Boy Scouts and the Explorers, the difference being that the worst thing that happened in the Scouts was that you could easily get popped with a wet towel on your bare butt. At Khe Sanh you could get your ass kicked or worse--die.

At night in our rock quarry caves, we would listen to Hanoi Hannah on a transistor radio and see by the light of the homemade, diesel-burning lanterns made from C-ration cans. Because we had no ventilation shaft or any way of circulating the oily smelling air from the diesel fumes, and because we had to cover the cave entrances with ponchos because of the blackout, we were always suffocating in greasy soot. After about an hour of diesel light we would have to blow out the lamp, our faces black with soot, and we spit out black balls of oil crud against glistening, shrimp-colored granite walls and a black, greasy ceiling.

We had to stand guard every night, with a three-hour shift per man. Guard level was at a minimum of 25% the majority of the time: 25% equaled one man standing guard, 50% was two men, and so on. We were at 50%, 75%, and, at least once a week, 100%, as the

NVA were assembling and a close-in attack was imminent, again.

Besides invaluable sleep, water and food were the other most precious commodities. We could forget about ice or toothbrushes. Virtually nonexistent beer went for \$5 per can. The treasured hard liquor was \$100 a bottle, but for a twelve-bottle discount, the Air Force boys would give us a bargain deal at \$1,000 per case. They bought it tax-free in Thailand for \$2.40 per bottle—nice guys, what a bargain. It would be a year before we gave those rear-echelon pricks some inter-military branch payback, when we charged them equally exorbitant prices for NVA weapons and stash that we brought back from enemy arms caches out in the field. The Air Force guys probably took the weapons home to make themselves into frontline war heroes instead of flying pogues.

Before I hit 'Nam I had been about 175 pounds, having been chiseled by Marine Corps boot camp, but I would end up dropping about fifty pounds at the Rock Quarry over the next couple of months. The more I cut that rock, the more weight I would lose, and the whole time I was chiseling my personal cave, I was always wondering if I was digging own grave.

#### PURPLE THE HARD WAY

It was at the Rock Quarry in late March 1968 that I received my first of several wounds. There was always so much metal flying and lying around that we could never tell if we were running over rocks or rocket parts. If we were fairly far away from our tank or cave, we had to hustle at double-time, which Time magazine dubbed the "Khe Sanh shuffle." I constantly worried about breaking an ankle or a leg from hitting the jagged metal that protruded up from the ground. It was during one of the hundreds of barrages, while I was running to my tank, that I was caught between two mortar blasts that came in right on top of me. As the first explosion hit, I ducked so fast, my helmet came off. When I tried to scoop my helmet up like a fumbled football, the next explosion tore at the left side of my head. As I realized what had just happened, I also discovered that my arms and face were sitting atop burning, hot metal.

I quickly saw other boys hitting the deck and chewing rocks out of fear; the gooks had our exact coordinates and were dropping rounds in on us as fast as they could load. They were "firing for effect," and we were in their crosshairs...sitting ducks.

Larry Basco saw me get hit and flew out of our cave as the cinders were still pelting down from the blast. He grabbed me by the scruff of my neck and the back side of my flak jacket and pulled me backwards into the cave. Although very skinny, I was still heavy. But he was strong, and he pulled me into the cave as I lost consciousness. Both of us wound up in shock: I from my wound and Larry from the sight of all the blood. What I was really puzzled at was that it didn't hurt, not like I had thought it would. The concussion from the blast had blown me up against the tank and scared the living shit out of me. I can remember screaming at Larry, asking him, "How much of my brains are left?" as I was afraid to feel the left side of my head.

I reached down and pulled out of my right hand a piece of hot, jagged metal that was burning like hell. At the same time I had been hit, our friend Gunz (Ralph Gonzales) had almost lost his right hand when it was nearly severed by a mortar round, and several more grunts had also been wounded and were screaming in pain.

In all the confusion, I can't remember who started yelling first, Larry or me, but we both screamed, "Medic!" until reality set in that Army medics were not in the Marine Corps, only Navy corpsmen were. The Marine Corps does not have corpsmen, chaplains, or anyone else who cannot pick up a weapon and fight. I don't know what hit us both so funny just then, but Larry and I both began to laugh hysterically. I touched my wound for the first time to see what was left of my head. Larry urged me not to touch anything, but I couldn't resist, as the blood had now filled my left eye. I decided to take a chance. It wasn't as bad as I had thought, but my head had still been split open like a coconut.

Gunz and I and a couple other wounded grunts were stacked on a mechanized flatbed infantry mule and rushed to Charlie Med, the base hospital across no man's land, and then into the CP. I think I was more in shock than hurt, so I really felt for the other Marines I knew were worse off than either Gunz or me.

Because of the number of dead and wounded coming in, chaos was the flavor du jour. Someone put a tag on my blouse and scribbled something on it. Gunz and I stayed overnight in Charlie Med, listening to the screaming and puking going on all around us. Everyone knew that no matter how bad the wounds were, no one, not even the dead, could be medevaced, as the NVA gunners were blasting right out of the air anything and everything that could fly.

Gunz and I were reported as missing in action (MIA) because we were not in either tank park, in the CP, or at the Rock Quarry on our tanks. I still believe that Larry Basco should have been honored for his bravery and that because of him I am still here today to write this. His actions saved Gunz and me from further wounds and probably from dying.

While all this was going on, there was no Jimi Hendrix music in the background; Robert Duval was not surfing on the Roo Quan River; and, Oliver Stone was not hanging out of a Hollywood chopper, yelling, "Cut!" This was the real deal. Our guys were being cut down, dismembered, and bleeding to death in the ugliest and most grotesque ways that you can see, hear, smell, taste, feel, or imagine.

As the brutal days and long, eerie nights of the siege passed slowly by, we were totally focused on what the next day was going to bring, and we were becoming ever grungier from the elements.

We had to constantly clean our tank weaponry with petrochemical products, and our clothes were covered with months' worth of oil, dirt, grease, and grime. While at Camp Carroll, I developed a rash and it began producing welts and bumps all over my body. I recall they burned and itched ferociously but would not break. When I went to a field hospital, the corpsman covered almost my entire body with calamine lotion and told me to return later. When the boils still did not break, I was later medevaced, and doctors injected about 100 of the boils on the back side of my body with cortisone. This procedure was extremely painful; I bit down hard on the clean rag stuffed in my mouth. I was asked to return two days later, and the process was repeated on my front side.

As I moved naturally in the normal process of my duties, the boils began to break. Dark purple blood and yellow pus was secreted from approximately 200 open wounds over my entire body, all in different stages of bursting, oozing, and scabbing. After each

session of injections and breaking, instead of being wrapped with medicinal bandages, the open boils were sprayed from above with a good concentration of Agent Orange (at Khe Sahn, 43,705 gallons were sprayed, and the Rockpile, 110,050 gallons) from our buddies in the Air "Farce." This process was repeated several times over the next couple of weeks and months, with less and less cortisone being injected each time. The doctors and corpsmen were astonished that I voluntarily returned to receive this kind of painful treatment, but I just thought of the alternative—infection.

After the war, I would continue to have large grape- or half-golf-ball-sized boils under my armpits that leaked pus and dark blood intermittently. This continued for nine consecutive years, until I finally sought treatment at a private dermatologist in Houston.

