



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

## THE ONTOS ISSUE



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# USMC VTA 20th Reunion Seattle, Washington Oct 31 – Nov 4, 2019

(Reunion Schedule and Registration Form on last four pages)

## Remember the Past by being Present

### These Good Men

BY: MICHAEL NORMAN

"I now know why men who have been to war yearn to reunite. Not to tell stories or look at old pictures. Not to laugh or weep. Comrades gather because they long to be with the men who once acted their best, men who suffered and sacrificed, who were stripped raw, right down to their humanity.

"I did not pick these men. They were delivered by fate and the U.S. Marine Corps. But I know them in a way I know no other men. I have never given anyone such trust. They were willing to guard something more precious than my life. They would have carried my reputation, the memory of me. It was part of the bargain we all made, the reason we were so willing to die for one another.

"I cannot say where we are headed. Ours are not perfect friendships; those are the province of legend and myth. A few of my comrades drift far from me now, sending back only occasional word. I know that one day even these could fall to silence. Some of the men will stay close, a couple, perhaps, always at hand.

"As long as I have memory, I will think of them all, every day. I am sure that when I leave this world, my last thought will be of my family and my comrades . . . such good men."

### Election of Association Officers and Directors

If you would like to run for a position on the Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, you will need to submit your name and desired position in writing. Elections will be held during the business meeting of the reunion in Seattle. Positions available are: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and four director chairs. You must be a member in good standing to be eligible to run for office. All who want to be considered for election must submit the request in writing to the Nomination Committee Chairman: SgtMaj William "JJ" Carroll, USMC (ret), 2725 Saddle Court (Unit 4), Stillwater, MN 55082-4583, no later than August 31, 2019. If you have a question or need further details, you may contact SgtMaj Carroll at email: sgtmajwfc@comcast.net or call him at (651) 342-0913 (CST). No nominations will be accepted from the floor during the annual meeting in Seattle.

### Hue City–Feb 1968



MAC-V Compound



Resupply Convoy



On the Streets

### Letter from the President

ONTOS!!! Boy! Do we have stories and photos!!! This is the first ever all Ontos issue. And just a reminder, when we were on Active Duty in the mid-1960s, USMC anti-tank battalions were organic to the tank battalions, so as the saying goes, "We were joined at the hip."

RECRUITING: We are printing a number of extra copies of this Ontos issue and we are planning to mail them to all of the Ontos crewmen who are not currently members of the VTA in an effort to get them to join. All of you VTA members who are 0353s, if you would give your non-member buddies a call and successfully persuade them to join the brotherhood, that would be great. Thank you in advance.

GETTING THE BAND BACK TOGETHER AGAIN: For anyone who read Steve Falk's wonderful story in the 2019 Reunion Section of the last issue of our magazine, then you will perhaps know and understand the sometimes difficult and yet very rewarding process it takes in order to get "the band back together." It surely would be outstanding if a few more if you would make the effort to seek out and find some of your old Vietnam tank battalion buddies that are the missing and who would most likely benefit from joining our brotherhood. We currently have approximately 500 VTA members. Our best guess is that there are about 500 more qualified-for-VTA-membership Marines still out there and who may be waiting to be found by you.

SEATTLE 2019: Please make your plans to attend our 20th Anniversary reunion. We all know that life is short and living with regrets is not a great way to live. Please be sure to gather up all of your Vietnam photos and put them in an album to share in the Torsion Bar hospitality room. Also, please find some really neat collectables to bring and donate to our fund raising auctions.

A REMINDER: Your stories are the life blood of our magazine. We cannot thank you enough for your good spirit, for your candor and for your willingness to revisit memories that, in many cases, you would rather leave undisturbed.

"Ask not what your country can do for you; ask what you can do for your country."

– John F. Kennedy –



A WORD FROM YOUR TREASURER: And that word is "Donation!" Our thanks to all who have continued to provide donations, those who started in 2018 to send a few extra bucks. And from Jim Coan: "Thanks for the donations to the Scholarship Program." We can't thank you enough for the extra money. It allows us to get an early start on the next reunion and for us to get four Sponson Box magazines in your mail boxes. If anyone needs a donation letter from me for tax reporting just shoot me an email or give me a call (Phone: 585-613-6564).

On the boring side of my job, I can honestly say we have the documents to track every penny in and out plus correspondence from the IRS that appropriate reports have been filed. If anyone has any questions, let me know.

Looking forward to the dues and donation checks. Your written comments are always appreciated. Remember, I live in Western NY so the winter is much like Mt. Fuji. The incoming mail is the high point of my day.

Semper Fi!

Bruce Van Apeldoorn  
2nd Plt. 'C' Co. 1st Tk. Bn. 67/68

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Wife: Marguerite  
Recruited by: Welcome Back!

**Boy! Wouldn't it be terrific if each former 0353 Ontos crewman who is currently a VTA member could get at least one of his Ontos veteran buddies who are not members to become part of the VTA brotherhood?**

## Member Info Changes

**Ev Tunget**  
3601 Steve St.  
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George Flaviani



ON THE COVER: An artist's interpretation of the action in Hue City during Tet '68

## USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. Scholarship Program

The Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association has authorized the establishment of a college scholarship grant program to assist the children or grandchildren of Association members with their undergraduate college tuition. Successful applicants will receive a \$1,000 grant for the requested academic year. If, in subsequent years, the student continues to maintain a cumulative 3.0 GPA or higher, they will automatically be eligible for additional one-year scholarship grants, not to exceed four years of undergraduate studies.

To be eligible for scholarship consideration, the prospective applicant must meet the following criteria:

1. Be a child or grandchild of a current member of the USMC VTA.
2. Have a minimum GPA of 3.0 upon graduation from the last academic institution attended.
3. Be enrolled for a minimum of twelve (12) semester credit hours in an accredited higher education institution.
4. Be a citizen of the United States or Canada.
5. Agree to authorize the Vietnam Tankers Assn. to publicize the award in the organization's newsletter (The Sponson Box) and on its web site.
6. All application materials must be received no later than June 30th of the ensuing academic year. These required items include: a high school or college transcript confirming the mandatory minimum 3.0 GPA; two

letters of reference from current or former teachers or academic advisors; A letter in the applicant's own words indicating future educational goals and objectives, past accomplishments, both in school and in their community; and, a brief essay (500 word max.) on the topic: Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans.

This most worthy Scholarship Fund established by the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association has ensured that our legacy of continued service to the community will be honored far into the future. Since the program commenced in 2011, we have awarded 11 new scholarships; 18 scholarships have also been awarded to repeat awardees. Members and supporters of the USMC VTA can help insure continued educational and scholarship support through donations or inheritance bequests to the Scholarship Fund. The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association was established in 1999 and organized as a tax exempt 501(c)19 non-military veteran's association. If you wish to make a tax-deductible donation, please make the check payable to the USMC VTF Scholarship Fund and mail to Bruce Van Apeldoorn, Treasurer, 73 Stanton St., Rochester, NY 14611-2837.

To obtain an application for the USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. Scholarship Program, the student must contact James Coan, Scholarship Program Chairman, at zjimco@aol.com. Mail all completed application forms to James Coan at 5374 E. Lantana Drive, Sierra Vista, AZ 85650-5401 prior to the deadline date of June 30th.

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### What the VTA Has Done for Me

Since my wife got me my USMC VTA membership, and some 50 years later ... this is what the brotherhood has done for me: I was honored to be included in the book A Tribute to Tanks by Clyde Hoch. This happened after I found my old TC, Jan "Turtle" Wendling and after he and I talked about the night I got hit on Mutters Ridge. That night I was medevaced to the hospital ship USS Repose. And at the time, I was told that the crew of my tank were all KIA and that I was the only survivor.

Not that long ago, I was again having more PTSD issues thinking of my dead fellow crew members, when one day I saw the name Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz in a recent issue of the Sponson Box magazine. So, I got ahold of Turtle and he got me Tree's contact info. Jan also asked Tree if I could contact him.

Tree had been my TC with Grady Nappier and another crewman who I only remember as "Brown" when I was

WIA. For all of these years, I believed that these men were all KIA at the same time that I got hit. Then, when I talked to Tree, he said that I was the only critically wounded crewman that night. He said that he and Grady got me to the triage area for first aid and medevac. He told me no one died on our crew that night, but ever since he was not sure of my condition and that he had continued to hope that I had made it home alive.

So, in 2019, for the celebration of the 50th year of my wounding, I sent Tree, Grady and Turtle a Vietnam War 50th Anniversary Pin. It was sent to those Marines who saved my life July 29, 1969. Then, sometime later, Grady told me that Brown had made it home but had since passed away on his home soil. Amen.

I am so proud to be a member of this wonderful association since now some of my ghosts are laid to rest. I will be in Seattle because Tree asked me to come and to see all >>

who I thought were KIA and to again feel the camaraderie of the USMC tankers who served with me. 'finding my brothers after 50 years of guilt and self-pity in thinking I failed in my duties that night. Looking forward to meeting you, sir, and shaking your hand in appreciation. Thank you sincerely

L/Cpl David C. Turner, USMC

### Seattle Bound

Ronald Dudek writes: Just want to let you know we are all locked and loaded for the Seattle reunion. Going to do it First-Class. I am sure you have heard of the "Empire Builder" passenger train from Chicago to Seattle. The Great Northern Railroad used to run it but now Amtrak has it all. I have a very large model train collection and I know a lot about our American railroads and their history. On the way back home we are taking American Airlines First-class.

Later, when I accompany the first "Angel Flight" tour back to Vietnam, I am going to give three VTA challenge coins to the Fox Morning crew. How cool is that?

Ricard Carmer writes: I just finished reading my latest Sponson Box and, as usual, an excellent publication. I am really sorry I wasn't able to make the mini-reunion, it sounds like it was fantastic. And speaking of reunions, I just reserved a room in Seattle and am writing in hopes that you are in need of a photographer. I'm coming either way, but it would be nice to be wanted. See you soon.

Larry Williams writes: I will have one or two knives for the auction at the next reunion. I missed the last one but I'll make it up in Seattle.

With regard to the story "The Fight to Keep RT 9 Open" by Jim Coan: That night our US Army "Duster" track was assigned to "Task Force Robbie" and was on the west side of Cam Lo Hill doing perimeter guard. During my shift you could see Cam Lo village from our location. When the NVA hit the District Headquarters compound it looked like 4th of July with green and red tracers going everywhere. Then it happened, a radio transmission from the compound asking for help. The radio operator was actually begging for help, as if the end of the world was near.

My Track (B-242) was part of the rapid reaction force. Whoever was in charge of the task force saved lots of lives as we cut across the dry rice patties heading to Cam Lo. Later we learned the NVA had set up an ambush along that road that came in from the east along Highway 9. Since we drove cross country, we missed the gook ambush. I remember the USMC tankers firing "bee hive" rounds at some of the NVA that tried to cross the river.

As we pulled into the outside of the Dist. HQ compound it looked like HELL had come thru that area. All of the cannoneers for the track were exposed from the waist up but we made it. We also had an M-60 "pig" (machinegun) mounted on the rear of the turret which I manned. There were lots of enemy bodies on the wire and around the area.

This was one of my most remembered and frightening moments as a young Army guy. But I was so very proud to be part of this USMC rapid reaction force "Task Force Robbie." To this day I will never forget the pleading for help on the radio by that operator. As I was reading the story in this issue, I remember my commanding officer, it was Captain Raymond McKenna. A hand salute to this warrior!

With Respect

Larry Williams

B242 duster

B battery 1st/44arty,

(Automatic Weapon Self-Propelled )

And proud member of the USMC VTA

### The Untold Story of Robert Mueller's Time in the Vietnam War

*The official story is that the above young US Marine infantry platoon leader was awarded the Bronze Star for valor and a Purple Heart after being shot. Then when his tour in Vietnam ended, he got a desk job in Washington, DC, and decided to attend law school.*

Bob Skeels writes: Bob Mueller and I were OCS classmates at Quantico, VA, graduating with the legendary TBS Hotel class of August 1968. Coincidentally, we were also with the same USMC infantry regiment and the same battalion, 2nd Bn, 4th Marines serving our tours in that intense Vietnam DMZ jungle war. Bob was a grunt platoon leader with Hotel Company, 2/4, and I was, for my first 90 days in-country, a grunt platoon leader with Echo Company, 2/4.

Our main objective was to continue to deny the enemy all that real estate below the DMZ, the 40 miles from the South China Sea all the way west to the Laotian border. We served our tour of duty at the same time and dates in Vietnam, late 1968 to late 1969. We also served together as members of the 2/4 Battalion in the 12-day intense battle, "Assault on Mutter's Ridge" that began with our initial multi-battalion chopper assault on Dec.7,1968.

Bob adds: I wrote about that specific battle in the most recent past issue of the Sponson Box magazine. My 90 days with these magnificent grunts ended the following month on Jan 3, 1969 and I cheerfully transitioned over to my duty as a Marine tank platoon leader with Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion for the remainder of my one-year tour of duty.

God Bless America and God Bless all those Marine Grunts and all of the Marine tankers and grunts that served in this long, horrific war.

### Thank You

Jim Coan responds: I can't thank you enough for the first-class job you did with the Time in the Barrel book review in the recent Sponson Box. I wrote that book with Vietnam tankers in mind, knowing they would be able to identify with what my tank platoon endured at Con Thien.

You have really found your niche as editor/publisher of the Sponson Box. I'm sure I speak for the rest of our mem-

bership in wishing you continued success with producing one of the best veteran-oriented publications out there.

Lee Dill writes: I am not sure what you did for a living. But I do know one thing: You produce one hell of a great product with the Sponson Box. It consistently gets better with each issue. Many thanks for your time and effort.

Gary McDaniel writes: Just finished reading The Box and wanted to tell you how much I enjoyed your appraisal of Cronkite, Johnson, and Kerry. Hooray! Methinks you see them just as I do. I stopped by a local fast food restaurant for a quick burger and as I was trained, I always remove my hat when indoors. I have to admit that it's my Corps training and good manners late in life. When I placed my hat on the bench, I noticed it was MADE IN VIETNAM!!! Probably by slave labor. Fifty-Eight Thousand lives lost; what a shame!

P.S. The Vietnam War was so disruptive to our country that it brought about the end of the Draft. I had a person stop by the store the other day and he remarked that today an E-5 with a few years' service is pulling down \$55,000 per year in salary/benefits. I think I was a bargain as an E-5 in 1966 since I made \$270 per month (if my faulty memory is correct).

### A 16" Gift From the US Navy

Back in Vietnam we used A-1 Sky Raiders and UH-1 B "Huey" Gunships for close air support. One day we were in a firefight and called for artillery support. We called in the target's coordinates and the next thing we heard was a "Volkswagen" go flying over our heads. Then there was no more enemy from the tree line where Charlie was. It was a 16" round from the USS New Jersey which was steaming onto "Dixie Station" in the South China Sea for the first time. A very effective way to end an engagement with the bad guys! May God Bless the United States Navy.

Joel Leson

(Then) Plt Leader 3/4 USMC

(Now) retired Lt Col USA

### Family Day at Camp Pendleton 1984

It appears as if the tank crewmen may have been getting prettier back then.



### Just thought you might like to know why I joined the Marines:

All journeys start with a step, except mine. My journey started with a stumble! I had finished my first two years of college in a fairly unremarkable way—a 2.5 GPA, flat broke, 5'-6" short with the physique of a teddy bear, and much too naive about the world. In high school, I had taken the ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery), and the Air Force recruiter said that I qualified to join the Air Force. I didn't want to get drafted into the Army, and applied for enlistment in Jacksonville, Florida, where my efforts to complete college had stalled. The Air Force recruiter in Jacksonville was booked solid with enlistments for months to come. He referred me to the Navy recruiter, who smirked at me after giving me the same "I'm full" story and referred me to a very strange looking person. He was wearing a white hat, tan shirt with green stripes on it, blue trousers with a red stripe down each leg, and the shiniest damn shoes I had ever seen. He was the U. S. Marine recruiter, and he told me to follow him. He ordered me to take a seat in his office, and I must admit that this was the last place I ever expected to be. Our conversation went like this: He said, "You need to be a Marine." I said, "You guys get killed!." He replied, "If you go to the Army, you're going into combat. If you go into "My" Marine Corps, you're going into combat, but we're going to prepare you for it. At least you'll have a chance to survive." That seemed logical. I said, "OK."

The next day I had my physical and the following day I was at the Jacksonville Naval Air Station in a hangar. There was a bunch of recruits standing around. A Navy senior chief and an Army sergeant were calling us to order. The sergeant yelled, "All men going to the Air Force go over there. All men going to the Navy, go down there. All men going to the Army, come over here." All that was left out of at least a hundred or more recruits were about three or four of us. Somebody said, "You poor sons of bitches." We few guys looked at each other, put our heads up, even though our peckers were dragging, and boarded the bus for Parris Island, S.C.

S/F

Jim (Mike) Ledford

### Leave It to the Doggies



## Marine Arrogance

A Marine sergeant wrote this in response to an Army guy who posted a comment on a Marine Corps site that he was sick and tired of "Marine Arrogance."

The sergeant said: "I think that's what makes Marines special, if only in our own minds, is that elusive quality of Esprit de Corps. It's the fact that we, as individual Marines, don't feel that we are individual Marines. When we wear our uniform, when we hear our Hymn, when we go into battle, we are going with every other Marine who ever wore the uniform."

Standing behind us are the Marines who fought during the birth of our nation. We're standing with the Marines who fought in WWI and gave birth to the legend of the "Teufel Hunden," or "Devil Dogs." We are standing with the Marines who took Iwo and Tarawa and countless other blood-soaked islands throughout the Pacific.

We are standing with the "Frozen Chosin" and our beloved Chesty Puller. We are standing with the Marines who battled at Hue City and Khe Sanh and the muddy rice paddies of South East Asia. We are standing with the Marines who fought in Desert Storm and Iraqi Freedom and now are fighting in Afghanistan.

Like real brothers, their blood courses through our veins, and when we go into battle, we would rather lay down our lives than be a disappointment to them. We carry on our backs their legacy, their deaths, and their honor. We carry that for the rest of our lives.

The Marine Corps uniform doesn't come off when our active duty is over. We wear it daily in our attitude and our love of Corps and country. We wear it on our tattoos and our bumper stickers. We wear it on our hearts.

It is why, no matter where we are in the world, on November 10th, every Marine celebrates the Marine Corps birthday. It's why we'll never be an army of 1. It's why we never stop being Marines. It's why, for most of us, being a Marine isn't something we were. It's something we are.

It's the most important part of who and what we are. Some say we're arrogant. We say we're proud. We have a right to be proud. We are the United States Marines, the most feared and ferocious group of warriors to walk the face of this earth.

When America's enemies formulate their battle plans, they plan on going around Marine units because they know damn well that they can't go through them. We are what other branches wish they were.

We are the modern-day Spartans. This isn't bragging. It's written in the battle history of our country. When there's a parade and the Marines march by, everyone pays a little more attention. Some say "Arrogance." We call it "pride." It's why, in a crowd of servicemen, you can always spot the Marine. Why are Marines special? I don't know. We just are.

Saepius Exertus, Semper Fidelis, Frater Infinitas, Often Tested, Always Faithful, Brothers Forever,

Submitted by Jim Coan

## Boot Camp Platoon 177



John Hunter writes: This photo is my KTM motocross bike, the number 177 which was my USMC boot camp platoon number.

## Top Jim Langford

*John Wear was looking at some old emails and found one from middle 2015, before Top Jim Langford passed away. Jim was commenting on his daughter and his granddaughter visiting us during our 2015 reunion in Washington, DC.*

I am sending you a story I sent to the Tankers Historical something or other and I probably got it all wrong. Do what you can to make me look less the idiot I really am, will you?

I also want to thank you for taking care of my girls at the DC Reunion. They both called me and were happy as all get out except that you were the only one who knew me! The other day I got a phone call from Andy Anderson and we had a long chat. He might get out here to see me one of these days.

You know about my bad heart, don't you? I don't want to blab about it anymore if I can help it.

Semper Fidelis  
Jim

## NVA Sapper Cemetery

John Wear writes: I have a US Marine Vietnam veteran buddy who was a "cannon cocker" during the war. He recently told me that he was contacted by a retired Army guy who had seen his article on the 3rd Bn, 12th Marines website where my buddy wrote about the very bloody 1966 NVA attack on the Cam Lo District HQ.

The doggie told him that he travels all over the world and that he went on a recent tour of Vietnam. The tour included Dong Ha then they went out west to Cam Lo. The doggie said that today there is an NVA cemetery out near the Cam Lo village where there is a mass grave for 80 "NVA Sappers" killed the night of August 26, 1966, at Cam Lo. The doggie sent my buddy a message and said that my buddy had the story right.

My buddy's only comment was, "Like I thought I had it wrong!"

(Continued on page 10)

## Ontos and Medals of Valor

### RECOGNITION DELAYED for PHILIP HOWARD SAUER US MARINE KILLED IN ACTION IN VIETNAM WILL FINALLY RECEIVE SILVER STAR

BY DAVID LITTLE

Lt Col, USMC (Retired)

davlit0917@gmail.com • 858 344-5410

March, 2018

### GENERAL ORDERS: CITATION:

In the early spring of 2015, I met a man about my age. We became friends sharing a passion for year-around daily ocean swimming. When he learned I was a retired Marine, he mentioned that his brother Philip Sauer had been a Marine. When I inquired as to what his brother was up to now, he said he had been killed in Vietnam. I expressed my sympathies, but there was not much more to say.

Curiosity took me to the Internet. His name, Marine, and Vietnam immediately turned up some information. Marines of the Vietnam era will recognize the term "Green Books." The Marine Corps published a set of histories – one for each calendar year. Having green covers these quickly became known by their color. The volume for 1967 contained a short paragraph describing a small, brief action in the Khe Sanh area – one of countless such skirmishes that spanned the Marines' time in Vietnam.

The brief paragraph described a five-man patrol, dispatched to establish an artillery observation post, that was ambushed by far greater North Vietnamese Army forces, dug-in and well-concealed with automatic weapons and grenades. One Marine was immediately killed as the others dove for cover. Recognizing and quickly assessing the situation, Lieutenant Sauer, an anti-tank (Ontos) platoon commander, ordered his Marines to withdraw while he covered them as best he could. The lieutenant rose up and engaged the enemy with his pistol as the remaining three Marines attempted to withdraw.

The end result was that only one Marine survived to return to friendly lines. The lieutenant was also killed. The action was likely over within several minutes. I did further research and found that the lieutenant received the Purple Heart, but his selfless heroism was otherwise unrecognized.

Months of research followed during which I found more postings on the Internet, contemporaneous reports in the National Archives, recorded oral interviews, and a Stars and Stripes article. I talked to many Marines who provided helpful information. I encountered many dead-ends. Nevertheless, I was able to track down the sole survivor and Lieutenant Sauer's company commander.

There were a multiplicity of units with various ad-hoc attachments and relationships. Lieutenant Sauer's Ontos section

was attached to a rifle company, as was the two-man artillery forward observer team. So, the five-man patrol had Marines from three different battalions. The rifle company had 13 KIAs that day. Based on my own combat experience in Vietnam it was easy to see how it was virtually impossible to put an award recommendation package together. The intention to do so was nevertheless clearly documented at the time.

For me, assembling an award recommendation only became possible after a lot of "dust" had settled and records and research tools became available. Ultimately and fortunately, I had the two essential ingredients for a viable award recommendation: the lieutenant's chain of command and an eyewitness to the lieutenant's actions. I should point out that I myself had no official "standing" vis-a-vis the award recommendation process. The recommendation had to come from the chain-of-command, that is, the lieutenant's company commander. There followed more months of writing and assembling a recommendation that was acceptable to the Marine Corps. The Corps, to its credit, is exceptionally demanding when it comes to personal awards. The willing participation of the surviving eyewitness and the company commander made the effort possible.

The recommendation for an award 49 years after the action needed to be submitted by a member of Congress to have the two-year time period for submission waived. Our local congressman and his staff added a cover letter requesting the waiver. The "package" was submitted in January 2016 – about nine months after I learned of my friend's brother's action. It contained about 25 pages consisting of a cover letter, the recommendation form, and the supporting documentation. It was never "bounced" or returned for incompleteness or for any other reason.

I did not tell the family of this submission until late in 2017 because I was never certain that anything would materialize. I finally told them when the Secretary of the Navy's office asked for family contact information.

In March 2018, more than two years after submission, the Secretary of the Navy, on behalf of the President, awarded the Silver Star Medal posthumously to First Lieutenant Philip H. Sauer. While it's been 51 years since Lieutenant Sauer's heroic action, the end result is the recognition he deserves. The surviving relatives – a sister, three brothers, and their children – are grateful to the Marine Corps for this recognition. One of Lieutenant Sauer's nephews is also named Philip Sauer. Semper Fidelis. ■



# To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

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



Ed Kues as a DI and advisor to the TV show

## CWO 2 Ed Kues, USMC (ret)

Rick Lewis writes: This morning as I logged on to email, I read that CWO 2 Ed Kues MBR# 767 passed away yesterday. I have known Ed for a long time. He was a Korean War vet that saw some tough going in tanks there. Ed also made a tour in Vietnam at 1st Tank Bn. He was a tanker then when he became a CWO; he became a tank maintenance officer. Ed has been part of the Marine Corps Legacy Program for years, This is

where we old Marines get to sit down with new Marines about to graduate and spin yarn's. I will miss seeing him and talking to him. He would always tell how great the VTA was and how much he enjoyed reading the Sponson Box. He was planning on attending the Seattle reunion this year. Now he joins the big tank park in the sky reunion. Knowing Ed, he's out inspecting track already.

## Our Readers Write

(Continued from page 8)



John Hunter writes: Below is a tribute to all the fallen heroes of the past. When I got out of the Marine Corps, I went to work for Union Oil of California. I worked with a guy from Everett, WA, who was 30 years older than me. He told me about the below monument. I believe he told me it was on Corregidor, PI. I looked for it for years and was never able to find it, that is until I looked in Manila.

This monument is a tribute to the Marines, sailors, soldiers, and airmen that died

during the battle for the Philippine Islands. It is located at the American Cemetery in Manila, PI. Every time I read the inscription, it gets me.

## The New French Army Tank



## Guest Opinion

### Let's Transfer Ontos to Barstow

BY: LT. GEN. BERNARD E. TRAINOR, USMC  
The Marine Corps Gazette May 1961

Ontology may be described as the science of reality, the investigation of the essential properties of a thing. What, pray tell, does this philosophical noun have to do with the profession of arms? With apologies to Plato and the gang, we will take the disciplines of ontology and apply them to the existing "thing" which has bastardized its name – Ontos. If consigned to the limbo of Barstow tomorrow, Ontos will have shared the distinction (with cotton khaki battle jacket) of being one of our Corp's more short-lived expressions of individuality. It is doubtful that the plaintive wails which attended the honorable retirement of the "60 mortar" would ever echo around the driver's hatch of the tracked "Dempster Dumpster." Rightly so, for weighing about the same as a healthy pachyderm, Ontos is a white elephant in our family of versatile weapons. This air-transportable orphan was adopted with sincerity by the Corps, during a period of helicopter intoxication, to replace the AT function of the tank within the division. It was adopted to provide the division with a realistic anti-tank weapon. This it fails to do. A weapon, to be worthwhile, should give us the maximum return in terms of its effectiveness for a minimum investment. I maintain that in this regard, Ontos is hardly blue chip stock. Six shares of BAT\* stock give us a greater return on our money than one share of Ontos common. Even then, however, we have a weak investment portfolio.

Let's look at the primary mission of Ontos, its anti-tank task. We must concede that Ontos can knock out tanks. Anybody's. If you have ever watched a trained crew operate you know what I mean. However, go beyond the guns and look at the weapon as a whole. Armor protection is insignificant; therefore, it cannot stand a slugging match. You may say, "Weaponry is ascendant over armor and not even the heaviest tank can withstand a direct hit from a modern AT gun." I maintain that Ontos can't even slug it out with a grease gun. One blast of automatic fire at the unprotected banks of guns will sever the exposed fire control system; leave the hull intact and

us with \$70,000 liability. At least with BAT\*s it would take six bursts in six different directions to accomplish the same end. Shall we move on?

Back-blast not only gives the nearby infantry a cracking good fright but tends to incinerate the unschooled to its rear. Admittedly, this is hardly a consideration in battle, but, more importantly, that impressive blast also tips your location to the enemy's base of fire (tank & SP). Needless to say, Ontos as a source of annoyance will be honored by immediate and unfriendly attention. Of course, here is where Ontos maneuverability comes into play and hasty withdrawal to defilade saves the day. But does it? Hardly. We have to delay and raise the travel locks to support the guns before we can move, else we will snap our multiple muskets into an attitude of decided embarrassment-pointing at mother earth. However, to raise these travel locks, the gunner must center the guns in azimuth and elevation while the driver must crank an archaic hydraulic system for an eternity until the locks marry with the tubes and allow safe movement. Reflect if you will, the action of that enemy base of fire during all this. Assuming that we are successful in eventually getting into defilade, where do we go from here? An alternate position would be logical, but remember that T-54 in the distance is wise to us now and his 100mm is looking in our direction. If we reappear nearby – whack! Okay, insure that the alternate position is not in the immediate vicinity of the primary position. Full credit for your logic! It might work but, in the meantime, hasn't the enemy really beaten us at our own game? While we move the distance to an alternate site compatible with safety and surprise, we are out of action and the enemy's maneuver element has moved frighteningly close. Besides, the enemy is probably tracking our tell-tale dust anyway and our alternate position will prove as uncomfortable as the one in the first instance.

Why not forget about the alternate position and break contact to a pre-selected position

to the rear to contain any break-through? This is reasonable if we are willing to accept the fact that our major anti-tank weapon has been good for only one shot during a critical point in the battle. Of course, the psychological impact on the front line "snuffy" when he sees his major AT unit heading for the rear in the face of an armored attack might be a matter of concern. Also, in open country, our M-50 might be degraded with an enemy shot in the back during this rearward movement. And what about this open terrain, this rolling countryside so favored by a fire and-manuever tank attack? Here we have our greatest Ontos liability. Our primary AT weapon sits basking in all the glory of its 1800 yard effective range while the opposition tanks crack away at us at ranges considerably in excess of ours. They are damaging us with their tanks long before we can employ our anti-tanks against them. Better lay the artillery for direct fire, Marines!

Perhaps I'm unfair. I set the scene for the illustration and naturally it tends to support my views. How about a situation favoring Ontos employment? Consider close country where range counts for naught? How about the ambush capabilities of Ontos. Unsurpassed, are they not? The answer is quite so. It is a close country anti-tank weapon; it is an ambush weapon and little else, and this is the point. The Ontos violates the principle of economy of force. It is an expensive weapon restricted only to situations which favor its limited capabilities-defensive capabilities of ambush and short range. Does this return warrant the expense in terms of dollars, personnel, support and maintenance effort necessary to sustain an Ontos-equipped battalion? I say no. Leave the short ranges to the BAT\*s and provide the AT battalion with a weapon which has the range and ruggedness to do battle with tanks before the infantry has to cope with them.

Bernard E. "Mick" Trainor was an American journalist and a retired United States Marine Corps lieutenant general. He served in the Marine Corps for 39 years in both staff and command capacities. One of his assignments was the skipper of an Ontos anti-tank company in 1960. ■

July 4, 2000

Mr. Canulette:

Dear Pat:

Thank you so very much for the pictures of Wayne and his crew and especially the picture of you. I'm making a grouping of these pictures with Wayne's College Grad. picture to put with the one's I have of the Wall at DC. I've already enlarged your portrait. I know by looking at your picture that he must have had great respect for you.

I've made copies of all that you sent for each one of our children and a set for our oldest grandson who was about 2 or 3 yrs old at the time.

Our oldest boy Larry along with Wayne and the 3rd boy Alvin all were serving in the Viet Nam war. Alvin was in the Gulf of Tonkin and saw some rough service. Larry was mostly in the air but never saw fighting. Our Chuck was only 8 years old and Cecil 4, when Wayne was killed. Coraene was attending the same college Wayne graduated from.

Wayne's place can never be filled, but we all have special memories and love for him. We like to think we will see him sometime in the here after. I guess that remains a hope. Thank you again and again for your kindness and may God richly Bless you and yours.  
With love, Lois Hayes

Dear Pat:

9-13-2000

Thank you so much for the video tape of Vietnam. It was so thoughtful of you. We watched it repeatedly and it helped us so much in understanding Wayne's death.

We have a grandson, 9 yrs old, who reminds us so much of Wayne. He looks like him and also acts like him. We thank God always for letting us have another Wayne. Our grandson is Samuel Hayes and he's so thoughtful and considerate.