During both my combat tours, I was out in the field for fourteen major operations, constantly exposed to the dirt, rain, humidity, sun, and heat of the Asian outdoor environment for months at a time without a shower, and I had direct exposure to a plethora of chemical agents.

Sometime during April 1968, my buddy Dale and I had the great idea to take a shower in the next steady rain that came by. After about three or four months of not showering, we thought it would be great to get the grunge off. While we were ferociously scrubbing and withering in the cold rain, Dale reached into one of the storage containers on the tank's fenders and pulled out a wire brush to scrub himself, and we both busted out laughing.

But in the irony of war, at that same moment, on the knoll behind us, the grunts were placing several of their buddies who been killed in the previous night's firefight onto a large net that was hanging from a line attached to a Sea Knight chopper hovering overhead. When we looked up and saw it, we quickly found it petty to worry about not having had a shower for so long.

With that, our moment of lightheartedness ended and we both quickly hustled to get the soap off and get dressed as the rain subsided. As we were trying to put our other dirty, but at least cleaner, clothes on, the chopper took off over us with its lifeless cargo. As we looked up, all we saw were arms and legs protruding from the spinning cargo netting, and as we watched, we were doused with splatters of red and black blood.

About the same time, a couple hundred meters behind us and outside of our lines, an F-4 Phantom was splashing napalm over enemy trenches, and my conscious thoughts were drowned out by the roar of afterburners and the agonizing screams of my dying enemies. This is the reality of war—death and payback.

In another mortar attack, our water buffalo on wheels, the main source of water for all of us on the hill, was hit as well, so from then on, water was rationed. It is no wonder that forty years later I am still rat-holing water for insurance, just in case. In one of the subsequent attacks, enemy artillerymen hit our ammo dump, taking it out, along with most of our tank rounds. Before long, everything was rationed, except for us Marines.

Because we had lost our platoon barber to a rocket, our hair was almost civilian-like once again. However, the body lice were plentiful and it was hard to find privacy to shave under the arms and the hairy parts of the body they could latch on to.

The insects in Viet Nam were large, but the rats were humongous,

and as someone said, they were faster at opening a C-ration can than a hungry gunny. The rat population was reported to be well over a million, and they would feed on the dead and wounded, regardless of which side they were on. Rat bites were prevalent, so much so that we shot them regularly. But, the word was passed to stop shooting with our pistols, because some grunt had put a bead on a speedy Gonzales and shot his sergeant in the ankle.

Occasionally, one of the tankers would go down from the quarry for tank supplies and other sundry items like popcorn. The quarry was sixty-four meters higher than the main CP (hence its official designation, Hill 64) and about the longest quarter of a mile I have ever carried anything. When exchanging and rolling a 300-pound tank wheel that distance, it was a challenge not to dump it over by going too fast on the way down, but it was the trip coming back up that was a real bitch.

One such trip, I'll never forget. I had gotten delayed in leaving the CP for another quarter-mile race up the hill. It seemed like a lifetime before, but it had been only seven months earlier that I had held a trophy in the air after winning the Top Competition Eliminator at the one-quarter-mile drag strip back in Dickenson, Texas. In this race from the CP, I took off rolling one newer 300-pound tank wheel, and my trophy, if I made it, would be the three cans of traded popping corn stuffed into my pockets. Once I was outside the CP, the concertina wire was closed behind me and I was on my own. I was having difficulty rolling the tank wheel, which made my progress slower than I really wanted. But because of the constant barrage of rockets flying overhead and the snipers' pings, I kept moving and rolling that damn wheel as fast as I could.

It was nearly dark by this time, and nighttime always came ultra fast during this, the monsoon season. It got dark so quickly mainly because of the rain clouds and the setting sun, and now I found myself in no man's land in the dark. Any real estate between the CP and the quarry was considered no man's land at night because both perimeters closed their respective ingress and egress with concertina wires and only let guys in who were coming back from duty on listening posts and had the correct password.

Because I was a tanker and not used to coming and going on foot, I had never thought to ask for the password before leaving. A light rain had now turned into a heavy downpour, and I tried to pump the wheel over my head. When I had been pumping iron as a civilian, I had made the "300 Club" by bench-pressing the "big three," but this awkward, muddy tank wheel was now my grounded 300-pound albatross. When I tried to roll it, the wheel jumped over the ruts in the road one way and then the other, and I had secret thoughts about leaving it and running up the hill without it or a password. By now the mud trench was a running river of red, muddy, clay water.

Every night was a complete blackout for both sides, but occasionally we could see a flicker of light on our side as well as theirs. This night I saw no light anywhere. As I progressed up the hill, the thought crossed my mind that I could very easily be shot by one of my own infantry guys or my brother tankers. Or, even worse, I could run into the concertina wire or walk into our minefield. The rockets and mortars were still intermittently dropping in the rain, and the visibility was almost nil, and I walked smack-dab into an infantry mule.

An infantry mule is like a large, elevated flatbed go-kart with a steering wheel protruding above the bed. I thought this was a good chance for me to put that damn wheel on that mule and get a free ride up the rest of the hill. I was wrong; the driver was dead and in the ditch. Worse than that, a couple of minutes later, I heard some Vietnamese men yelling to one another in the rain. I didn't know if they had seen me or not, nor which side of the DMZ they came from, ours or theirs, but I didn't care. I slid into the muddy, watery ditch with the dead mule driver and partially covered myself with the wheel and a lot of mud.

I was shaking like I had palsy in a cold winter rain, with only a pistol and a tank wheel. Whoever they were, they passed on by like thieves in the night while I continued to shake, and I was not going to ask them any questions. Whether they were friendly ARVNs or enemy PAVNs, the odds were 50-50, and I wasn't taking any chances announcing that I was an American. They could have been North, headed South or South, headed North. I didn't care, I just knew that I was on the DMZ between the two, and I briefly thought about my 20th birthday, which had just blown by without any ice cream, cake, or candles.

I stayed frozen in that watery ditch, with that damn tank wheel and the stiff, dead driver next to me, until morning light. I thought it would be safer to stay there till first light, safely hidden, rather than getting shot or stepping on a landmine. It turned out that my buddies at the quarry had covered for me, thinking I was still at the CP and the CP had thought I was back at the quarry. I finally accomplished my "short" mission that morning, when I not only rolled that freaking wheel up the hill and into the quarry, but still had one of the popcorn cans left to share with the guys. ♦

#### **AUCTION ITEMS NEEDED**

**We are looking for items that we can auction off at our coming reunion. They can be almost anything from a tank ballistic computer to C-Rations.**

**Have any military stuff you want to get rid of? We would appreciate whatever you can bring or send to us. If you are not able to make the reunion, you can send your stuff to:**

**Rick Lewis  
5663 Balboa Ave. #366  
San Diego, CA 92111-2795**

**Make certain you label the outside of the box: FOR AUCTION.**

**What Members Are Doing**  
(Continued from page 6)

John,  
As you know, my son took his own life after coming back from his second tour in Iraq. Chuck suffered from extreme depression and anxiety, even though he was on meds.