May God Bless you always where ever you are and what ever you do.

Thank you again and again for your kindness.

Lois Hayes

DIocese of LAFAYETTE  
P. O. DRAWER 3387  
LAFAYETTE, LOUISIANA 70504

January 17, 1967



Corporal Patrick J. Canulette  
2144096, U.S.M.C.  
3rd Anti-Tank Battalion  
1st Platoon, "Alpha Company"  
FPO San Francisco, California 96602

Dear Corporal Canulette:

While visiting St. Mary's Home yesterday afternoon, Sister Cuthbert showed me a letter sent to her with two money orders amounting to \$170.00. The letter was signed by Lt. Wayne M. Hayes, and the Christmas card by you and 18 others. Unfortunately, Sister did not have Lt. Wayne's complete address but she did have yours.

All of you are assured of the prayers of the Sisters and of the children at St. Mary's. I shall also remember all of you in my Masses. I want you to know how deeply touched I was by your generosity and thoughtfulness. Keeping in mind the conditions under which you wrote makes us all the more proud of our boys in Viet Nam.

With a blessing to all of you, I remain

Sincerely yours,

Maurice Schexnayder  
Bishop of Lafayette

## What Members Are Doing

### Then and Now



Stan Williams, Ned Schultz and John Hunter

### Sgt Major of the Marine Corps



VTA member Joe Tyson with Sgt Major of the Marine Corps Greene at the Marine Corps Law Enforcement Foundation Gala Oct. 2018. Sugarhouse Casino, Phila. PA.

### VETERAN'S DAY CELEBRATION ON ST. GEORGE ISLAND



Pete Ritch writes: On November 10, 2018, the St. George Island, Florida, community took time off from recovery efforts from Hurricane Michael to recognize veteran's at the St. George Island Light House Park. Over 80 Veteran's family and friends attended the event. The Port St. Joe High School ROTC Color Guard presented the Colors, followed by the Pledge of Allegiance and the singing of the National Anthem by Drew Robison, a senior at the Franklin County School.

The keynote speaker was Bob Holton, a local resident, who joined the Army in 1964 at the age of eighteen and by

his nineteenth birthday was a squad leader for a four man demolition unit in Vietnam. Mr. Holton stated that he was selected as a demolition tech because he told his recruiter that he liked to blow things up. On a serious note, he related that the most important thing that he learned in Vietnam was that you were only as good as the man on your right and the man on your left. You depended on them and they depended on you. Mr. Holton stated that his favorite explosive material was C-4. I couldn't help but remember using C-4 to extract broken torsion bars on our tanks.

Having a Vietnam Veteran as the keynote speaker resonated well with the attendee's as most of them were Vietnam era Veterans. The celebration concluded with the singing of God Bless America.

The Marine's in attendance thought that it was only fitting that the SGI Veteran's Day Celebration Committee selected our 243rd Birthday for the 2018 Veteran's Day event.

### Jan "Turtle" Wendlin





## GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who this famous Hollywood movie star is who is making a valiant effort to look like an Ontos Commander?

Hint: He played Ben Hur in the movie of the same name.

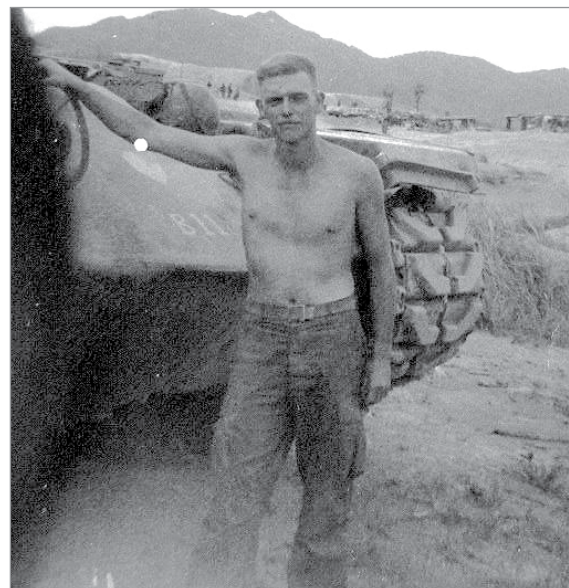
Bonus question: Who is the Marine officer?

The first person to contact John Wear (Phone: 719-495-5998) with the right answer will have his name entered into a raffle to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.



## Last Issue Winner

On Friday, Jan 18, 2019, at 7:38 PM Greg Kelley emailed and correctly identified Greg Martin. Greg was with Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks during "Operation Buffalo," July 1967



## V. A. News & Updates

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

### Have you considered burial in a VA national cemetery?

#### How to Apply

To find out in advance if a Veteran or family member is eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery, go to the below website line and click "Apply for Pre-Need Burial Eligibility" to fill out and submit the application. If pre-need eligibility has not been determined, upon the death of the Veteran or his or her spouse or dependent (also called the time of need), family members should locate the Veteran's DD-214 or other discharge papers if readily available and click "Schedule a Burial" to begin the process. Then make arrangements with a funeral home, National Cemetery Scheduling Office, or directly with a VA national cemetery.

#### VA Memorial Benefits

VA takes special care to pay lasting tribute to the memory of Veterans who served and sacrificed and that of their families. VA meticulously maintains 135 VA national cemeteries in 40 states and Puerto Rico and is working to increase access to accommodate Veterans and eligible family members close to home. In a few years, 95 percent of Veterans will have a burial option in an open VA, state or tribal veterans cemetery located within 75 miles of their home. Some benefits are also available for Veterans who choose burial in a private cemetery.

Veterans with a qualifying discharge are entitled to VA burial benefits. Spouses and dependent children are eligible too, even if they predecease the Veteran.

#### The following burial benefits may be provided:

##### Burial in a VA national cemetery

- Opening and closing of the grave or burial of cremated remains or placement in an above-ground vault, also called a columbarium
- A government furnished grave liner
- Perpetual care of the gravesite
- A headstone or marker with an inscription
- A burial flag
- A Presidential Memorial Certificate
- Transportation of flower arrangements from the committal service shelter to the gravesite

##### Burial in a private cemetery

- A government headstone, marker, or medallion
- A burial flag
- A Presidential Memorial Certificate.
- Some survivors may also be entitled to VA burial allowances as partial reimbursement for the costs of funerals and burials for eligible Veterans.

Please note that gravesites in a VA national cemetery cannot be reserved in advance. To prepare for a private cemetery burial, VA suggests families review these questions and complete required forms in advance.

**VA Requirements:** DD-214 Discharge papers to establish your eligibility for burial services

##### VA Application Process:

##### Burial in a VA national cemetery

- To determine eligibility before the time of need:
- To request burial at the time of need when eligibility has been determined:
- To establish eligibility at the time of need:

##### Burial in a private cemetery

- To receive a headstone, marker, or medallion:
- To receive a burial flag:
- To receive a Presidential Memorial Certificate (PMC):
- To apply for a VA Burial Allowance:

You can learn more about VA Burial Allowances and eligibility on the below special compensation overview page.

##### A direct link to the VA website:

[https://explore.va.gov/memorial-benefits?utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=june-memorial.benefits-monthly\\_6.14&utm\\_term=body-button-page&utm\\_content=memorial-application-all-null](https://explore.va.gov/memorial-benefits?utm_source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=june-memorial.benefits-monthly_6.14&utm_term=body-button-page&utm_content=memorial-application-all-null)

##### VA Community Care Update

Veterans may be eligible to receive care from a provider outside of the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) in their community when VA cannot provide

the care that is needed. This type of care is known as "Community Care," and is paid for by VA. Although some changes occurred with community care recently, Veterans continue to have access to this type of care. The process starts at your VA medical facility. Follow the steps below to see if you're eligible:

1. Go to VA • Schedule an appointment with a VA provider. • Your VA care team will work with you to see if you are eligible for community care. • Eligibility is based on your medical needs, care that is available at VA, and other requirements. • Important: Make sure VA confirms you are eligible and authorized before you proceed to the next step.

2. Make an Appointment • VA will work with you to find a community provider and make an appointment.

• You can select a community provider, or VA can select one for you. • Important: The community provider selected must be in VA's network and be willing to accept payment from VA.

3. Receive Care • Arrive promptly for your appointment. • Important: If you need to schedule a follow-up appointment, check with your community provider to make sure VA authorized the care. If VA did not authorize the care, your community provider should contact VA to arrange the care you need.

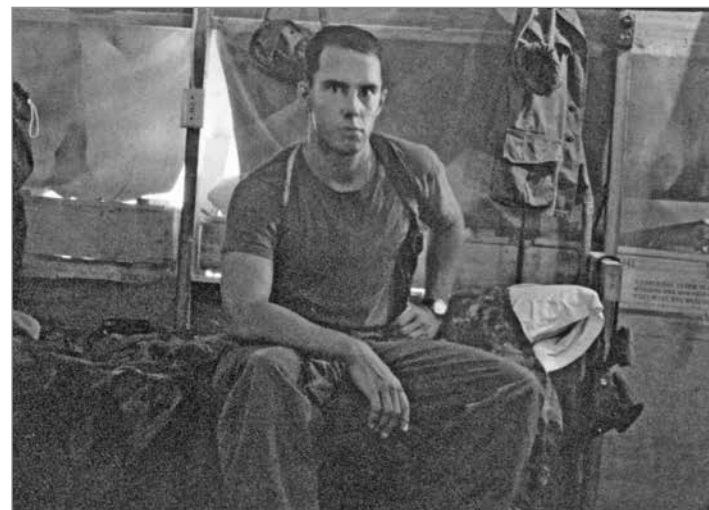
Note: Go to <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/index.asp#FAQs> to see VA's list of Frequently Asked Questions if you have questions about the above steps. Getting Support 31 • If you have questions about your specific circumstances, please contact your nearest VA medical facility.

• Go to <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/VCP/index.asp> or contact (866) 606- 8198 for questions about the Veterans Choice Program • Call the VA Adverse Credit Helpline at (877) 881-7618 for help to resolve adverse credit reporting and debt collection issues from using the Veterans Choice Program.

• Visit <https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/programs/veterans/index.asp> for more information, [Source: The Rural Connection | Office of Rural Health | Fall 2018] ■

## THREE FIINGERS

BY 1ST LT. DICK PEKSENS



launches at night. Each of the two occupied fingers had about four well-fortified bunkers. I rarely slept inside the bunker because it was infested with spiders and centipedes the size of my fist along with occasional "giant rats" which would prey on our food droppings.

Sometime in 1968, while on Operation Victory Dragon V with the ROK Marines near Hoi An, I received a message from my CO at Charlie Company that I was being immediately transferred to 1st Ontos Battalion. Up to this time, my only familiarization with Ontos was seeing a dozen lined up at 1st Tank Battalion when I had arrived in-country. Within a day or two, I found myself on a desolate outpost called "Three Fingers" which was east of Hill 10 and north of Hill 55. The outpost got its name from the fact that it was composed of three rock outcrops which overlooked "Rocket Alley" southwest of Da Nang.

I shared a bunker on the south finger with an E-5 who was my acting staff sergeant. I've forgotten his name, but he was built like the great Cleveland Browns football great Jimmy Brown and exuded confidence to match my trepidations. On the north finger, I had three Ontos situated for offensive and defensive fields of fire. We also surrounded our outpost with 55-gallon drums of "foo-gas" (a mixture of napalm and diesel which could be ignited with detcord).

Our main mission was to observe enemy movement during the day and to quickly return 106mm fire in the event that we observed enemy rocket

We would try to put out SID's (sound intrusion devices) each evening around our perimeter, but these proved useless as they would often just "disappear" during the night. We also tried using a specially trained German Shepard for an early warning system. Every night that we sent the handler out beyond the wire, he would quickly report enemy movement and return to the hilltop within the first hour of deployment. In addition, his dog would scare the hell out of us at night when walking the perimeter, as he would lunge from the mortar pit (his sleeping quarters) whenever anyone passed in close proximity during the night.

A few times, the sergeant and I would apply camouflage and creep outside the wire trying to play at a poor man's Force Recon. After throwing a few grenades at suspected movement and almost managing to get shot by our own men, we quickly discontinued our counter-espionage attempts. On top of the north finger, we had a 60mm mortar with both HE and illumination rounds. When I reported to the new outpost, I asked the E-5 if he was familiar with the 60mm mortar and soon learned that this would be a "learning under fire" project for both of us.

During my second week, the bridge along Route 4 that was in close proxim-

ity to us was being hit by a sapper squad and we received an immediate call to provide illumination. As you may recall, the illumination round requires three entries: namely, declination and azimuth of the gun tube, bags of powder for elevation and distance, and a manual setting for the timer fuse. Being a rookie, I "eyeballed" the direction, added two bags of powder to the tube and set the timer. We fired and then began looking skyward for the illumination to begin. Unfortunately, our aim was perfect but our timer calculation was incorrect. As a result, the illumination round hit within a few meters of the bridge and completely illuminated the grunts rather than the intended enemy. Needless to say, we were not asked to "fire for effect!" The next morning we were surprised by the visit of a Marine captain in a jeep with a driver and his gunny. The captain had asked to be directed to the individual in charge of the mortar and I meekly came forward expecting a verbal assault. In fact, he said nothing, but ordered the gunny to put my mortar and rounds into the back of his jeep. Without a word, they departed.

One night, a few weeks later, my E-5 informed me that our two-man listening post had spotted movement directly in front of them outside our east perimeter. I grabbed an M-79 "Blooper" and proceeded to the perimeter where I intended to lob a round over the heads of our OP to inflict maximum hurt on the intruders. I warned the OP to keep their heads down and launched an HE round estimating the proper elevation of the barrel. To my shock, the HE round hit exactly at the location of my listening post. My whole career flashed through my mind as I saw myself standing before my inevitable courts-martial. I was frozen and unable to radio my obviously wounded men below. Suddenly, to my utter surprise, the men came

crawling through the concertina wire having been spooked to retreat by the proximity of the sappers. I had escaped prosecution and probably scared away

the sappers through pure serendipity. All this goes to show why second lieutenants are never given more than a Colt .45 and K-Bar during combat!

Editor's Note: This story first appeared in #2 – 2009 Sponson Box but we felt it was appropriate to feature it again.

## The Sale of Ontos C-22

BY MIKE SCUDDER

After 18 years of both working on and displaying my Ontos, I sold the machine to a man that is building a new museum in Wyoming. He has purchased more than 150 military vehicles that cover WW1 to present conflicts. A newly constructed building is presently being built, although I am not sure of the city that will host it. I will pass on details as I know them. I drove it for the last time this morning and I will forward photos and videos later. At age 75, keeping it maintained was more than I could do. My wife, Dottie, and I plan on taking the proceeds and take a vacation or two. The Ontos crewmen contacts are the most rewarding thing in my retirement. This endeavor was a hobby, but more than that, was a tribute to you crewmen. I hope the new owner will take it to a new level.

Walter Brock: I would like to thank you for all your work you did on the Ontos, and to thank you for affording us Ontos crewmen the opportunity to visit and see your Ontos. You did an outstanding job and again thank you and Semper Fi. If there is ever anything I can do for you, please let me know.

Michael Scudder: Thank you. That means much to me.

Rick Walters: It was a big accomplishment resurrecting vehicles found in a chicken coop, and White Owl, Kingston, NC. Then plywood sides as templates for the upper hull armor. Add more crafting with a bend for the rear doors with a D4.

The 106's were hard to find and expensive. A turret was another trip to Jacksonville, and retrieving parts off the ranges at Camp LeJeune. The history was great with major operations in 1965 with infantry and 3rd A-T's, possibly 1st A-T's too. Operation Starlite was very successful.

Also, various reunions with Ontos Marines, some 1965 and earlier in Ontos Battalions, Hue City and Khe Sanh Vet's, and later one's Baby Huey or Paul Fisher from 5th A-T's in late 1969. He



was still firing 106s, south and west of Hill 55, and north to Phu Loc 6, on Highway 1. These were 1st A-T's TAORs in 1967.

A big boost for the Weaver family honoring Greg and fallen Heroes in 2007 Las Vegas reunion. Ben was very instrumental as well as Steve Markley, Gunny Dave MacGilvary, although you did all the heavy lifting with C22.

Outstanding job, and you were very diplomatic with all the Ontos Marines and their surviving families, like Lester Chamber's and Sgt. Marsh.

## The Lady and the Pig



A retired US Marine gunny sent me these photos of his girlfriend posing with a static displayed Ontos at MCB 29 Palms sometime in 1983.

I sent the photos to Rick Walters and this is what he found out about this vehicle:

We found the serial number for this Ontos, it is now painted-over next to the "USMC" on the side slope plate. The vehicle belonged to >>

Lester Chambers and Bill Marsh, two Texas Marines. Both received the Silver Star for their last actions on 2/25/68 in the northwest corner of the Old City in Hue, South Vietnam.

The Ontos was painted desert camo, Marsh's brother corrected that mistake. The sign says 1,100 meters...which is a very short distance. The 106 mm can fire 6,000 – 7,000 meters. And 3,000

meters is too easy with a .50 cal. spotting round. And no spotter is needed for Beehive. It carries 41 additional rounds with just two crewmen.

## Ontos Deploying to Okinawa in 1969?



Richard Peksens: While at An Hoa, the ammo dump at Da Nang blew up and some of my Bravo tankers were slightly injured while spending time doing some major repair on their tanks. Also, some of our tanks were used to evacuate many people from the ammo dump that was close to the Freedom Hill "toy store" (PX). I had gone to 1st Tank Battalion in 1969 to beg to take command of HQ Platoon (either Bravo or Charlie) to aid in the upcoming sweep of The Arizona (I think that it was Operation Dewey Canyon). I took these two photos of the Ontos lined up for what I think was disembarkation back to Okinawa,

Rick Walters: This was March 1969. I was on the Cau Do bridge with two Ontos. We watched the Da Nang "fireworks" for two whole days. I am pretty

sure that 1st Tanks lost 65 hooches and 30+ trucks.

The Ontos in the photo were at the battalion rear for months. In 1970, I was told they were taken to the Deep Water Pier in March, just as 1st Tanks was leaving for good. I believe that Bravo Co. stayed in-country and may have remained in An Hoa. The road sweeps always went well when tanks or Ontos accompanied the engineers and grunts.

The A-T Battalion's, 1st & 3rd, were reduced to a Reinforced Alpha Company on Dec. 15th, 1967. Then, OPCON to 1st & 3rd Tanks, their Command Chronologies really took a hit. First Tanks had real problems with 1st A-T's in Camp Evans, then Gia Le, before Hue. Hue solved the problem, temporarily.

May 1969, 1st A-T's was parking some of the Ontos. Five Ontos were still operating on that Southern Sector Defense

Circle given to 1st Tanks. They left March 1970 with 1st Tanks.

3rd A-T's may have left earlier, in 1969? 5th A-T's was Hill 55, Hill 41, Namu Bridge and the float with all of the battalions of the 26th Marines.

I met them a few times, they were the worst running Ontos I ever saw. 5th A-T's was operating in Vietnam until the monsoons, early Dec., 1969. I saw them. I got some of their crewman as 0311s on the OPs of 1st Tanks.

1st Tanks wanted no part of them. 1st A-T's did zilch for 5th A-T's. They needed spare parts, plus a maintenance shed or building. I give credit to the crews, plus Navy, making those vehicles run and providing fire power. Then, again, I would not want to fight an Ontos—too fast, too small, too unpredictable and too much energy coming out of the many cannons.

## The Story Behind the Photo

Art Moreno recently joined the VTA brotherhood. When Art's membership was announced, Rick Walters wrote the following:

Art is great find, as he was a no nonsense OC from 2nd Platoon. He arrived with a few other 0353s just after Tet '68 directly from Camp Pendleton in March. He was on Operations Ford, Houston and Nevada Eagle. One battle he received the Bronze Star, and no one



NVA inspecting an abandoned Ontos

will ever know of it unless I tell the story right now.

It was the day after the Marines had left the Gia Le Combat Base near Phu Bai. The US Army "100 and Worst" took over the lines. And then one night the base was over-run and most of the Army soldiers ran off the base. But the US Marine Ontos crews stayed and fought. The perimeter bunkers were now manned by NVA and the M-2's were firing at the Pigs. As you see in the above photo the NVA were climbing on the rear of the Ontos.

Once permission was granted by our Marine Lt's, the NVA-filled bunkers were destroyed, one by one. The NVA in the perimeter were tougher.

By 0600, Art's was the lone Pig left with ammo. He had one box of .30 cal. for the Browning machinegun. He covered the other nine Ontos, One platoon was in field and one pig (Steve Slaughter's) was down. Art grabbed the .30 cal. Browning and tripod and fired off the box of ammo.

The next day there were hundreds of dead NVA, many on the perimeter. Af-

ter the fact, the US Army Cobra choppers strafed the dead. Then, the engineer's arrived and created a mass grave on the perimeter.

An ARVN officer arrived and promptly killed the first NVA prisoner with a shot to the head. The next NVA prisoner started talking.

Art received a Bronze Star. The US Army felt the Ontos crews did not deserve anything, as there were dead American soldiers in the bunkers.

Very few know of that battle.

## CAREERS MARINE JOBS

### Marine Anti-Tank Missile Man (MOS 0352) Job Facts

These marines are in charge of widely-used weapons systems

BY ROD POWERS - UPDATED DECEMBER 11, 2017

Military weapons systems have become so specialized and high-tech over the years that it takes special training and often more than one person to operate them safely and effectively. The responsibilities of the anti-tank missile man, which is Marine Military Occupational Specialty 0352, involve the tactical employment of some very specific weapons.

Military Weapons Systems: Military weapons that fall under the control and responsibility of the Marine anti-tank missile man include the TOW—a tube-launched, Opticaly-tracked, and wire-guided weapon system—as well as the Javelin weapons system. Both are widely used anti-tank missiles and they're capable of damaging and defeating tanks in battle, which is obviously crucial in combat situations. In addition, MOS 0352 is responsible for anti-armor operations and tactical vehicle operations. These

service members provide medium and heavy anti-armor fire in support of the infantry battalion. the light armored



talion. Non-commissioned officers are assigned as gunners and squad leaders.

Training Requirements for MOS 0352: Marines must have a general technical or GT score of 100 or higher on the Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery, known as the ASVAB, to qualify for this position. The Marine Corps infantry provides two training schools for Marines who want to pursue a MOS 0352. Both are available after basic training. Anti-tank missile men are required to complete the anti-tank assault

guided missile man course at the School of Infantry at either Camp Pendleton in California or at Camp Geiger, a satellite facility of Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. They might also complete appropriate managed on-the-job training.

Job Requirements for MOS 0352: Recruits for this MOS must have a normal color vision, and vision of at least 20/200 that's correctable to

guided missile man course at the School of Infantry at either Camp Pendleton in California or at Camp Geiger, a satellite facility of Camp Lejeune in Jacksonville, North Carolina. They might also complete appropriate managed on-the-job training.

Job Requirements for MOS 0352: Recruits for this MOS must have a normal color vision, and vision of at least 20/200 that's correctable to >>

20/20. Their past driving records as reported by the National Driver Register must show that they are eligible for an SF-46 military driver's license, and they must possess the psychological and physiological qualifications required for licensing as a government motor vehicle operator.

Jobs That Are Similar to MOS 0352: Infantry assault men provide rocket fire in support of Marine rifle squads, platoons, and companies within the infantry battalion. They're trained to use the anti-personnel obstacle breaching system or APOBS, as well as demolitions. This job is MOS 0351. Non-commissioned officers are assigned as gunners, team, squad, and section leaders.

## It Did Not Stand Up

I served under Colonel Walter "MuMu" Moore from 1965-1967, and during his Command of the 1st Anti-Tank Battalion prior to our Battalion leaving for Vietnam, he told me he was sent to evaluate the Ontos once it was completed by Allis Chalmers, and he recommended to the Corps that they not employ the "The Thing" because the armor plates

## Ontos And More

Nah... the Army didn't "dump" the Ontos onto the Corps... We chose it. The Army went on in development for an air-mobile / droppable AT weapon, known as the "SPAT." A 90 mm gun, open (no armor) on a very similar tracked vehicle platform like the 106mm recoilless rifle mounted on a jeep. By the time the Corps had gone that way, it was a 106 mm recoilless mounted on a "wheelbarrow mount" that would either clamp into a M38A1C 1/4 ton truck, 4X4, better known as a Jeep... or could be used as a ground mount.

The .50 caliber rifles (M-8) that mounted on the top of the recoilless rifle were special. They did not use the same ammo as the M-2 .50 cal. machinegun. It was a spotter-tracer round that had essentially the same ballistics as the 106 out to about 1,800 meters. If properly bore-sighted, the 106 round would hit where the smaller round did. And since the back-blast from the 106 absolutely marked your position, the idea was to shoot and scoot. Adjusting fires from observing the main round really was not the best of ideas against tanks, hence the spotting rifle.

The Ontos box magazine held 8 rounds, and the top two inboard guns on the vehicle usually carried an M-8 each that were serviced by the OC. The bottom (elevate/traverse and firing mechanism) from the wheelbarrow mount was adapted to mount on the Mechanical Mule. I think it probably had 360 degree traverse but it would be fired to one side or the

The LAV or lightly armored vehicle crewmen, which is MOS 0313, operates and maintains the LAV and its weapons systems. These vehicles are armored reconnaissance vehicles that can carry communications equipment. They're eight-wheeled and amphibious. The LAV's role within a larger Marine expeditionary unit or MEU is to conduct security, recon and screening missions for a larger force with some independent operations.

Despite the names of these positions—missile men and crewmen—women are now permitted in U.S. military combat situations and any of these jobs can be held by female Marines.

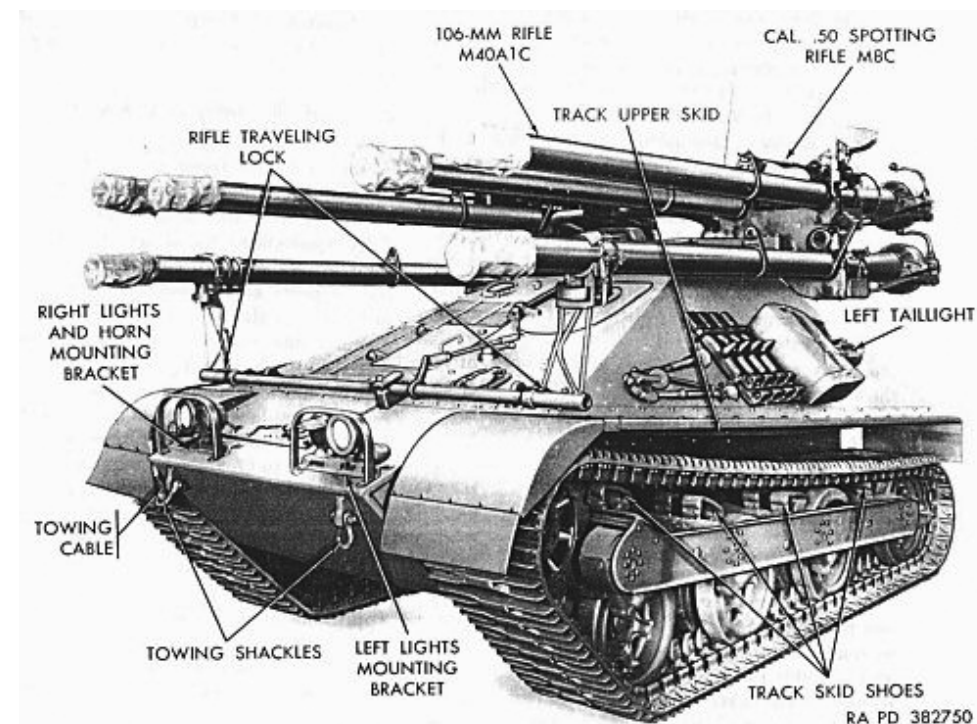
were too thin and it would not stand up to mines or being confronted with tanks. Obviously, political considerations overruled his assessment of the Ontos.

Joe Henderson  
Sgt. USMC  
1963-1967

other of the Mule. The Mule's engines came in two versions, neither made by Briggs/Stratton. The early ones had four opposed cylinders while the later version went to a two-cylinder with a pull - start. Either way, no battery and no lights. The Mule had two ranges, four speeds forward, and either two or four-wheel steer. If necessary, it could be operated by someone crawling behind it while operated in low range and reverse. It had no suspension whatsoever, save the fairly soft tires. Mules would tip / flip over fairly easy, could also be coupled in a train with tow bars and used like warehouse trailers. From memory, Infantry Bn. Motor T operated 8 or so, with maybe 8 more for the H&S Co. 106RR Platoon.

BTW...the second pix of a 'Mighty Mite'... ain't. That is an M151, generally known to the doggies as a "MUTT"... A1, A2, and A3 versions, rare to find in civilian land, since they largely did not get sold as surplus from the depots, but were cut up and de-milled... too dangerous for civilians to drive. Everything before the A3 had a nasty habit of 'tucking under' a rear swing arm, which is how Ralph Nader was able to kill the Chevy Corvair of the early sixties. (99% of this info is available on the net for those willing to get off their dead butts and research before running off at the keyboard)

D Dick



## The Ontos Anti-Tank Vehicle

BY: PETER BRUSH

By any measure, the Ontos was one of the most interesting "things" to come down the road of United States military armored development. The idea for this vehicle was born in the aftermath of World War II when the U.S. Army perceived the need for a new reconnaissance vehicle. Then it evolved into a tank destroyer for use with the Army on the nuclear battlefields of Europe. Next it was deployed in Marine Corps anti-tank (AT) battalions. The Ontos most significant contribution was in the Vietnam War, but in a role much different from the role for which it was designed. This is the story of the Ontos, officially the "Rifle, Multiple 106mm, Self-Propelled, M50."

The adaption of the internal combustion engine to warfare brought about the removal of the horse from the battlefield. The reconnaissance mission formerly performed by cavalry remained. By the end of World War II, the motorcycle, jeep, armored car, and light tank all tried to fill the gap, all without complete success. A classified 1953 U.S. Army report noted:

"There is an urgent and immediate need in our army for a vehicle similar in performance to the jeep, but at the same time affording some armored protection and greater cross-country mobility, for use by reconnaissance personnel, commanders, messengers, and liaison officers who are frequently exposed to small arms fire."

At that time jeeps and half-tracks were authorized in the command, scout, and support elements of the Army reconnaissance platoon. The Ontos was considered as a replacement. After considerable study the Army concluded that although the vehicle had outstanding cross-country mobil-

ity and armor protection, it had deficiencies in the areas of storage space, lack of speed, lack of range, and excess weight. Ironically, given the vulnerability of the M50 to enemy mines in Vietnam, the Army concluded these test vehicles "offered protection against atomic bombing." The Army decided to stick with its M38A1 1/4 ton trucks and M21 mortar carriers for reconnaissance platoon use. Spurred by Secretary Frank Pace, Jr., the Army was developing the Ontos as a family of vehicles, to include infantry carrier, antitank anti-aircraft, self-propelled artillery and logistics carrier.

During World War II, the Army embraced the tank destroyer concept, which called for the placement of large-caliber anti-tank guns on lightly armored carriages. These could quickly be moved to any area under enemy tank threat. This concept was never embraced by the Marine Corps to any extent. The tank remained the favored anti-tank weapon for the Marines in the immediate post-war period. In addition to duties as naval infantry, postwar planners envisioned a role for the Corps in any European conflict between the United States and the Soviet Union. Late 1940s war planning put the Marines into direct conflict with front-line units of the Red Army. In the Pacific War, the Marines dealt with sporadic attacks by small Japanese tanks. In the future war, Marine tankers would have to face a highly mechanized Soviet force equipped with large numbers of medium and heavy tanks.

Using tanks to destroy enemy tanks proved less than satisfactory in the Korean War: too often the weight of American medium tanks rendered them too road bound. Marine planners, cognizant of the formidable threat posed >>

## Looking For

SAMMY BINION

This longtime VTA member has gone MIA. His last known address was: Land O Lakes, Florida. Does anyone have contact with him? Please call John Wear at 719-495-5998 with any and all details.

by Communist armor, returned to the World War II tank destroyer concept. In 1949 the USMC Armor Policy Board specifically noted "There is a requirement for a destroyer-type tank to destroy hostile heavily armored vehicles...."

As early as 1944, Army production and logistics considerations began to determine Marine Corps tank decisions. Although some of the USMC armor requirement was developed and produced by the Navy's Bureau of Ships (e.g., amphibious tractor or amtracs), the Corps came to fully depend on the Army for its tank procurement. In 1951, based on an Army initiative, Allis Chalmers became the lead contractor for this new anti-tank vehicle. It would be built at the company's La Porte, IN, factory.