Charles W. Robinson

It's a shame we lose young men to this problem that many doctors take so lightly. Look into the face of this young man

before the next time you think of ending your life. My Son is gone and I can't bring him back, but maybe this will save some kid's life that you know.



I made a motorcycle vest dedicated to Chuck.  
Semper Fi

Harvey "Robbie" Robinson

**Robert Peavey**

I had a book signing for my book, "Praying for Slack" on April 17<sup>th</sup> and was pleasantly surprised when two fellow tankers showed up for the event. I want to thank both of them for supporting their brother-tanker. ♦



Chris Vargo, Bob Peavey and Ron Knight

**A chance to tell your story**

Clyde Hoch just completed a book about his Vietnam experience in Tanks. He is in the process of writing a second book that will be short stories of Tankers called Tracks II Recollections of my Brothers. He is looking for stories in your own words with accompanying photos if possible. Stories should be about 20 pages in length. Submit your stories to Clyde in print or by e-mail. This is an opportunity to tell your story in your own words and see it in a book. Send your stories by mail to Clyde Hoch, 313 4th St., Pennsburg, PA. 18073 or by e-mail to hochclyde@yahoo.com

**Looking For**

Rick Walters came across this photo of a flame tank in a stack of press photos he purchased recently. The photo was labeled, "William Luvell, 1965". Anyone have a clue as to who he was and what unit?



**Phantoms of the Yellow Shitter**

BY MARSHALL JAMESON

Yes, it is true. You take young Marines with too much time on their hands and they will find something to do – usually to the bad.

It was one of those periods in the Charlie Company CP outside of Marble Mountain when time just seemed to have taken a stall. I, a PFC, and two other lower-life forms decided to raise that level of our excitement a few clicks. We imagined that, if we could "produce" some yellow paint, to the amazement of everyone, decorate the morning "hot spot" of our area. A day or so later, one of us found some yellow paint and some brushes. So we plotted! The next night we met at the agreed location, which happened to be the "two holer" at the end of the cat walk between the company area and those damn loud 175's next door. We hurriedly did our dirty deed and scurried back to our perspective hooches. Morning muster brought some word about the paint job and how the guilty would be caught and dealt with.

Now, I had grown up in Platoon 378, Parris Island, S.C., in May 1967, and I had a vision of myself being flogged publically, maybe even the firing squad. All I know was that the Gunny's face

would turn blood red every time he started talking about it...and I was shitless! After a couple of days, leadership investigations had gone nowhere. During evening muster, Gunny demanded that those responsible step forward. I wasn't budging!

There was a skinny Spanish kid, whose name I don't remember, and was a driver of one of the flames, stepped forward. Not wanting to be a holdout, I stepped out and then "Cody" (don't have his last name) stepped out. Later in the Gunny's office, during the verbal beating, we couldn't help noticing that Gunny was fighting back laughter and tears.

We each got three months of EPD (extra punishment duty), when we were not performing our normal crewman duties (of killing people and breaking things). We were to report to "The Berm" to fill sandbags. The ammo bunker at Charlie Company CP was built with thousands of sandbags. I filled a third of them. To this day, I count sandbags instead of sheep!

Marshall Jameson  
1st Tanks, '67 – '69

**Letter to the Editor**

(Continued from page 5)

I have the serial number (201825) of the tank that I was tank commander of while I was in Vietnam. I am looking for anyone who may have some roster of tank serial numbers or other knowledge of what happened to that tank. We had a drawing of a knight chess piece on the xenon search light cover. During my time in-country, we never had a name for the tank painted on the gun tube. Not long

ago I was speaking to Bob Peavey about this search that I am on and Bob claimed that his brand new Charlie Company, 3rd Tk Bn tank inherited a search light cover with that same knight image. Does anyone have a clue?

Jim Knee  
Pocahontas, AR  
(870) 378-1148

Thanks for all that you do for the USMC VTA. Here is a small donation for you to do as you see fit. See you in San Diego.

RB English  
Joshua Tree, CA  
(760) 366-1259

## *Tankers Association History Project* (Continued from page 17)

and east. We ran these patrols for several weeks with no evidence of enemy activity, much less enemy contact. On January 13, I asked permission to run the next day's patrol in the area assigned to the ARVN. It was granted and we were informed that there would be no "friendlies" in the area.

On January 14, our three tanks accompanied by an infantry platoon headed out of the village in our usual southwest direction. About a click down the road, we headed north over a small hill and into a tree line. The infantry platoon dismounted and moved through the tree line into an open field and proceeded toward the next tree line. The three tanks waited behind the first tree line. I received a radio message from the grunt platoon leader that there was what looked like smoke from a campfire in the far tree line. As the grunts continued across the field, they received small arms fire from the tree line. B-33, B-34 and B-35 crashed through the near tree line, moved past the grunts and opened fire on the enemy position with 90 MM canister rounds and .50 and .30 caliber machine guns. The enemy fire ceased. We searched the tree line and found five uniformed NVA dead and blood trails leading away from the scene. In addition to the KIAs, there were several AK-47s, NVA packs and equipment and a small fire with cooking utensils. The fact that they established a camp fire showed that they felt very secure in the area.

The infantry company commander ordered us to load the NVA bodies on the tanks and bring them back to our base camp. On the return trip back, B-33 slipped a track on a muddy hillside and we had to break track and walk it back into position. Repairing the track was hard enough, but to have to deal with the NVA blood running off the fender and down the side of the road wheel housing made it sickening. When we got back to our base camp, it was almost dark and we were told to lay the bodies along the side of the road in front of the village. At day break, the next morning, every villager was lined up and walking past the bodies. One old woman fell to the ground screaming and crying. She had found her son.

B-33, B-34 and B-35 supported road

sweep and patrolling operations for another three weeks without any incidents. Our patrols were once again restricted to areas south and west of our combat base while the ARVN were "supposedly" patrolling areas to the north and east.

3. Command Chronology notation: *3 February 1969 - 3rd Platoon, Co. B and APC units on land clearance with Army Dozers and Co. G/2/3, found NVA campsite with hootches and bunkers. 2 NVA/POW's were captured with their equipment and sent to Cam Lo for questioning.*

The rest of the story: Three tanks from Bravo Co. (B-33; I do not remember the other two tank numbers) were supporting an Army Engineering Company of 25 bull dozers and 5 Army APCs in a chopper landing clearing operation that was located north of Rt. 9 and east of Cam Lo in Quang Tri Province. The tanks, APCs and infantry platoon established a security perimeter and the dozers would clear all of the underbrush and trees inside the perimeter. The trees and underbrush were approximately 7 feet tall. The dozers formed an off-set column inside the perimeter and would clear everything in their way to dirt level.

I was in the TC hatch of B-33 and, after one of dozers passed by, I saw a frantically waving hand sticking out of the freshly turned soil. I halted the next dozer in line and we approached the hand. The grunts dug around the hand and when another hand surfaced, they dragged an NVA officer from a tunnel that the dozers had crushed. The grunts found another NVA officer in the hole along with an AK-47, 9 mm pistol and several NVA packs. In the packs were maps of several U.S. combat bases in the area, including a map of Bravo Co., 3rd Tanks Headquarters at Vinh Dai. The map of our company headquarters included the location of our night time tank locations, our communications bunker, and our machine gun placements. The POWs were taken away for questioning.

Shortly after the POWs left, I received a radio call from Bravo Six (my company commander) asking where the AK-47 and 9 mm pistol were. I stated that I wasn't sure. Captain Miller told me that I had 15 minutes to get the weapons to Cam Lo. I liberated the

weapons in my turret and dispatched a tank with a squad of Marines to Cam Lo. I felt that the tank crew deserved the souvenirs more than some POG in the rear. We never did find out who got the weapons.

4. Command Chronology notation: (There were two reports of this action in the CCs - Summary report and the S-2 report; both are listed below).

Summary report - 22 February 1969 - On 22 Feb., the APC platoon suffered 2 KIAs from an enemy ambush in Leather Neck Square. The APC platoon and a platoon from B Co. 3rd Tank Battalion inflicted 4 enemy KIAs and captured 1 NVA/POW.

S-2 report - 22 February 1969 - B Co tanks with APCs on landing clearing operation taken under heavy automatic weapons fire - 2 KIAs on the APCs. B-32, B-35, APC 13 & 14 on a sweep with Co. K/3/3. B23 [incorrect, should be B-32] fired 5 canister, 2 HE, when ambushed. 2 KIAs from PCs. 1 NVA/POW. Found 1 AK-47, 2 chi com grenades.

The rest of the story: The APC platoon was actually 2 Army APCs under the command of a Marine Infantry platoon Leader and manned by Marine drivers and machine gunners. The infantry platoon supporting the land clearing operation was from "K" Co 2/3 and the platoon commander was Lt. Oliver North. The bulldozers (approximately 20) were from an Army Engineering unit. The area of operation was north and east of Cam Lo and south of Con Thien. We established a base camp a couple of miles northeast of Cam Lo. The terrain was hilly and covered with thick brush and undergrowth. The objective was to clear all of the brush in order to observe enemy movement south from the DMZ. Eventually there were to be sensors inserted in the cleared area as part of what was later referred to as the McNamara Line.

On 22 February, we completed the land clearing for the day and had escorted the dozers back to our base camp. A spotter plane contacted us and indicated that there was "a bunch of bad guys" just east of our position, heading south. He said that if we got our tanks on the small rise about a click to the east, "It'd be like shooting fish in a barrel". We saddled up B-32, B-35, APC

13 & 14 and with the infantry platoon on board the vehicles we headed east. After about a mile, we came to a deep gully with a narrow trail through it. The spotter plane radioed that on the rise just the other side of the gully we'd have a clear shot at a platoon sized enemy unit. With B-32 in the lead, the APCs next and B-35 in the rear, we entered the gully, single file. Half way through the gully we were ambushed by small arms and .50 cal. Machine gun fire from both sides of the trail. The driver of APC 13, the second vehicle in line, was killed and the APC stopped in the middle of the ambush. I accelerated B-32 through the ambush site, turned around (throwing a track) and went back into the gully. Lt. North riding on my fender was deploying the grunts and firing his shot gun. I swung the turret around to deliver canister fire into the ambush site and knocked North off the fender. We fired .50 cal. and several more canister rounds into the brush on both sides of the trail and the enemy fire ceased. We got another driver into the driver's seat of APC 13 and backed it out of the ambush site.

After we evacuated the KIAs and several wounded grunts, including Lt. North who sustained a couple of broken ribs as a result of being hit by a 90 mm gun barrel, we searched the area and found four NVA dead. I do not remember taking a POW. An artillery strike was called in on our original objective, so we returned to our base camp.

While repairing the track on B-32 I noticed that the glass ring surrounding the TC cupola on the tank had been shattered by the impact of five enemy rounds. The distance from the shattered glass to where I had been manning our .50 cal. machine gun was approximately 5 inches. I jumped down from the hatch and immediately threw up.

Bronze Star Medals were awarded to several Marines for their actions that day, including Lt. North and me. In his first book, entitled "Under Fire", North describes the incident as follows... "the turret swung around and batted me into the air like a baseball".

5. Command Chronology notation: *23 March 1969 - B21 sinking in quicksand at grid 281759. All equipment evacuated off vehicle. 1st Amtrac has recovery vehicle on the way to the position. B43 & 41 dispatched from A2 to recovery site. B21 recovered & moved to Dong Ha.*

The rest of the story: On March 23, 1969, 2nd Platoon, Bravo Company was sent to relieve two 3rd Platoon, "B" Co. tanks at the Oceanview Combat Base. B-21 arrived at Oceanview under the command of a brand new 2nd Lt. He was shown the Oceanview perimeter, gun placements, and tank slots and briefed on operational procedures. B-21 then accompanied the two 3rd Platoon tanks south to the Cua Viet base camp. As we ran south in the tide line, B-21 radioed that he wanted to check out the area to our west just beyond the sand dunes. I recommended that he remain along the tide line. He asked that we run parallel to him and drove over the dune and headed south. The Bravo 3rd platoon tanks continued toward Cua Viet and we could see B-21's radio antenna running parallel to us, behind the dunes. Suddenly, B-21 radioed that he was stuck and then he said that he was sinking. The Bravo 3rd platoon tanks came to the top of the dunes to see the B-21 tank crew and their equipment evacuated from the tank along with the grunts who had been riding on the tank, standing on the dunes. The only evidence of B-21 was the two radio antenna's sticking out of the quicksand. I do not remember an Amtrac being involved but the Bravo 3rd platoon tanks were ordered to return to Cua Viet. I never did find out what happened to the B-21 or the boot 2nd Lt.

6. Command Chronology notation - (There were two reports of this action (*24 March 1969*) in the CCs- the summary report and the S-2 report- both are listed below).

Summary report - Co. B (REIN) in support of the second ARVN Regiment...the following day (24 March) while the company retriever was going to the aid of a mined tank west of A2, it hit a mine and subsequently was attacked by an estimated NVA platoon. The retriever commander distinguished himself by defending his wounded crewmen and damaged vehicle until reinforcements arrived. He was credited with killing seven (7) NVA. A sweep of the area disclosed many drag marks and further disclosed three (3) AK-47 rifles, one (1) SKS rifle, two pair of binoculars and miscellaneous 782 gear.

S-2 report - 24 March 1969, B Co. on a

sweep with elements of the 2nd ARVN Regiment, had two (2) tanks and a retriever detonate A/T mines. When the retriever hit the mine, it came under ground attack by an estimated NVA platoon. Results were two (2) friendly KIA, two (2) friendly WIA, seven (7) NVA (confirmed) KIA, and weapons & equipment captured.

The rest of the story: The above operation was a series of patrols along the demilitarized zone (DMZ), east of Gio Linh and was intended to curtail the flow of NVA infiltrating across the DMZ. A U. S. Army Major was the liaison officer with the 2nd ARVN Regiment and three tanks (B-35, B-?? & B-??) from Bravo Co., 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. We operated out of the "A-2" combat base and patrolled an area approximately three kilometers (clicks) east of A-2 along the DMZ.