In 1953, Michigan Congressman Gerald R Ford held congressional hearings for Army appropriations. When discussion turned to anti-tank capabilities, the testimony of Army generals was taken off the record and not included in the printed transcript. The public became aware of Ontos development only by mistake. According to a report in the New York Times dated June 26, 1953, the congressional testimony was classified "Secret." The newspaper noted "An entirely new weapons-carrying vehicle, nicknamed 'The Thing' but carrying the official designation Ontos, to be used variously, including as a mount for a new 'highly-powered' recoilless rifle and for a quadruple .50 caliber antiaircraft weapon against low flying planes." Army officials expressed amazement and appeared appalled when copies of the 1,667-page printed testimony released by the subcommittee reached the Pentagon.

The first production model of the M-50 came off the assembly line on 31 October 1956. The original Ontos emphasized firepower over crew comfort. The hull was derived from the T55/T56 series of tracked armored personnel carriers. It was powered by a six cylinder in-line gasoline engine, the General Motors SL 12340, which developed 145 horsepower at 3,400 rpm (this was later upgraded to a Chrysler V-8). This power source was coupled to a XT-90-2 transmission, which drove the front sprockets, which turned the tracks. Maximum road speed was 30 mph on improved roads. The Ontos had terrain navigation ability superior to tanks. Range was 190 miles on primary roads, 120 miles on secondary roads, and 50 miles cross country with a 47-gallon internal fuel tank. With fording kit installed, the vehicle could cross streams as deep as 60 inches. The vehicle weighed nine tons. It had a three-man crew: driver, loader, and gunner. For a tracked vehicle it made little noise. Consequently, there was no intercom between the gunner and driver, although there was a loudspeaker on the radio. The M-50 was not portable by an available helicopter, although it could be air transported by R4Q aircraft. Two Ontos could be landed over the beach in an LCM-6 (Landing Craft, Mechanized). The M-50 could climb a 60 percent grade and climb over a 30-inch obstacle. The engine would run wet, and the vehicle could ford

two feet of water in normal configuration. With fording equipment, it could go deeper.

The main weapon consisted of six 106mm M40A1C recoilless rifles mounted on a central turret. The guns extended beyond the hull on both sides. Built with simplicity in mind, this rifle was the same weapon used by infantry on a fixed-mount. These guns could be fired individually, in pairs, or all at once. Fifty caliber spotting rifles were mounted on four of the recoilless rifles. Two of the recoilless rifles were equipped with a spotting rifle and sight and could be removed from the vehicle for use on ground mounts (these spotting rifles could not be fired from inside). The sights could be removed from the vehicle for use on ground mounts. The Ontos also had a .30 caliber machine gun. Each vehicle carried a normal load of 18 rounds of 106mm ammunition (six in the rifles plus a dozen more in the ammo bin). These weapons were externally and coaxially mounted and were fired electrically. The rate of fire was four aimed rounds per minute with all guns loaded and fired individually.

The trajectories of the spotting rounds and the 106mm rounds were very similar to a distance of 1,100 yards. Beyond 1,100 yards the trajectories differed, causing the effectiveness of this spotting system to decrease as range increased. The spotting rifle could not be used beyond 1,500 yards, necessitating the use of burst-on-target and bracket techniques of fire adjustment at these greater ranges. High Explosive Anti-Tank (HEAT) ammunition for the 106mm rifle would penetrate the armor of any known tank (16" of armor at 0 degrees obliquity). The Ontos armor was one-half inch plate except for the floor, which was only 3/16" inch thick. The upper sloped armor would withstand all small arms fire, but was vulnerable to .50 caliber armor piercing rounds. Artillery airbursts could cause severe damage to the Ontos' guns and external fire control equipment.

Frank Pace, Secretary of the Army during the Truman administration, initially supported the M50 for Army use. Pace noted, "If Ontos is there, tanks had better get the hell off the battlefield." Not everyone agreed with Pace. Others felt it was too lightly armored, underpowered, and incapable of sustained combat. The Marine Corps accepted the Ontos after the Army rejected it. The Marines did not have the specialized supply and maintenance capabilities of the Army, and the Ontos was a simple vehicle. It had fewer parts than other armored vehicles. There was no heavy turret. The engine was a common truck engine found on various military and civilian vehicles. The fire control system was simple: according to LtCol. E.L. Bale, Jr., a Marine instructor at the Army Armor School, the average Marine could master the system "as easily as he has the pinball machine in the local drug store." The Corps ordered 13 million dollars-worth, about 300 vehicles. Production was to run for about one year.

The Ontos, manned by infantrymen, was quickly integrated into regimental anti-tank companies. These companies contained 12 Ontos, five officers, and 91 enlisted men. Each unit consisted of three Ontos platoons of four vehicles each. The unit's 72 anti-tank rifles could be fired from the vehicle or dismounted and fired from ground mounts. Its first non-training deployment abroad came in July 1958. The Lebanon Crisis saw Marine Battalion Landing Teams (BLT) of the Navy's Sixth Fleet come ashore to stabilize the weak Lebanese national government. This 2nd Provisional Marine Force included 15 M48 tanks, 10 Ontos, and 31 LVTP5 amtracs (Landing Vehicle, Tracked). These vehicles provided general Force security and protection for armored patrols until a larger Army tank force could be sent from Germany. The Marines began embarkation in mid-August.

The Ontos next saw action in 1965 in the Caribbean. In April, the Dominican Republic was sliding into civil war as reformers did battle with right-wing military forces. The 6th Marine Expeditionary Unit, the Caribbean quick-reaction force, was ordered ashore in order to evacuate civilians and reinforce security at the American embassy. A company each of tanks and amtracs (LVTs) plus two platoons of Ontos were part of the landing team, which took the side of the Dominican military.

Ontos were organized in the Marine Division into Anti-Tank Battalions. Each battalion was composed of one headquarters and service company plus three anti-tank companies. Each of these letter companies contained three platoons of five Ontos for a total of 45 Ontos vehicles per battalion. Planned distribution in the Marine Division was for a company of 15 Ontos (three platoons) for each of the division's three infantry regiments. Ontos companies, along with tanks and amtracs, landed with the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade at Da Nang, Vietnam, in the first half of 1965. Within one year, both the 1st and 3rd Anti-Tank Battalions were ashore in Vietnam. Unlike the enemy in the Korean War, the Vietnamese Communist military forces possessed significant anti-armor capabilities in the form of recoilless rifles and RPGs. The Ontos' thin floor armor (3/16") made it especially vulnerable to mines. Consequently, and as opposed to its designed role, Ontos spent a great portion of their time in static defense positions.

Initially Ontos units were deployed in defense of the Da Nang airfield. In August, 1965, the Marines began Operation Starlite, the first big battle of the war. At 0730 on August 17, tanks and Ontos rolled off amphibious landing craft (LCUs and LCMs) and made their way ashore south of Chu Lai in support of the assault companies. Later in the day a Marine armored column was halted when an M-48 tank was hit with recoilless rifle fire. The Viet Cong (VC) poured mortar and small arms fire into the Marine positions, quickly killing five and wounding 17. The On-

tos maneuvered to provide frontal fire and flank protection until enemy fire let up. The following month, in Operation Golden Fleece, a combined infantry-armor assault force including Ontos attacked a VC main force unit trying to collect a rice tax in a Vietnamese village near Da Nang. The enemy was forced to break contact and flee the area.

After establishing themselves at Da Nang and Chu Lai, the Marines built their third base at Phu Bai, in Thua Thien Province 35 miles northwest of Da Nang. Initially, defense of Phu Bai was provided by the 2nd Battalion, 1st Marines (Reinforced) which had a platoon of M50s attached. It was not only the Marines who were expanding their forces in the northern part of South Vietnam: both the VC and North Vietnamese Army (NVA) also increased their forces, and both sides sustained heavy casualties. In late June, on Operation Jay, a large, heavily armed VC force ambushed a South Vietnamese Marine Corps convoy moving north on Route 1, the main north-south highway in Vietnam. At 0830 on June 29, the attacking force struck the convoy with mortar and recoilless rifle fire, quickly hitting ten trucks. U.S. Marines quickly sent reinforcements, including Ontos, to assist the SVN Marines. The VC force lost interest and tried to break contact. While crossing open ground, the M50 platoon opened fire and "obliterated a VC squad on a ridgeline with a single 106mm salvo." An M50 platoon commander even captured an enemy soldier. Over 185 enemy soldiers were killed in this action.

Marines and their armor were deployed in I Corps, the northernmost of four military districts in Vietnam. An exception to this was Special Landing Force (SLF) of the Navy's Seventh Fleet, the strategic reserve for the Pacific Far East. The SLF was available for amphibious landings in South Vietnam. Gen. William Westmoreland, commander of U.S. forces in Vietnam, decided to use the SLF to clear Viet Cong forces from the Rung Sat Special Zone south of Saigon. VC gunners were firing on ships using the river channel that supplied the Vietnamese capital. The result was Operation Jackstay, March 26-April 6, 1966. The operation had limited success, but not due to lack of ingenuity of the Marines, who experimented with riverine warfare techniques including mounting an Ontos on a LCM to provide fire support. Only 63 enemy troops were killed; however, the shipping channel was at least temporarily clear.

The following incident illustrates the vulnerability of the M50 to enemy mines. It was spring, 1966. An armored column supporting Company "K", 3/9 was returning to base camp near Da Nang. Three tanks and an Ontos went over a stream at a place called Viem Dong Crossing without mishap. As the second M50 crossed, Platoon Commander Lt. Allen Hoof heard a pop, turned rearward, and saw the upper half of the vehicle blown off the lower half, and lying upside down next to it. All three crewmen were seriously wounded. Acting Ontos Commander PFC Greg >>

Weaver was quickly removed from the vehicle but died almost immediately. The mine explosion, perhaps either command detonated or activated by a counter, caused the detonation of a 106mm round stored directly under the commander. This secondary explosion blew the turret off the vehicle and killed Weaver.

Since enemy tanks were not a problem for Marines in Vietnam, Ontos use reverted to its secondary mission: providing direct fire support for infantry. By late 1966 problems with Ontos became evident. The supply of tracks was depleted, which caused breakdowns on operations. This caused a reluctance to utilize the M50. An even more important reason was several incidents of accidental firings of recoilless rifles which cost some Marine lives. This was an extremely serious problem for Ontos on convoy duty. These accidents were caused by overly tight adjustment of the firing cable allowing the firing pin to release prematurely. This adjustment was a crew responsibility and required thorough understanding of the firing cable, sear, and trigger. These mishaps caused restrictions to be placed on Ontos use.

By 1967, the Marines were fighting two wars in Vietnam. The 1st Marine Division engaged in counter-guerrilla operations in the southern part of I Corps while the 3rd Marine Division conducted mostly conventional war against NVA along the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in the north. As the Marines moved northward to counter the NVA threat, Ontos and tanks provided important support. In May 1967, the 2nd Battalion, 9th Marines (2/9) and 2nd Battalion, 26th Marines (2/26) began Operation Hickory north of Con Thien. Fighting against enemy forces in well-prepared bunkers and trenches was heavy. M50s, using the proper ammunition, proved to be devastating antipersonnel weapons. After the conclusion of Hickory, 2/9, accompanied by tanks and Ontos, was sent on a spoiling attack into the DMZ. On this operation the tracked vehicles proved more of a liability than a tactical asset as the terrain restricted them to the road. Instead of providing infantry support, the M50s and tanks required infantry protection against NVA rocket propelled grenade (RPG) attack. Using these vehicles as ambulances to evacuate the wounded further reduced their offensive capabilities.

1967 saw the introduction of CH-53 Sea Stallion heavy-lift helicopters for the Marines in Vietnam. The first models had a six-ton external lift capability. This meant an Ontos could be transported by helicopter if it was broken down into components with the hull transported externally. It could then be reassembled and operated at destination, giving it a transportability beyond its design considerations. M50s could also go where tanks feared to tread (or should have): in a 1966 operation, tanks got stuck in flooded rice paddies. Ontos, with less ground pressure, were able to drag timbers up to the tanks without bogging down. In Operation Jay, mentioned above, the Ontos of B Company, 3rd

Anti-Tanks, were able to assist the SVN Marines because they could cross a pontoon bridge, the only tracked vehicles light enough to drive to the operation. Ontos could go more places than many people thought possible.

In December 1967, the 1st and 3rd Anti-Tank Battalions were de-commissioned in Vietnam. One company from each battalion was attached to the tank battalions. 1968 saw Ontos assume an important role in some of the heaviest fighting of the entire war, the Battle of Hue during the Tet Offensive. In February, 14 NVA battalions seized control of most of the city. The Americans and South Vietnamese faced the formidable task of retaking this important cultural center of the nation. The result was urban fighting unlike anything seen in the war. The attacking Marines had to take each building and each block, one at a time. This close-quarter combat and low flying clouds, coupled with the desire to minimize damage to the city itself, meant there could be little reliance on artillery and close air support.

Four tanks from the 3rd Tank Battalion along with a platoon of Ontos from the Anti-Tank Company, 1st Tank Battalion, joined the advance against strong enemy resistance. LtCol Ernest Cheatham, commander of 2/5, had reservations about using tanks. One tank sustained over 120 hits

(Editor's Note: That number of hits is not true) ... and another went through five or six crews (Editor's Note: Also not true but perhaps the author meant "crewmembers.")

Infantry commanders liked the Ontos better. Cheatham described the M50 "as big a help as any item of gear we had that was not organic to the battalion." Regimental commander Col. Stanley Hughes went even further when he claimed the Ontos was the most effective of all the supporting arms the Marines had at their disposal. Its mobility made up for its lack of armor protection, noting that at ranges of 300 to 500 yards, its recoilless rifles routinely opened "4 square meter holes or completely knock[ed] out an exterior wall." The armor plating of the M50 was sufficient protection against enemy small arms fire and grenades. However, B-40 anti-tank rockets were another story. An Ontos with 1/1 was knocked out and the driver killed on February 7 while supporting the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines. The essential role of tanks and M50s in the fighting was illustrated by the fact that Marines had to hold up their advance from time to time for lack of 90mm tank and 106mm Ontos ammunition.

The Perfume River flows through Hue. After clearing the south bank on February 11, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines pushed north to clear NVA forces firmly entrenched in the 4-square-mile Citadel, location of the former Imperial Palace. USMC M-48 tanks and Ontos were placed under the command of the attached tank platoon commander. Tactically, the tank or Ontos commander, working with the infantry commander, would reconnoiter a particular target area, usually

a masonry structure blocking the Marine advance. Returning to their vehicle, the tank or Ontos commander would move forward at full speed while the infantry laid down a heavy volume of fire. Upon reaching a position where fire could be directed on the target, the vehicle commander halted the vehicle, fired two or three rounds into the structure, then quickly reversed direction and returned to friendly front lines. Casualties among armor crews were high. On February 24, South Vietnamese troops finally dislodged NVA forces from the Citadel. By the time the battle for Hue was over, 50 percent of the city was destroyed.

Before, during, and after the Battle of Hue, the 26th Marine Regiment was fighting the North Vietnamese at Khe Sanh. Here the enemy tank threat was real: 17 days into the battle at Khe Sanh, NVA tanks helped overrun the nearby Special Forces camp at Lang Vei. Ten M50s from B Co (-) 3rd Anti-Tank Battalion were incorporated into Khe Sanh's defenses. They were sometimes used for reconnaissance but more often in static perimeter defense roles. Author Robert Pisor notes the Ontos at Khe Sanh had "enough flechette [anti-personnel] ammunition to pin the entire North Vietnamese Army to the face of Co Roc Mountain."

The Marine Corps began to deploy its forces out of Vietnam in 1969. Tank and amtrac units rotated early as fighting had ebbed in the Corps' area of responsibility. By this time the M50 parts supply was depleted and the 106mm rifle was about to be replaced by other weapons. M50 mechanics cannibalized disabled machines to keep others running, but after Hue the Ontos were worn out. Ironically, excess Ontos were given to Army forces (recall that the Army initially rejected the Ontos as being unsuitable for its requirements). These Army Ontos went to Company D, 16th Armor, 173rd Airborne Brigade. The Army used its Ontos until they ran out of spare parts, then employed them in fixed bunkers. In the United States, the Marine 2nd Anti-Tank Battalion was disbanded along with the 5th Marine Division. The last Ontos garrison was stationed at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. It continued to operate until 1980, by which time it had one operational vehicle. Two others were used for parts.