On March 24, 1969, the tanks and a company of ARVN had completed a sweep of the area and were returning to A-2, when B-35 hit a mine. I requested that the U. S. Army liaison officer direct the ARVN to set up perimeter security while the tank crew repaired the damage. He replied that he would have the ARVN set up the security. B-3? & B-3? remained nearby providing tank security. The ARVN infantry unit marched past us as if we weren't even there. As the end of the ARVN column neared our position, I again requested ARVN perimeter security and again, the Army liaison officer acknowledged my request. He said that he would get the ARVN to set up a perimeter immediately. I told him the ARVN column was almost out of sight and that no perimeter security had been established. The crew of the stricken tank completed repairing the track without any ARVN infantry support and our three tanks headed toward A-2.

As our tank column limped west, B-3? hit a mine. Again, the tank crew began repairing the track and the only security was provided by our other two tanks. In the meantime the Bravo Co. tank retriever had been dispatched from Vinh Dai to meet us at Route 1, just south of Gio Linh. Staff Sergeant Harold Reinsche was in command of the retriever, and with his four crewmen he awaited our arrival at Route 1.

When our tank hit the second mine, Staff Sgt. Reinsche radioed that he was coming

west to our assistance. As the retriever headed to our position, Sgt. Reinsche told us that he had just passed the end of the ARVN infantry column marching east. None of the Bravo Company vehicles had any ground security, and, as we finished the repairs on B-3?, we heard an explosion and saw a plume of black smoke about 100 yards to our east, just over a small rise.

Sgt. Reinsche informed us that the retriever had hit a mine and his crew had dismantled to repair the damage. We then heard small arms fire and Reinsche radioed that they had been ambushed. I dispatched B-35 (the tank commander (TC) was Cpl. Claude Vargo and his driver was Pfc. Robert Mendez) to the retriever's position. I stayed on the radio with Cpl. Vargo and Sgt. Reinsche. At one point, Sgt. Reinsche told me that he was the only crewman left and he was running out of ammunition. Sgt. Vargo radioed that he had the retriever in sight and was delivering .30 cal. and .50 cal. machine gun fire all around the area surrounding the retriever. Then the fire from the NVA ceased. By this time B-3? was repaired and we moved to the retriever's position as quickly as we could. It was dusk, so I ordered all four vehicles to button up and to shoot at anything that moved. We had "Spooky" flare ships overhead that provided us with "daylight" conditions throughout the night. All of the TC's (Sgt. Vargo, Sgt. Reinsche, Sgt. Bosko and me) remained in radio contact until day break. We arranged for a medevac chopper to arrive at first light. At dawn, a Marine infantry platoon arrived and set up perimeter security. Our KIAs

(Sgt. Wachley and LCpl. Foster) along with our two WIAs were medevaced. There were seven NVA KIAs surrounding the retriever and one NVA KIA lying on the top of the retriever. All of the enemy dead were killed by Sgt. Reinsche, who exhausted all of the ammunition from the .50 cal. machine gun, an M-79 grenade launcher and his .45 cal. pistol. A search of the area surrounding the retriever resulted in the capture of a good amount of NVA equipment and multiple blood trails.

Once the vehicles were repaired, we drove west to Route 1. The retriever returned to Bravo Company Headquarters and the three Bravo 3rd Platoon tanks returned to A-2 combat base. I went directly to the Army liaison officer's command bunker and proceeded to chew him up one side and down the other. The Army major was absolutely silent. I guess he had never been chewed out by a second lieutenant before. As I went outside of his bunker I threw up.

For their heroism, Staff Sergeant Reinsche was awarded the Navy Cross and Sgt. Wachley was awarded the Silver Star medal.

7. Command Chronology notation - *11 May 1969, B-31 hit a mine at YD 315728 while returning to Oceanview with troops from the Cua Viet. Moderate suspension damage sustained and four (4) infantrymen were wounded and required evacuation.*

The rest of the story: Two Bravo company tanks, B-31 and B-3?, were supporting Marine infantry units at the Oceanview

Combat Base. Oceanview was located on top of a large sand dune that overlooked the Ben Hai River and the DMZ. The objective of our operation was to identify and interdict NVA troops crossing the river and the DMZ into South Viet Nam. The tanks would also transport troops and supplies from Cua Viet to Oceanview once a week. On 11 May 1969, we had completed our run south to Cua Viet, picked up supplies and replacement troops, and started back to Oceanview. Approximately a click north of Cua Viet, B-31 hit a mine on the right side, blowing off two road wheels and throwing several grunts off the tank. I was riding in the TC hatch and I looked down and saw an unconscious Marine on the fender. When I reached him, I saw that his right leg had been badly damaged by the blast. He was bleeding out so I applied a tourniquet with my web belt to his groin area. We called for a medevac chopper and placed him on board. He and three other wounded Marines were taken to the Cua Viet aid station. I never found out his name or how badly he was hurt. We repaired the track and continued to Oceanview. I was deaf in my right ear for about three days.

From that day on, we made it a policy that on the runs to and from Oceanview, the tanks would run with one track in the surf and the other on the hard pack sand and that no troops would ride on the vehicles with their legs hanging over the fender. ♦

### To the Great Tank Park

(Continued from page 43)

and a Master of Education from Memphis State University. No matter where he was, he cultivated his view of the Corps and life--for him, they were one and the same. Probably the hardest thing for Dunk was the realization that, after 29 years, in 1979, he was really retiring from his Corps. But Dunk also knew that one never really leaves the Corps. He found that he had a knack for writing and, of course, he wrote about his favorite subject: Marines. He co-authored "Green Side Out," got the hang of putting pen to paper and soloed with "Brown Side Out," "Run in Circles" and "Scream and Shout," which were the first of many books that also included the 1989 "Dunk's Almanac," which, with a stretch of the imagination, could be Sun Tzu's "The Art of War" for busted Marines.

For many years, he published his own works, printing them in his basement under the name of "Gene Duncan Books," in Boonville, MO. Later, in Ft. Wayne, Ind., he found a private printer to continue to make his musings and anecdotes of life in the Corps available. A strong conservative with a Catholic

background, he also expressed his views in a weekly column for a Florida newspaper. During Operation Desert Shield in 1990, Duncan appealed directly to the Commandant of the Marine Corps for a return to active duty, stating, "I want to fight in one war which has public approval before I die." He was told that his impaired hearing might keep him from active duty, but he replied, "I don't want to listen to the Iraqis, I want to shoot them." His application was still being considered when the follow up to Desert Shield, Operation Desert Storm, ended in early 1991. Marines loved Duncan's writing and they often sponsored his visits to bases and stations so he could talk to Marines of all grades, imparting leadership and ethics. He could not, however, escape old Corps habits and probably was seen by some as a little out of step with the modern-day Marine Corps on subjects like women in combat and gays in the military--except when it came to his books, which still sell. We will not see the likes of Maj Duncan again. You always knew where Dunk stood on any issue. Firm in his convictions, he earned his "proficiency and conduct marks" in life by wearing his heart on his sleeve--a heart tattooed with the eagle, globe and anchor of the Corps. He was a friend to many in the Marine Corps tanker community and he will be missed. ♦

### M3 Grease Gun Stories

(Continued from page 15)

into my embarrassed theory. The manufacturer's stamp was in tiny script and not in block letters like most other guns. It was just in front of the forward sling mount, or some models had it just below the ejection button at an angle, it read: "Guide". "Never heard of them", I thought.



Back in the States, I would later learn that "Guide" stood for the Guide Lamp Division of GM, a company that stamped out headlights and hubcaps in Indiana. And you know, except for the barrel, that damned gun looked every bit like a cheaply stamped hubcap of the 1940s.

Years later, on a tour of the Aberdeen Proving Grounds, during one of our reunions, Dr. Atwater, curator of the museum, said it cost the government \$15 to make an M3A1 sub-machinegun... and I believe him!

## Ooops!

BY JOHN WEAR

Our tank sat at the Dong Ha tank ramp in the middle of our quarterly PM so today I decide that it is time to clean all of the tank's onboard weapons. The first one to get the PM is the .45 caliber "grease gun." What a piece of shit this useless weapon is. It is too heavy, totally inaccurate and it rusts far too easily in the hot humid weather of Vietnam. I take it off of the mount that is on the inside of the turret and I see that it is filthy and rusty. I bring it and a loaded magazine into the transit tent where we are staying. I pop the 20 rounds out of the magazine and clean the inside making sure that the spring works well. Then after cleaning the entire weapon, I reload the magazine and then stick it in to the gun to check its functioning. Opps! Now the damn magazine is stuck. No matter how hard I pull on it, the stuck magazine just will not budge. So I ask Frank Cruz, one of the other tank crewmen who was in the tent, to pull on the magazine as I carefully pull the bolt back. I figure that I can stick my finger inside of the open chamber and push

the magazine out from the inside as the bolt is held back. As I gently pull the bolt back, Frank gives a might yank on the magazine and all of a sudden the gun slips from my grip. In losing my grip, I release the bolt. BAM!!! The first round in the magazine gets chambered as the bolt moved forward and the gun goes off. Everyone inside of the tent is stunned into silence. Oh God! Where did the bullet go? I am holding my breath just waiting for one of the Marines in the tent to begin to moan and groan with a .45 slug in his head or his body. Other than smoke from the round firing...there is nothing to show for the accidental discharge. Then I look toward the opposite end of the tent and about five inches above my driver, Staffo's head. There is a brand new hole. Thank God! It missed my driver and spared me going to the brig for a long - long time. We quickly stow all weapons back inside of our tank and the transit tent empties as we all head out for other parts of the tank park... before someone starts looking from where the shot came. ♦

### From the archives

Quantico, Virginia, Sept. 6, 1955

"Marines Demonstrate new Anti-Tank Weapon. The Marines puts its newest anti-tank weapon through its paces tonight in a public demonstration, the first held showing the tank destroyer in action. The weapon consists of six 106mm rifles mounted on a light, fast and maneuverable tracked vehicle. The rifles are recoilless which accounts for the terrific backblast as one of the six guns is fired in the above picture. The light streak is from a tracer bullet used in finding night targets." AP WIREPHOTO (Magazine article courtesy of Rick Walters)

Editor's Note: The press always seems to get the facts wrong even back in 1955. They also failed to mention the name of the vehicle or its model number.



# V. A. News & Updates

Go to our website for more health related info.  
[www.USMCVTA.org](http://www.USMCVTA.org)

**PTSD Update 62:** Irritable Bowel Syndrome in OIF,OEF, Desert Storm and Vietnam Veterans, listed as IBS for VA Claims, is a symptom that should be explored to get more answers on the root cause. Referrals need to be made to rule out Cancers and other diseases such as Crohn's Disease. A new study contends Crohn's disease may cause post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). The study included nearly 600 Swiss adults with Crohn's disease, an incurable inflammatory bowel disorder that causes severe pain and diarrhea. The study participants underwent PTSD assessment at the start of the study and 19% of them were found to have the disorder. All the participants were monitored for 18 months. The researchers found that Crohn's patients with PTSD were more than 13 times likelier to experience worsening symptoms than those without PTSD. The study appeared 2 DEC in the online edition of Frontline Gastroenterology. Crohn's can't be cured but PTSD can, and doctors treating Crohn's patients need to be alert for PTSD and refer patients for appropriate therapy, said the researchers, led by Roland von Kaenel, a professor with Bern University Hospital, in Switzerland. PTSD is typically triggered by violence, natural disasters and emergency situations. But a growing body of research shows that serious illness, along with diagnostic and treatment procedures, may trigger the psychological condition. Over a long period of time, PTSD can permanently change the body's hormonal and immune responses, making a person more prone to serious health problems, the researchers said. –In most cases, patients avoid talking about cures which remind them of having the disease, •the researchers wrote in a news release from the journal's publisher. •Such behavior may unwillingly be encouraged by the usual shortness of

consultation time and unfamiliarity of [gut specialists] in dealing with the psychological needs of wwtheir patients. • The Crohn's and Colitis Foundation of America has more about Crohn's disease at <http://www.cdfa.org/info/about/crohns>. [Source: BMJ journals, news release 1Dec 2010 ++]

**Nocturia:** A new study finds that one in five U.S. men have to get up at least twice a night to empty their bladders -- which for some could signal an underlying medical problem or even contribute to poorer health. Known as nocturia, those frequent overnight trips to the bathroom can be a sign of a health condition, ranging from a urinary tract infection to diabetes to chronic heart failure. In men, a benign enlargement of the prostate can also be a cause.

For some people, the constant sleep disruptions can themselves cause problems -- contributing to depression symptoms or, particularly in older adults, falls. On the other hand, getting up during the night to urinate can also be normal. If you drink a lot of fluids close to bedtime, for example, don't be surprised if your bladder wakes you up at night. Nocturia also becomes more common with age. Part of that is related to older adults' higher rate of medical conditions. But it could also result from a decrease in bladder capacity that comes with age, explained Dr. Alayne D. Markland, the lead researcher on the new study, which appears in the Journal of Urology.

Her team's findings -- based on a government health study of a nationally representative sample of U.S. adults -- give a clearer picture of just how common nocturia is among men. The researchers found that among 5,300 U.S.

men age 20 and up, 21% said that in the past month, they had gotten up at least twice per night to urinate. Nocturia was more common among African-American men (30%) than those of other races and ethnicities (20%). Not surprisingly, it also increased with age: Just 8% of men ages 20 to 34 reported it, compared with 56% of men age 75 or older. The higher rate among African Americans is one of the more interesting findings from the study, said Markland, of the Birmingham VA Medical Center and the University of Alabama at Birmingham. The extra risk was not explained by higher rates of medical conditions among black men, or racial disparities in education or income. Future studies, Markland said, should try to uncover the reasons for the higher rate of nocturia among African-American men.

Other factors linked to an increased risk of nocturia included prostate enlargement, a history of prostate cancer, high blood pressure and depression. It's not entirely clear if all of those problems cause, or result from, nocturia. With depression, for example, Markland said that poor sleep caused by nocturia could contribute to depression symptoms. On the other hand, men with depression may have sleep problems and be more apt to get up to use the bathroom; in that case, it would not necessarily be a full bladder triggering the trip to the bathroom. Nocturia can also be a side effect of some medications, such as diuretics used to treat high blood pressure. This study did not have information on men's medication use. The bottom line for men is that bothersome nocturia is something they should bring up to their doctor, according to Markland. "I think that someone who is having their sleep disrupted with two or more episodes at night should have

it addressed," she said. If an underlying medical cause, like diabetes, is to blame, then it's important to have that problem treated. In other cases, Markland said, lifestyle changes may do the trick.