Upon return to the United States, the tops of the vehicles were removed. Many of the chassis were sold for use as construction equipment or given to local governments for rescue work. One "platoon" of surplus M50s wound up in the service of the North Carolina Forestry Service for use as fire fighting vehicles. According to Vietnam veteran and former Marine Mike Scudder, Ontos today are scarce. In fact, there are more surviving World War I tanks than Ontos. Scudder should know: he bought the seven from North Carolina and is restoring two of them. More than 60 Ontos are believed to be

stored in the desert at the Marine Corps facility, Naval Air Warfare Center, China Lake, CA.

Was the Ontos a successful addition to the Marine Corps arsenal? The answer is quite simply, yes and no. The primary mission of the M50 was a tank destroyer. In the actual tactical environments in which it was deployed, there was little use for this ability.

Its secondary mission was the provision of direct fire support for the infantry. In this role the Ontos was underutilized. The reason, according to Major D.C. Satcher writing in the Marine Corps Gazette, is because, unlike artillery, air, and tanks, Ontos were little emphasized in Marine officer training. Ontos were never used in any tactics problems in The Basic School. Ontos crews did not have their own MOS (instead, they were infantry MOS). An Ontos officer normally served one tour with an M50 unit, then moved on. A weapons system that is under-emphasized will be under-utilized.

Although quick and agile (the M50 could go places no other Marine armored vehicle could go), it had limitations. In addition to the problems previously noted (premature firing and vulnerability to mining), the recoilless rifles had to be loaded externally which meant the crew had to leave the protection of an armored hull in order to reload. The 106mm recoilless rifle is no stealth weapon. When fired, the tremendous back blast makes the Ontos location visible to the enemy. Ontos crew had to ensure no friendly troops were in the large back blast area when operating in confined areas.

There was no enemy armor for the Ontos to destroy in Vietnam. Still, Marines are famous for their ability to improvise, and the enemy infantry were plentiful. The M50 was a formidable anti-personnel weapon. A couple of Ontos on the perimeter could decimate Communist forces attack on Marine fixed positions, a static role quite the opposite of its designed high-mobility, anti-armor role. My favorite example of Marines ability to adapt to local tactical conditions is the main streets of Hue City in February 1968. Not only good at destroying structures, Ontos were able to provide a "smoke screen" for infantry attacks. When Marine artillery was unable to provide white phosphorus rounds, Ontos could fire "beehive" rounds (explosive shells filled with thousands of small darts) fired into masonry structures, thereby creating a dust cloud that screened infantry movement. Marine infantry loved their Ontos. In Phase Line Green: The Battle for Hue, 1968, author Nicholas Warr describes how the M50 platoon pounded the enemy positions, accompanied by the choruses of "Get some!" sung by infantry holed up in houses, waiting to move forward. Fact is, even with its limitations, the Ontos was used and, to a considerable degree, provided invaluable support for the Marines in I Corps. ■



# MY TOUR OF DUTY WITH ONTOS

BY: R. SCOTT BERRY  
Alpha Co., 3rd Anti-Tank BN, 1966-67

I was in Khe Sanh from May 1967 until the end of November 1967. I was an Ontos crewman. My unit was 2nd Platoon, "A" Company, 3rd Antitank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. I came into country October 28, 1966. I was assigned to Charlie Company, which was stationed on "Finger 5" next to Hill 55, in the Da Nang area. I was assigned to 2nd Platoon that was at An Hoa, where there was a small airstrip that could handle planes up to the size of C-123's. Monsoon season made the roads a mire of deep mud that only Amtrak's could easily traverse.

For those who don't know what an Ontos is (or should I say was, as they are no longer in service), it's a nine-and-a-half-ton tracked vehicle armed with six 106mm recoilless rifles, four .50 caliber spotter rifles, and a .30 cal. (Browning) machine gun. Ideally, a crew of three manned each vehicle; some vehicles only had two crewmen. The Ontos has half-inch-thick armor that will stop .30 cal. and below. The Ontos has a top (governed) speed of 25 mph. It was highly maneuverable, originally designed as a tank killer.

In Nam, we used HEPT (High Explosive Plastic Tracer) rounds mostly, and some HEAT (High Explosive Antitank) rounds. When we got the Beehive rounds, they were very effective for clearing out tree lines of enemy snipers. The 106mm Beehive round contained 9500 flechettes. There was a variable fuse on the nose of the round that let you set the detonation from "MA" (Muzzle Activating), where the fired round would go out 75 meters and then detonate, or the fuse could be set to detonate the round at different distances up to 3300 meters. The MA setting was reliable. The other settings were not always as reliable.

We had trouble getting parts for our vehicles, especially the hard, rubber-tired steel "road wheels" that rode on the tracks. Chunks of rubber would break off these road wheels. In monsoon season, we would take 30-weight oil and paint it all over the 106's, .50's, and the .30 cal. to keep them from rusting.

At Delmar in Camp Pendleton, we went through Ontos Crewman School. They told us that the word

ONTOS is Greek for "Thing." After humping hills at San Onofre at Pendleton in ITR, (Infantry Training Regiment), I was glad when they pulled a group of us out after the third week of ITR and put us in the Ontos school. It sure beat walking, and you could carry more personal items with you in 'Nam.

The one big drawback is that we tended to draw heavy fire. Fifty-calibers would go through the Ontos easily, and several Ontos were taken out with RPGs. (We lost one Ontos with two crewmen in late 1966 [November] to a "wooden shoebox" mine in an area that had been already swept for mines by the daily morning mine sweep. I believe this was Highway 1, "Freedom Road." (It's been a long time since I talked about this, so excuse the lapses in memory.) There were five Ontos in a platoon, a platoon commander, a platoon sergeant, a mechanic, and the crewmen on the Ontos.

We went to the Bob Hope Christmas Show in Da Nang in December 1966. In January 1967, we went on a BLT (Battalion Landing Team) with 3/9 (Third Battalion/Ninth Ma-

rines) to Camp Hansen in Okinawa via ship. We left Da Nang Harbor at 2:30am when the Marines on board were sleeping. The next morning, out to sea, 90% of the Marines were seasick. Most had never been on a ship before. The "green" Marines were using the heads, sinks, showers, and any other available receptacles. The sailors were not very happy about this. I'll never forget that first morning breakfast on that ship—"creamed eggs!" (I declined.) To this day, I have never heard of "creamed eggs."

We refurbished our vehicles and equipment in Okinawa and after five weeks we headed back to Vietnam on another ship. I believe the first ship was the AKA-106, [Attack Cargo Transport?] (maybe named the USS Cabildo?) The ship we took back to 'Nam was an LSD (Landing Ship Dock?). The 3rd Mar. Div. had moved up north to the DMZ area, and the 1st Mar. Div. moved up to the Da Nang area. Our platoon was then attached to "A" Company, 3rd Antitank Battalion. We were in Camp Carroll for a short time. One vehicle and crew went to another unit, supposedly temporarily, but we never saw them again. Two vehicles and crew went to Gio Linh, and two vehicles and crew, with the platoon commander and platoon sergeant, went to Khe Sanh. I was in Gio Linh.

Gio Linh was 2100 meters from the DMZ. Con Thien was seven miles east of us. At Gio Linh, everything was dug down in holes and bunkers as every night between 11:00am and 1:00am, the VC would drop mortars on our small firebase—average 20-30 a night. They were close enough that you could hear them dropping them in the tubes with the "cah-dunk" sound, and then the whistling as the round came in, and then the explosion of detonation.

One afternoon, we mounted up and a large entourage of grunts, two tanks, two Dusters with their twin 40mm's, and our two Ontos, left the perimeter of Gio Linh and went out to the fire break to await large helicopters bringing in large wooden towers. The fire-

break at this time was 200 meters wide and was bare dirt. (Many years later I found out how this was cleared—Agent Orange.) The firebreak was ultimately supposed to be 800 meters wide, going from Gio Linh to Con Thien, and was to have a series of manned wooden towers along its border. The idea was to keep the NVA from filtering down from the North through this area. I believe they gave up on that project. That day, when we were all on line sitting in the scorching sun on the bare dirt of the fire break waiting for the choppers with the wooden towers, we were told it was 140 degrees.

We started taking mortar fire from the north. After numerous close rounds to our troops and vehicles, the enemy ceased firing after artillery from Gio Linh fired on their positions. Finally, a large chopper brought in a wooden tower and placed it on the firebreak. At Gio Linh, the Army had four 175mm artillery pieces. They had very long barrels, and were on tracks. These were on the north perimeter. The Marines had five 105mm towed units, set up in the usual large circle-shaped battery position.

One day, we took a couple of incoming enemy rockets. That was odd, as we were only used to the nightly mortar attacks. And then one evening around 6:30pm when I was going to late chow after my two fellow Ontos crewman (Sgt. Mac from Chicago and L/Cpl Reaves from Indiana) returned from chow to relieve me from our position on the south perimeter, I was in the large GP (General Purpose) tent that was dug down into a large. Three-foot-deep hole. I was in the process of declining the slop that was being served, figuring I'd go back and eat some "C Rats," when what sounded like a screaming Phantom jet with its afterburners on, went over my head, and exploded out in the minefield and wire on our perimeter. Another Phantom jet went screaming over my head and exploded. I then realized it wasn't a Phantom—it was enemy artillery. I expected them to drop several rounds on us and then stop, but it just kept coming and coming. I had been

shot at with small arms, mortared, and been in rocket attacks, but this was the worst. The incoming scream of those rounds was terrifying and something I shall never forget, because you know they are either going to get you, or they are not, and there isn't much you can do to prevent it except pray.

During one lull in between rounds, there were about four of us hunkered down in a corner of that big, wide hole of the mess tent—we heard a Marine calling for help. We looked up, and saw a Marine that was not hit, but obviously suffering from shell concussion. He was in a daze. We told him to get down in the hole with us, but he either couldn't hear us or was just too dazed to understand. We grabbed his hands, and just as we pulled him down into the hole, a round came in, and exploded behind us about fifty feet away, fortunately above ground, and not in the big wide hole we were in. The concussion slammed us down into the corner of the hole and temporarily deafened us for a few minutes. It was like two giant hands coming together on your ears. When rounds hit close, the shrapnel sounded like it was ripping the air. The shelling stopped for a short time. I ran back to my vehicle and fellow crewmen. There were craters and shell diameter-sized entry holes in the ground all over. My small bunker and two crewman and Ontos were okay. The only damage suffered to our Ontos was shrapnel cut off the two metal radio antennas, and the ammo can and its belted .30 cal. ammo on the machine gun was pierced by a large piece of shrapnel.

I sat on the front of the Ontos that was sitting in a hole dug out by a bulldozer, with the loose dirt pushed up behind. I had the dry heaves as I tried to regain my composure. As a grunt Lt. and a Sgt. were checking the lines, the heavy shelling started again. Instead of taking cover in my bunker that was about forty feet away, I opted to take cover underneath my Ontos. I don't know how I got under there wearing my helmet and flak jacket, but I did. (I was a lot slimmer back then.) The >>

grunt Lt. and Sgt. took cover on the ground in the hole at the rear of the Ontos. And the artillery shells kept coming and coming. After a while, you could just about tell where they were going to land, if they were going to be short or long. They say you never hear the one that gets you. Well, I don't know if you hear it explode, but I heard this one coming. I think my heart stopped for a second, as I stiffened up waiting for the impact, as this round sounded like it was going to be a direct hit on us. It came in screaming, and then there was a "whump" sound, and the ground shook. I held my breath, waiting for the explosion. It didn't explode. The grunt Lt. asked the grunt Sgt. where that round hit. The Sgt told him, "Don't move, I must be sitting on it!"

After another long duration of incoming artillery rounds, it stopped for a few minutes at which time I ran to my bunker, and the two grunts went back to their positions. We saw that that one incoming round landed in the soft bulldozed-up dirt on our side of the slope, less than ten feet from where we had taken cover. There was a nice round neat hole where it had cut a path downwards into the loose pile of dirt. If that round had gone off, we probably would have been scattered over the countryside. We later learned that there was an NVA artillery battery (or two) that dropped approximately 200 rounds on our small firebase in a 10-hour attack. They were dropping point-detonating and delayed fuse shells on us. The first rounds made direct hits on three of the Army's 175mm guns, and the fourth 175mm's powder pit was on fire, taking it out also.

Those extremely brave Marines in that 105mm artillery battery kept firing and were basically out in the open in the waist-high sandbag wall of the large circle containing their guns. One by one, the NVA artillery took them and their guns out. When everybody else was hunkered down, these guys were standing at their guns firing back as fast as they could. Those were some brave guys.

Both of our ammo dumps had been hit and were on fire, with our own ordnance detonating. It was pure hell that night. All our artillery was gone. We had two Ontos, two tanks, two twin 40 dusters, and one 81mm mortar. That was the extent of our heavy weapons. Our wire and large minefield on our perimeter were pretty chewed up with some of the rounds landing there and detonating our mines. We expected a ground attack during the darkness. All the other firebases were getting hit at the same time, so they could not support us with any artillery fire.

A couple hours after it started, we got a couple of Bird Dog spotter planes coming in from the south, but when they got close to us the NVA were shooting air bursts at them and coming close. After midnight, we got two Phantoms in that dropped their ordnance, but when they came into the area the NVA stopped shooting. When the Phantoms left to re-arm, the NVA started on us again. The Phantoms were never able to locate the exact position of the NVA artillery. We had heavy casualties. We did get a medevac chopper in for some of the wounded. Heat tabs that burn with a very low blue flame were arranged in a large circle to mark the LZ (Landing Zone). Just after the medevac took off and cleared the LZ with the wounded, the NVA zoned in on the LZ and dropped several rounds on it, but didn't get the medevac.

All night, the artillery continued. It was constant. My Ontos Commander, Sgt. Mac, who was on his second tour, was a tough, lean, black Marine. He told me he had been raised Catholic but wasn't very religious. Sgt. Mac was even praying that night! Just before daylight, the shelling stopped. We came out of our holes. It seemed like almost every square yard of the ground was covered by jagged pieces of metal shrapnel, like leaves on the ground in the fall. Everything was blown up. I was so happy just to be alive. We were at Gio Linh for two months. That morning we left, and went to Camp Carroll.

A short time later, we were informed that our Platoon Commander was killed on Hill 861 while he was in a five-man recon team. This was the precursor to the "Hill Battles." Our Platoon Commander was 1st Lt. Phillip Sauer. When I first came into the unit, he was a 2nd Lt. He was a gung ho Marine. He always wanted to personally get into the action. I was told that when he was going to go up Hill 861 to see if he could get the "pigs" (Ontos) up there, they tried to talk him into taking an M-14 or one of our "grease guns" (.45 cal. submachine gun). He declined and took his beloved Colt .45 auto that he had the armorer tighten up in Okinawa. You know the rest of the story—he covered the escape of the Marines left alive in the five-man team with his .45. I was told that he was cut in half by a .50 or .51 caliber NVA machine gun, and that they recovered half his body eight days later. He was put up for a Navy Cross. His family was from the East Coast.

Anyway, I ended up at Lejeune for a couple of months after getting back to the world, and then got orders for HMX-1, Marine Helicopter Squadron One (Presidential Helicopter) as a Marine Security Guard. I flew with the Vice President (Spiro Agnew) twice. After 17 months in HMX-1 at Quantico and the subunit at Anacostia (U.S. Naval station Washington D.C.), I got orders for NSA (National Security Agency) at Marine Barracks, Fort Meade, Maryland, where I finished my four years in the USMC, April 28, 1970. The names of some of the guys in my 2nd Platoon, 3rd A.T.'s: Cpl. Yates, Snead, Reaves, Sgt. Mac, Bosman (or Bozeman) (Saul Bozeman and another), our mechanic Chapin, Cpl. Wright, Peterson, Rupert from California, Pucci from New York, and Ray Updyke from Pennsylvania.

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## My Vietnam Experience with an Ontos Unit

BY RALPH BECK

I was so eager to become a Marine that I quit high school with only about fourteen weeks to go before graduation and left for Marine Corps Recruit Depot, San Diego, California, to begin my recruit training on 23 February 1965. While in Receiving Barracks awaiting the formation of our platoon, we were informed that the first combat troops, two battalions from the 9th Marine Expeditionary Brigade, arrived in Vietnam just north of Da Nang on 8 March 1965. I graduated Marine Corps Boot Camp on 20 May 1965 with the other recruits in Platoon 313 and began Infantry Training (ITR) with Company B, 1st Battalion, 2nd Infantry Training Regiment, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, California, on 23 May 1965. I fully expected to become a "Grunt" (Infantryman) with an MOS (Military Occupational Specialty) of 0311; however, I was surprised to find that upon graduation from ITR I had been assigned an MOS of 0353 – Ontos Crewman. I had no idea what an Ontos was, but it sounded better than "grunt."