"Avoiding caffeine and a large fluid intake at night may help," she noted, as may other lifestyle tactics, like adjusting your sleep habits. One recent study of 56 older adults with nocturia found that lifestyle changes -- including fluid restriction, limiting any excess hours in bed, moderate daily exercise, and keeping warm while sleeping -- helped more than half of the patients significantly cut down their overnight trips to the bathroom. There are also medications available specifically for overactive bladder and nocturia. Those include a synthetic version of a hormone that keeps the body from making urine at night, a drug that blocks the ability of the bladder muscles to contract, and antidepressants that make it harder to urinate by increasing tension at the bladder neck. Several of Markland's colleagues on the study have a financial relationship with companies that market those drugs, including Astellas Pharmaceuticals Inc. and Pfizer Inc. [SOURCE: Reuters Amy Norton article 2 Feb & Journal of Urology 19 Jan 2011 ++]

*The following article is reprinted from the Bay State Veteran Spring Issue of their newsletter wrote by Richard Levesque, Director, Chief Service Officer, Veterans Benefits Program, Mass. State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc.*

## The DD Form 214/WGO 53 – A Most Important Document

He was an elderly World War II Veteran who, after the war, lived the American dream. The house, the two car garage, the kids and 2 and a half dogs behind a white picket fence.

Time passed, the kids grew up and they grew old. The Veteran retired and that thing that happens to so many retirees in their older years happened to him – he got sick. At age eighty-seven he passed away leaving an elderly wife. This is where our story really begins...

The Veteran had told his wife and family many times that he had earned his final honors, flag draped casket, firing squad, and most importantly he wanted to be buried in the

National Cemetery in Bourne. The one thing he didn't do was to give someone in his family his military separation documentation; WGO 53 or as we affectionately call it, the DD 214.

For your information, the DD 214, as we know it, did not come into being until the Korean Conflict (wasn't a war, remember? Tell my Dad that). The WWII Veterans were given the WGO 53 and it was a negative image (black & white) that carried all the Veterans information like a DD 214 does today. In many cases, on the reverse is the Honorable Discharge certificate.

In this case, our Veteran never gave one to any one in his family, not even a copy. Although wounded and decorated, he never used the Veterans Administration (VA) for anything. So, when the final arrangements were being made, the wife told the funeral parlor that she wanted his final honors and that she also wanted to respect his wishes that he be buried in the National Cemetery. The funeral parlor asked for his separation documents.

She didn't have them. The family went back to the house and looked everywhere for these documents. Nothing. He did not have his papers anywhere in the house that they could find. My office was called and with the information we had we checked with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

There was no record of his service. We checked with the National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) in St. Louis, Missouri. I called the "special number" we have and spoke with an individual who was apprised of the situation. After checking their records and the records at the National Archives, there was no record of this Veteran.

They believed that his records were completely consumed in the Great Fire of 1973 at the NPRC and were totally lost. As we have said, there was no record of him with VA at all.

The Veteran was laid to rest without his flag covering his casket; without his final honors and; without his plot at the National Cemetery. To this day, no one has ever found any documentation that he served in the US Military. Proof would have been found at NPRC, except for that fire in 1973.

The Veteran has a brother and sister surviving him and they remember his service, but those statements are insufficient. In my own family, we had a similar situation with my father-in-law who was a survivor of Omaha Beach. We never placed his Memorial Stone on his grave.

At the time of his death, VA was not issuing stones to Veterans who had deceased at that time (1994). We finally applied for his stone. I well remember his WGO 53, but, for the life of me, we couldn't find it in the house. I applied to NPRC for a replacement certificate. We were advised that his records had also burned up in the Great Fire of 1973.

But in my father-in-law's case, there were a few documents that survived the fire and we were able to get a Certificate of Service from NPRC that satisfied VA and his stone was placed on his grave. We lucked out!

The lesson: These are not the first situations where the records were misplaced, lost, or burned. And these were not and probably will not be the last time we have problems securing documentation of military service. The lesson is to please make copies of your WWI WGO 53, Honorable Discharge, or your DD 214.

Don't put it in a "safe place". Give it to your spouse or children (or both). These documents are important in many ways. They prove your military service and open the doors to all your final honors. They are the key that gets you into the National Cemetery or even the State Veterans Cemeteries. Without proof of your service, you will not get in.

Give them to someone. Don't want to part with the original?? Make copies and give them to your children and your spouse (if living). When the time comes, someone will have that document to give over to the Funeral Home. And don't procrastinate. . . .do it right away. The Grim Reaper waits for no man.

Richard Levesque, Chief Service Officer Veterans' Benefits Program, Massachusetts State Council, Vietnam Veterans of America, Inc. ◆

# An Open Letter to the VTA Membership

I'm choosing this forum to address the membership concerning some conflicts that have developed of late concerning the missions of the Vietnam Tankers Association and the Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation. As a charter member of the Vietnam Tankers Assn., I wish to share some history of these two organizations. My belief is that having an informed membership will encourage more productive dialogue between these two organizations in the future.

Richard Carey initially organized the Vietnam Tankers Association. His vision became a reality when the first reunion was held in Washington, D.C. in 1999. He was elected President, Bill Wright was Treasurer, and John Wear was elected Secretary. Many of us were also members of the Marine Corps Tankers Association (MCTA) at the time, so a logical next step was for the VTA to be accepted into the MCTA as a chapter within that parent organization. Lt. Col. Ray Stewart's Vietnam Tankers Historical Foundation (VTHF) was also launched at that initial organization meeting in D.C., in partnership with the Vietnam Tankers Assn.

At the next VTA reunion in Minneapolis in 2001, I was approached by Dick Carey and asked if I would be interested in running for Vice-President. As a "left coast" member, Dick thought I was in a good location to assist with a reunion in California in the future. I accepted the nomination and was confirmed by the Board of Directors. For the next four years, I served as Vice President of both the VTA and the VTHF (Lt. Col. Ray Stewart's organization). During that time, a conflict developed between the MCTA and the VTA over the MCTA by-laws, which only allowed chapters based upon regional affiliation. As a result, the VTA left the MCTA and became a separate non-profit veterans organization. The VTHF remained "joined at the hip" with the VTA.

A successful reunion was held at Seattle in 2003. The VTA and VTHF were in

sync, mutually supportive of each others missions. Ray Stewart conducted oral history interviews using a video camera and recording equipment purchased by the VTA.

In 2005, at the reunion in Philadelphia, some major changes occurred. Dick Carey resigned as President of the VTA due to health reasons. I resigned as Vice President also due to health reasons. Bill Wright moved up to President, John Wear as Vice President. The newly elected treasurer and secretary resigned soon after the reunion. I heard through the grapevine that it was largely because, when Dick Carey moved from Ohio to Massachusetts, he did not re-register the VTA with the IRS, thus potentially jeopardizing our non-profit status. No personal history interviews were conducted at that reunion. Newly elected President Bill Wright soon resigned, thus leaving the VTA leaderless for a few months. John Wear stepped into the breach and took over the reins of the organization. By mid-2006, I had overcome my prostate cancer situation, and John asked if I would take over as Treasurer and help him get the VTA back on sound financial footing [and we did that].

At the next VTA Board of Directors (BoD) meeting that fall of 2006, Bob Peavey was nominated and confirmed as the Vice-President. Some months later, Ron Knight was appointed as Secretary. Note also that John Wear had our organization officially re-registered with the IRS as a "Not for Profit Pennsylvania Corporation."

Bob Peavey took over publication of the Sponson Box. I've forgotten the specifics, but a rift began developing between the VTA and the VTHF around that time. The fallout from all of that drama was that the VTHF was not represented at the 2007 Las Vegas reunion, thus no personal history interviews were conducted there. The VTHF ceased submitting historical articles to the Sponson Box, as they had in previous years. In an attempt to patch up

differences, John Wear and Ray Stewart had a face to face meeting in DC. Without going into detail as to their agenda, that meeting seemed to resolve differences.

The next VTA BoD meeting was held in Atlanta in 2008. The VTHF president did not attend. The BoD authorized \$2,000 annually for historical research at that meeting. In an attempt to be more accountable with our membership funds, the Board voted to require that any member wishing to request such funding would have to submit a plan stating how those funds would be spent. The VTHF President chose not to avail himself of that money, preferring to use his own personal funds for the Foundation's business.

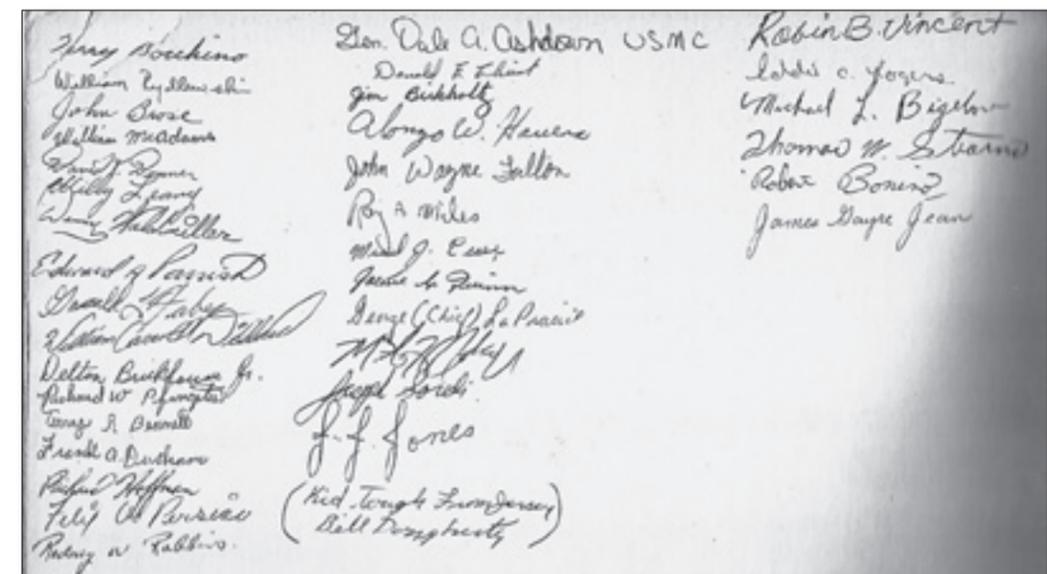
The present situation finds the VTHF refusing to accept any of the funds the VTA has authorized them for historical research. It has been five years since the VTHF president has submitted any historical articles to the Sponson Box. Instead, the VTHF has developed a separate monthly e-mail newsletter called the Breach Block to compete with the Sponson Box. They now have their own web site [software paid for by the VTA], solicit donations from the VTA membership, and hold online auctions to raise funds.

Unless some serious intervention is undertaken soon by members of these two quality organizations, I see the day coming when these unresolved turf wars will result in the VTA and VTHF going their separate ways. Perhaps it is too late and the die is cast. I'd hate to see that schism happen. Call me a "traditionalist", but I liked being a Vietnam Tankers Association member when the VTA and VTHF were "joined at the hip" and mutually supportive.

James "Jim" Coan  
VTA Treasurer



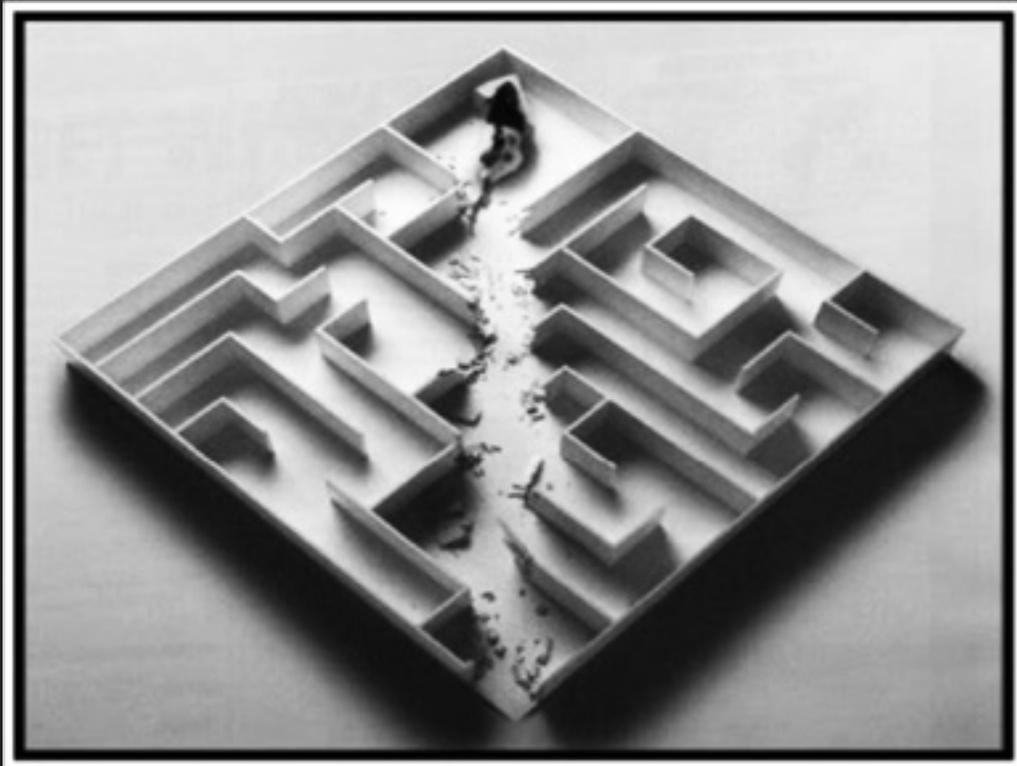
Tracked Vehicle School Class 2-67  
Graduated 9/27/1966 Camp Pendleton



Names signed on the back of the above photo. Can anyone  
Put a name to a face?

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

Please get your 2011 dues paid up! Send \$30 to:  
John Wear, USMC VTA, 5537 Lower Mountain Road, New Hope, PA 18938



**U.S. MARINE CORPS LOGIC**

IF YOU DON'T UNDERSTAND THIS, YOU'VE NEVER MET MARINES.