On 30 June 1965, I reported to Company B, 1st Anti-Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton, California. Two days later, I took my "boot leave" and went home to Wisconsin for the next twenty days. Upon returning from leave, I fully expected to begin formal training at Camp Delmar, California, for Ontos Crewman School, but that was not to be. On 3 August 1965, I was reassigned to Company A, 1st Anti-Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division Reinforced, Fleet Marine Force, Camp Pendleton, California. Just three days later we embarked aboard the USS Wexford County LST-1168 (Landing Ship Tank) at San Diego and headed for "Southeast Asia."

We were part of a four-ship convoy that left San Diego, California – made a brief stop at Midway Island in the

"middle" of the Pacific, where I celebrated my 18th birthday (14 August 1965). We crossed the International Dateline on 16 August 1965 and continued our voyage. When we got to Okinawa, two of the ships in our convoy continued on to Vietnam, but the Wexford County, along with one other ship, docked at White Beach, Okinawa, Japan, where we disembarked. For the next ten weeks we underwent extensive "On the Job" (OJT) training with our Ontos. I was trained as a loader, but also learned how to drive and fire all the weapons on the Ontos, and had some basic instruction in vehicle maintenance. We also completed the Counter Insurgency Guerrilla Warfare Training School at Jungle Lane, Northern Training Area. We were based at Camp Hansen and spent our time off frequenting the whores and bars in and around Kin Village.

On 7 November 1965, I was re-assigned to Headquarters & Service Company, 1st Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division Reinforced, Fleet Marine Force, and on 10 November 1965, the 190th birthday of the Marine Corps, we embarked aboard the USS Oak Hill LSD-7 (Landing Ship Dock), headed for the South China Sea. We floated around for the next week and rumors were rampant aboard ship. We were going to Japan, or the Philippines, back to Okinawa, or on our way to Vietnam. The issue was settled on 18 November 1965 when we disembarked at Red Beach, Da Nang, South Vietnam. The previous day, three battalions of Viet Cong and one battalion of North Vietnamese military



PFC Ralph Waring Beck, USMC Vietnam 1966

troops overran a South Vietnamese Army (ARVN) outpost at Hiep Duc. The outpost overlooked Que Son Valley – a strategic area between Da Nang and Chu Lai. Under attack, the ARVN abandoned their posts and left behind a large supply of weapons and ammunition, now in enemy hands. It was going to be our job to help retake the outpost.

The Ontos commanders and drivers stayed with the vehicles aboard the USS Oak Hill, while the Loaders went ashore with the grunts by climbing down the rope ladders into Amphibious Assault Landing Crafts (LCM-6) and hit the beach in a typical World War II beach assault. However, there was no opposition to our landing. The Ontos were off-loaded at Da Nang, and we joined up with our vehicles in short order. We traveled south along Highway 1 toward Hoi An, then Southwest toward Hiep Duc. The sides of the roadway were lined with Vietnamese civilians who cheered and waved as we



made our way into battle. It was reminiscent of films I saw as a child of Allied Forces liberating cities and towns in Europe during World War II.

We were engaged in battle to retake the ARVN outpost at Hiep Duc within hours of arriving in Vietnam. We were re-designated Company A, 3rd Anti-Tank Battalion Reinforced, 3rd Marine Division, Fleet Marine Force. The Northeast monsoon season and weather conditions were at their worst. In spite of the weather conditions, the battle was joined by Marine Air Group-11 (MAG-11) providing F-4B Phantom jets, and MAG-12 providing A-4 Skyhawks to conduct airstrikes in support of the operation. MAG-16 and MAG-36 airlifted ARVN troops into the battle zone. The Marine Infantry unit involved was the 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment (3/7) from Chu Lai. Finally, two United States Destroyers, the USS O'Brien DD-725 and USS Bache DD-470 provided fire support from their locations at sea. In the first six days of the battle, enemy combatant losses were estimated to be 515 Killed in Action (KIA).

The enemy was routed from Hiep Duc, but remained strong in the area. The Marines were kept on alert and ordered to conduct "search and destroy" operations while commanders planned a more detailed response. The result was Operation Harvest Moon involving 2nd Battalion 7th Marine Regiment (2/7), 2nd Battalion 9th Marine Regiment (2/9), and 3rd Battalion 3rd Marine Regiment (3/3), reinforced with a Battery of 105mm Howitzers made up of elements of the 11th and 12th Marine Regiments. Also assigned to the operation were Tanks, Amtracs, and Ontos, comprising the balance of the attack force, which was code named "Task Force Delta." Operation Harvest Moon was to be the largest combined operation of the war since the Marines arrived in Vietnam the previous March. Starting on 12 December, the B-52 Stratofortress Bombers from the Air Force Base on Guam conducted bombing raids throughout the night and into

the early morning hours of 13 December. Operation Harvest Moon was officially ended on 20 December. In addition to the 515 enemy KIA prior to the start of Harvest Moon, the operation accounted for another 407 confirmed enemy KIA, 33 combatants captured, and 60 tons of ammunitions and other supplies were confiscated. Marine losses were 45 Marines KIA, 218 Wounded in Action (WIA). ARVN losses were 90 KIA and 141 WIA. Thus was my baptism under fire – a combined total of well over a thousand individuals on both sides losing their lives, and hundreds more wounded.

After Operation Harvest Moon we were relocated about 8 miles Northwest of the Da Nang Airbase at a little outpost named Le My. It was known as an enemy stronghold and our main objective was to be a blocking force in an avenue that would protect the Da Nang Airbase from attack. While there we had our share of daytime patrols and night ambushes. The Ontos were set in the hills and repositioned almost every night to avoid enemy mortar rounds. Frequently, we would take incoming small arms fire from our North – on the opposite bank of the Ca De River. On the evening of 22 January 1966, about twilight, the enemy launched an assault on Le My. While standing in front of my Ontos, I was struck by a round that ricocheted off the vehicle, hitting me behind my left knee. Just as I was hit, my Ontos commander, Staff Sergeant Gerald Ogle, or perhaps my driver, Lance Corporal Jimmy Ruthford, pulled me to the ground, probably saving me from further injury. My wound was slight, but it was a wake-up call for me.

Our Ontos would rotate back to Company Headquarters every ten to fourteen days for maintenance. Those trips were a welcome relief to the hard conditions we faced at Le My. There we lived in canvas tents with overturned ammunition boxes to form the deck. The monsoon weather turned the ground throughout the area, including inside our tents, into raging rivers. The rats and centipedes made their homes

in our racks, foot lockers, and wherever they could to escape the weather. Showers and hot meals were rare. In February 1966, after three months of very difficult duty, I had the opportunity to take a job in the company office as an administrative clerk. Apparently, typing was a rare skill, and that was enough to land me a new assignment. From my new locale, I would frequently ride shotgun on vehicles taking ammunition, fuel, mail and other supplies to my old friends still in the field. Those rides, while sometimes punctuated with sniper fire, were much safer than being assigned to an Ontos crew out in the sticks. However, one particular ride became the most memorable of my life.

Trying to find a "shortcut" to our destination, three of us were in a jeep carrying mail. Our weapons were holstered or on the deck of the jeep. The "road" turned into a trail, and then almost disappeared into the jungle. We were putt-putting along at just a couple miles per hour on some awfully rough terrain making a wide turn to the right, when out of the jungle stepped three Vietcong, their weapons at the ready. They stood frozen just a few feet to our left, and our eyes locked as we slowly drove past them. The tallest of the three, standing in the center, was carrying a Browning Automatic Rifle (BAR). He let us get about fifteen yards past them, and he let loose with a burst of eight to ten rounds just over our heads, and let out a huge laugh that seemed way out of proportion for his size. We just kept inching along and somehow made it back to our outpost. I have been haunted by this experience ever since it occurred. I just cannot understand why he and his comrades didn't just kill us on the spot. They would have had our jeep, uniforms, weapons, radios, and the supplies we were carrying, and we were completely helpless to defend ourselves. What bothers me the most is that I believe if the situation had been reversed, I would not have been so compassionate. I would

M-50A1 Ontos



My Outpost, Viet Nam 1966



have taken their lives with little or no hesitation. Over the years, I have often prayed for the salvation of that enemy soldier, so one day I could meet him in heaven and thank him for sparing the life of a stupid kid Marine, and my friends.

I was due to rotate back to the United States in September 1966, and received orders to report to the 5th Marine Division at Camp Pendleton, California. Having more than two years to go on my enlistment, I was sure that I would spend a short time at Pendleton, and would soon find myself back in Vietnam for another tour of duty. Therefore, I decided to extend my current tour by 90 days in exchange for any duty station "East of the Mississippi River." My extension was approved and I settled in for the next three months working in the company office.

What I didn't know was our entire Company was about to move North to the area around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ). In August 1966, Operation Prairie began to establish and maintain a blocking force along the southern edge of the DMZ to prevent the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) from crossing the DMZ at will. Since every Marine is first and foremost an infantryman, my new job as administrative clerk did little to keep me out of danger. We traveled north along Highway 1 to Dong Ha, then west along Highway 9 and finally settled at Camp J. J. Carroll. On the way, we encountered double and triple canopy jungle, but

when we arrived at Camp Carroll, it was as barren as the landscape of the moon. We had dumped enough Agent Orange and other toxins on the land to kill everything that grew. My last three months in Vietnam were similar to my first three. Cold, wet, tired, hungry, enjoying the monsoons along with the smell of gun powder and napalm. Operation Prairie ended with more than 100 Marines KIA, 200 WIA and 1300 enemy KIA. Fortunately, I was spared much of the action of that operation, as it covered such a large geographical area and I was involved for less than half the time it was taking place. Nevertheless, I was more than ready to see 18 December 1966 come around and my return home.

The last two years of my active duty enlistment were spent at Marine Air Reserve Training Detachment, Marine Air Reserve Training Command, Naval Air Station, Grosse Ile, Michigan. I continued in my job as administrative clerk and trained Marine Reservists as my primary assignment. There were only about ninety active duty Marines on the base. Other duty included providing military funeral honors for Marines KIA whose home of record was in and around Detroit, Michigan. I went on countless funerals, and in some cases, the duty was worse than serving in Vietnam. I was frequently overtaken by guilt, as I lay to rest fellow Marines who paid the ultimate price for all of us to enjoy "life as usual" back in "The World."

During the years that followed my service in Vietnam I have made four humanitarian missionary trips back to Vietnam, two of them with my wife, Lynn. I have helped in the construction of three medical clinics and one childrens playground on those trips. I also revisited all the areas where I served as a young Marine. I have found my purpose in life doing volunteer work helping veterans, their families, and supporting their causes. In Vietnam I made friends that have lasted a lifetime, and remember those who became casualties of war.

To this day, I am friends with our company corpsman, Ric "Doc" Gardiner, and a few others that I count among my blessings: Rick Murdie, Pat "Frenchie" Canulette, Gary "Lightning" Hartman, John "Pi-man" Paiva, Dana Hunter, John "Sergeant" Williams, and Steve Valdez. I have had brief encounters with others and would like to build deeper friendships with them: Elwood "Woody" Carpenter, Robert "Bob" Becker, David "Dave" Stegmeier, and Daniel "Danny" Welch. Whenever I am able to visit The Wall I pause to remember some of those we left behind: Greg Weaver – KIA 26 May 1966; Robert "Bob" Gage – Missing In Action (MIA) 3 July 1966 (body not recovered); Raul Orta – KIA 1 February 1967; Philip Sauer – KIA 24 April 1967; Wayne Hayes – KIA 6 July 1967; and some 17 others that served with Ontos units that were KIA sometime during my tour from November 1965 to December 1966. ■

# The Shitter

John Paiva, better known to us as “Pi”, was not exactly your poster Marine. A “high spirited Marine” was a tactful way of describing his colorful character. He was a Motor Vehicle Operator (MOS 3531) assigned to our Ontos Unit, Company A, 3rd Anti-Tank Battalion, 3rd Mar. Div. during his 1965/66 tour in Vietnam. His specialty gave him plenty of opportunity to travel within our assigned area of operation. A magnet for enemy fire, anyone who dared to ride shotgun for him was in for an adventure. It didn’t matter if he was transporting ammo, fuel, pulling a water-buffalo, or mail; it was as though he had an invisible target on the side of his vehicle. Many stories could be told about his escapades, like his imaginary friend, or his attempts to do wheelies in a six-by, the time he allegedly rolled a CS grenade into the officer’s shower, and more. But one of my favorites was when he blew up the shitter.

No, he didn’t act alone. His accomplice on this most notable occasion was Gary “Lightning” Hartman. Now Lightning didn’t get that name because he moved faster than any of us. Just the opposite. He moved more like Wisconsin molasses in January. Quiet, a bit more reserved, he was more likely to be the “si-

lent partner” in any crime. As an Ammunition Technician (MOS 2311), he and Pi frequently made ammunition runs from battalion to outpost. They were a pair.

Neither one of them had more than one stripe on their sleeve and would frequently get the shit details. On this infamous day, following morning assembly, the two of them were ordered to burn the shitter. The orders came from a new corporal who had just reported to our unit the previous day. Already he had acquired the name “Shaky Jake” because he was startled by every little sound and believed a VC sniper was behind every bush.

Shit burning is, of course, an acquired skill, and as far as we all knew, this was the duos first attempt. Believe me, neither of these two were a good choice for this highly technical activity. The corporal was even less qualified, but instructed them to get some diesel fuel for the task at hand and supervised from a distance.

Ontos Marines lived next door to our big brothers, tankers, and Pi recalled that tanks run on diesel fuel. Since they were not strangers to requisitioning needed supplies from other units, he and Lightning borrowed a jerrycan of diesel from the neighbors, lugged it all the way to the

shitter, and began to empty all five gallons into the shit below awaiting destruction. The corporal went ballistic. He said the fuel needed to be poured on the wooden structure as well. Why? Who knows. Perhaps he thought it was to sanitize the surface. Both Lightning and Pi objected, in a not too forceful way, and dutifully followed the corporal’s orders.

Realizing that they were dealing with massive amounts of shit beneath a four-holer, they decided that more fuel was necessary. However, rather than returning to “big brother’s house” for some more diesel, Pi decided to stay close to home and got a can of Ontos fuel—gasoline.

After pouring most of the five gallons of gasoline into the pit, Pi stuffed a rock inside a roll of toilet paper, lit it ablaze and tossed it into the deep. Both of them ran like hell. And it was a good thing they did!

It is a little-known fact that gasoline is lighter than diesel fuel, shit, and most other debris one would find at the bottom of any four-holer. Therefore, it was floating and pooling on top of all the crap, and when the flaming toilet roll touched the first collection of gas, BOOM! It was literally “outgoing.” Part of the shitter blew over the wire as flames erupted, engulfing the structure.

The rumor that the company gunny was sprayed with shit are completely unsubstantiated. No one recalls ever hearing a Marine Corps Gunnery Sergeant stutter before, but he was unable to form any meaningful words to match the look on his face. There are only two things we know for sure: Corporal “Shaky Jake” only lasted another day or two and was rumored to have headed for home suffering from a nervous breakdown, and neither Pi nor Lightning were ever asked to burn another shitter for the remainder of their tours in Vietnam.

Story by: Ralph Beck

Other Collaborators: Rick “Doc” Gardiner, Rick Murdie, Gary “Lightening” Hartman & John “Pi” Paiva.



# MY TIME WITH THE “ONTOS”

BY ROGER LULI

A Trans World Airways 707 left Norton Air Force Base at 3:00am. The plane stopped at Oakland, California, Anchorage, Alaska, and Kyota Air Force Base in Japan. At 9:00pm we finally landed at Kadena Air Force Base in Okinawa. From the air base we were transported to Camp Hansen for a briefing, more shots, and a few hours rest. At the “O” club I ran into 2ndLt. Steve Lampo, one of the officers in the same platoon at The Basic School. He was attending Embarkation School. He had his quota of Purple Hearts. He said, “There is so much s\*\*t flying around over there, it is not a question of whether or not you will get wounded, but when.” It was definitely not what I wanted to hear.

Another World Airways flight landed in Da Nang late afternoon on August, 18 1967. The flight attendants said “Welcome to South Viet Nam. We hope to serve you on your way back home.” I thought, “Amen sisters.” The tent where the newbies were to report was closed so we were told to report back the next morning. The rest of the crowd went off to find a barracks while I decided to camp out on a bench in front of the tent. Since we were near the end of the runway, the F-4’s taking off all night prevented any sleep. The next morning, the battalion liaison assigned me to the 3rd Anti-tank Battalion as they were in need of officers. I found out just recently that I was one of the very few tank officers assigned to Ontos. As I was waiting for a flight to Phu Bai, I met an officer from Tank School. He told me that most of the officers from that Tank School class did not get tank platoons. Instead they were performing administrative work or just sitting around. After hearing that, I was just glad to be getting a command, even an Ontos command.

I was put on a flight to Phu Bai. Upon arriving at the camp, I was directed to the CO’s tent where to my surprise was Lt. Col. Jinx McCain. He was the very officer who convinced me that tanks were the way to go. I started to feel pretty good about my situation when he said, “We do not need any tank officers at this time, but I promise to get you in a tank platoon as soon as possible.”

He told me I had been assigned to another tracked combat vehicle called the Ontos. “With all due respect Colonel, just what is an Ontos?” He replied that the name means “The Thing” in Greek and that it had tracks, guns and a crew. He omitted the fact there was no room on board for the platoon commander. He pointed on a large map to the place where I was to be stationed. I noticed two long parallel red lines traversing across the map just about 3 clicks north of the base; Con Thien was right next to the DMZ.

The Colonel then told me to report to the airfield for a flight to Dong Ha. He dismissed me, and as I started to open the door he said, “Oh, by the way, Lieutenant, don’t f\*\*k it up.”

Upon landing in Dong Ha, I reported to Charlie Company 3rd Anti-Tank Battalion. The company commander was an Annapolis graduate. He welcomed me and showed me where my platoon quarters were and I proceeded to stow my gear. He also introduced me to Gunny “Snake”, the chief mechanic. Gunny introduced me to the Ontos. The first things I noticed were the six 106mm recoilless rifles mounted on a small turret (a six-shooter on tracks). The interior made a tank turret look like a grand ballroom.

The next day, I met Cpl. Henji, the platoon driver. We proceeded to Con Thien. As we passed through Cam Lo, he pointed out the police chief. She was a young Vietnamese woman. Cpl. Henji said she was in love with Pete, the platoon radio operator. While his name was Pete, she pronounced it “Feet”.

We drove north over roads that were very rutted and dusty. When we arrived, Con Thien was the same, rutted and dusty. We stopped at the top of the hill by OP 2. Gunny Cahoon greeted us and we proceeded on a tour of the vehicle emplacements. We had four bunkers, two at OP-2, one for an ontos crew and the driver, the other for the other crew, the platoon commander, platoon sergeant and the radio operator. The other two bunkers were located at the southern and western gates. >>



This is 3rd platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Anti-Tank Battalion at the decommissioning of the AT battalion. I am at the bottom left. Shortly after this was taken, I reported to Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks. Standing behind me to the left is Cpl. Dispirito, who is mentioned at the end of my story. On the top, the guy on the left is Bottimer and on the right is Bohr. Bohr is the one I thought was sleeping on the Ontos in Hue.

Later that afternoon, at the Battalion CP, I met Lt.Col. Gorton Cook, the commander of the 3rd battalion 9th Marines. His three company commanders were, Captain Sam Adams, Captain "Crunch" and another captain who never carried a weapon. "When it comes time for me to shoot, there will be plenty of weapons lying around." I would see these men later at The Rockpile. I also saw Lt. James P. Coan from tank school. He had replaced Lt. Thomas C. Barry, also from tank school. Lt. Coan told me his bunker was just to the north and down the road from mine. Life on Con Thien for the most part was pretty routine. In the morning, we heard the first rocket, put on our helmets and boots, lit our first of many cigarettes, and went outside to observe the DMZ. At night, we were busy chasing rats and centipedes. Gunny Cahoon was replaced by Sgt. Green and Cpl. Henji was rotated back stateside. Then one day the rains came and the dust became mud.

There were several non-routine events which deserve mentioning:

One morning very early, a crewman rushed into the bunker and said, "Lieutenant, I just saw an anti-aircraft gun in the DMZ". As we moved to the bunker door, we heard the rockets coming in. It is believed we took over 1000 hits that day.

One night, a heavy machine gun opened fire on our outpost. We watched the green tracers as the rounds went way overhead. Our thought was that the enemy was trying to draw our return fire in order to spot weapon emplacements. Lt.Col. Cook ordered the troops not to return fire directly at the incoming tracers but toward each flank. This tactic was intended to neutralize the spotters.

One afternoon, Cpl. Despirito was relaxing, sitting over one of those famous 55-gallon drums half filled with diesel fuel. From inside the bunker we heard the incoming round land nearby. In an instant Cpl. Despirito came running into the bunker holding his neck. There was a piece of hot shrapnel lodged in the collar of his flak jacket. It was a close call. He was one of five Ontos crewmen to receive minor wounds.

Then, the bridge washed out. Heavy rains had destroyed the bridge just south of Con Thien making resupply very difficult. Everything had to come in by helicopter. Each helicopter brought in more fuel, food, and ammunition as well as more incoming rockets. Critical items became scarce. Fortunately, we had a box of the less desirable cans that we usually traded in Cam Lo for ice and candles. Those cans soon became our main source of food. (Ham and Mother F\*\*kers anyone?) Also, even though we were in desperate need, the people in the rear still found room on the helicopters for our mail.

One morning I was visited by Lt. Larry D. Parsons. He was my fraternity brother at Penn State as well as my roommate at Camp Pendleton. He was in Track School while I was in Tank School. He had been working his Amtracks

at the mouth of the Cam Lo River. He asked "Where is the DMZ?" When I pointed to the tree line, he said, "Luli, there is nothing between you and the enemy but God." He did not care for Con Thien. 2ndLt. Robert Lovejoy, my roommate at The Basic School, was also there as a forward observer. He too did not like Con Thien. In the last 50 years, I have found no one to disagree with them.

On another morning, Cpl. Henji came to me and said that the left headlight of the personnel carrier (PC) had been destroyed by shrapnel. I told Pete to radio company maintenance about what had happened and request a replacement. I said to disguise what was affected so the enemy would not know what they had accomplished. The radio message stated the "PC" had been wounded in the left eye.

Several days later my mother was greeted at the door by two Marines in dress blues. "Ma'am, is your husband at home?" He was not, so she called him and he came. They handed them a telegram that said, "THIS IS TO INFORM YOU THAT YOUR SON SECOND LIEUTENANT ROGER B LULI USMC WAS INJURED ON 25 SEPTEMBER 1967 IN THE VICINITY OF QUANG TRI, REPUBLIC OF VIETNAM. HE SUSTAINED A FRAGMENTATION WOUND BELOW HIS LEFT EYE FROM A HOSTILE ROCKET WHILE IN A DEFENSIVE POSITION. HIS CONDITION AND PROGNOSIS WERE EXCELLENT. HE WAS TREATED IN THE FIELD AND RETURNED TO DUTY."

Since none of this was true, my parents received another visit from the two Marines. This time the telegram said, "A REPORT RECEIVED THIS HEADQUARTERS REVEALS THAT YOUR SON SECOND LIEUTENANT ROGER B LULI USMC WAS NOT INJURED AS PREVIOUSLY REPORTED TO YOU. HE IS PRESENTLY WELL AND ON DUTY WITH HIS PARENT UNIT. IT IS HOPED THAT THIS ERROR HAS NOT CAUSED YOU ANY UNDUE ANXIETY."

Are you kidding me? My mother suffered two visits by Marines, who only bring bad news, simply because no one bothered to verify my condition.

One afternoon, one of the Ontos was hit by shrapnel and sustained some damage. The event wound up on television in a segment of the NBC News Report. The replacement 106mm recoilless rifle was photographed by David Douglas Duncan and the photo was one shown in the October 27, 1967 issue of Life magazine.

We were listening to the radio and heard the following exchange: "We are requesting artillery on a target that looks to be a group of men dressed in green carrying a log or recoilless rifle. Do you have any troops in the area?" The response was, "we have no friendlies in the area. What are the coordinates?" Shortly after the coordinates were given, we heard a frantic call, "cancel the fire mission. The man in the rear of the column just ran up and kicked the man on point in the ass. They must be Marines."

The last two events will never leave my memory: Cpl. Herman John Baer and I were sitting between the

two bunkers. He was short and told me how he intended to re-populate the state of Montana. He called himself the "Montana Stud." He was a good crewman and a great help to me. I heard the incoming rocket and dove for the bunker door. I felt the heat of the explosion and crumpled into the bunker. Someone said, "Where is Baer?" We rushed outside to find him lying on the ground with a severe head wound. We called the battalion HQ and asked for corpsman assistance. When the corpsman arrived, he had no stretcher. We grabbed a cot and placed Baer on it. The corpsman, myself, and two crewmen took off toward the battalion aid station. The dry dusty road had by this time been turned into a muddy quagmire. We tried to run but could only go step by step, pulling our boot out of the mud with each step. Every so often we had to drop down because of incoming rockets. We arrived at the battalion aid station and I sent the crewmen back to our bunker. I stayed with Baer as the doctor worked on him. After a while the doctor stepped back and said "There is nothing more I can do here." Baer started to breath heavily and I asked the doctor if he was in pain. The Doc said that he was fighting for his life right now. Baer was placed on a helicopter and sent to a hospital in Dong Ha. As I went to the infantry battalion briefing, I knew that I had lost a brother.

Lt. W.G. Jerro was in 2nd Platoon, Golf Company in the same Basic School class as I was. He was a forward observer in OP-2, located just up the hill from our bunker. He was killed by an enemy recoilless rifle. He is one of 44 officers from that class killed in Viet Nam.

Here are some observations of other weapons and events at Con Thien:

"Puff the Magic Dragon" dropping flares and spraying the mini-guns out on the trace. It looked and sounded like some kind of ray gun.

The Battleship New Jersey was firing 16-inch shells in support of Khe Sanh. It sounded like we were shooting railroad cars at the enemy. My uncle, Sgt. W.R. Patterson, was a marine sniper during the battle for Iwo Jima; he told me of his experience with the battleships. He was halfway to the base of Mount Suribachi when the Japanese began firing from the mountain onto the beach. He saw the battleship turrets turning toward the mountain and when they fired, the concussion knocked all the fillings out of his teeth.

The B-52s dropping "Arflight" over the DMZ. The concussion was enough to blow out the candles in our bunker. When we heard the bombs coming, we looked up to see the contrails. The B-52s were on their way home before their Bombs hit the ground

We finally saw a newspaper clipping about the "Marine Victory" at Con Thien. We always knew we were hurting them more than they were hurting us but this was the first time we had seen it reported. It made the crewmen mad to read about "Marines in sandbagged positions taking a heavy-artillery-pounding," when in fact, they were in their

vehicles firing back at the enemy positions.

Finally, Lt. Col. Cook asked me how long our platoon had been on Con Thien. When I told him over 45 days, he said, "It is time for you to rotate out of here." He had nothing but compliments about our platoon. I had my crewmen to thank for that. They were a very fine group of Marines.

The 2nd AT Platoon came in and took over our positions. We returned to Dong Ha for some in-country R&R, then one section went on to Gio Linh with two of the 2nd Platoon Ontos. The other section stayed in Dong Ha. The platoon sergeant and I rotated between the two positions. One night in Dong Ha, Gunny "Snake" and I were having conversations in the NCO club. I complained that Marines on Con Thien were nothing but bait. The upper command would wait until we were surrounded and then bring in the B52s. Gunny "Snake" politely straightened me out. "Lieutenant, we are Marines, we go where we are told and do what we are told." I had a new attitude after that.

Gio Linh was at the opposite end of the Trace from Con Thien. Instead of rockets, we had the "pop-boom" gun—a 100mm direct fire gun that, when you heard the pop, it was too late to take cover. Therefore, the entire base was criss-crossed with trenches. These trenches were a blessing because we did not have to spend so much time underground. We did not get as much "incoming" as Con Thien and the bunkers were much better with walls and floors made of wood instead of sandbags. We even had electric lights and fans. We got two hot meals per day and drew C-rations for the other meal. The food was much better than at Dong Ha and there was more of it. We ate our evening meal after dark so the NVA wouldn't see our movement. We would go to the mess hall and bring our food back to the bunker. I came back to our bunker twice with no food. I kept falling in the dark. The crewmen would sit and wait to see if I came back empty handed. Then they would cheer if I returned with a tray in my hand.

The Ontos were positioned, one by the main gate, one directed towards the trace. We were told that in the event of a ground attack, the Ontos facing the main gate toward the ARVN position was to fire at anyone coming in from that base. Fortunately, we never had to do that.

There was a temple to the west of our position. We suspected there was a forward observer in the temple but we were told not to fire on it. The solution, therefore, was to sight-in on the temple during the day. After dark, we said we observed a light outside the wire. We were given permission to fire at the light. Boom, there was no more temple and no more forward observer.

I remember seeing an F-4 dive below the tree line near the Ben Hai River. It never came out.

I believe it was in mid-November we were told the Ontos battalion was to be disbanded. We were to return to Dong Ha and board a ship to take us to the tank battalion headquarters at Phu Bai. The trip from Gio Linh was un- >>



This is the command bunker at Con Thien. The barbed wire in the foreground borders one of the old French minefields that were still in place and active on Con Thien. The hill to the right of the bunker is OP 1. I was standing in front of OP2 when I took the picture.

eventful. We arrived in Dong Ha and loaded the vehicles onto an LST. The trip out the Qua Viet River was smooth until we got to the mouth. The ship hit a wave and shot skyward then dove down below the water. When we surfaced I thought, "Ok, this is normal," and then I looked at the

Camp Carroll to meet the 2nd tank platoon

I remember as I was leaving the camp, Cpl. Despirito snapped to attention and gave me a salute. It was a special end to my time with Ontos. ■

bridge and saw the look on the faces of the Navy crew. That look told me we had almost gone under.

The ship traveled down the coast and up the Song Huang River to Hue City. The place was beautiful. There were hundreds of students in their traditional dress walking home from class. We soon discovered that young women can look very sexy even when covered in silk from their necks to their ankles. The buildings were gorgeous and beautifully decorated. We spent the night and then continued onward to Phu Bai.

Arriving at Phu Bai, we began cleaning the Ontos and polishing the exterior with diesel fuel. At the same time, I cleaned my .45 and discovered it was full of sand, compliments of our earlier swim in the South China Sea. Once the vehicles were squared away, we began to disperse. Some of the crews stayed with the AT Company and some were transferred to Recon. Lt. Col. McCain sent me to B Company at



Marine M50 Ontos - Vietnam

## Ontos at Con Thien and Khe Sanh

BY EDWIN L. "TIM" CRAFT

B Co., 3rd AT's

I graduated from high school in 1966, and all of my course studies had been academic. My main interests besides girls were marching band and debate. Having won the Kansas State Oratorical Championship in 1964 with a speech topic, "Optimism Formula For Freedom," my intentions were to become a lawyer. I was aware of the Viet Nam War, especially when it began to heat up in 1965. Little did I know that before the next year was over that I would take a journey straight into the pits of Hell and see the heaviest fighting our country has ever experienced.

After high school, I enrolled in junior college. I paid my own way by also working at night part time for the H. D. Lee Company that made clothing. When I quit college to join the Marines, my professors and especially the office tried to get me to reconsider by saying, "But your grades are well above average. You will never have to go!" My reply, and my reason for joining, was simply, "Those guys fighting and dying over there are no more deserving to be there than me, and I can't feel right letting them do something I would not."

My goal was never to be heroic or gallant. That was the last thing on my mind. After joining, I was barely in the States nine months when I was sent to Nam. En route, we landed on Wake Island. It looked like a grain of sand in the middle of the ocean when our commercial flight United 747 jet pitched downward and aimed at that grain of sand. My thought was, "You've got to be kidding me." All of the Marines that fought there in WW2 became POW's of the Japanese. Later, I met one of them and got to know him well. I spoke at his funeral. His name was Bob Eaton.

Next stop was Okinawa and the next day it was Da Nang, then Dong Ha, then Hell at Con Thien. My first day in the field I met a Marine who would be my commanding officer...a fine man. Thirty minutes later, Lt. Dallas Thompson would move in front of me and die from an explosion. He fell right across my lap and died looking into my eyes. We were taking so much incoming that our Platoon Sgt. ordered us off the hill, mainly because they had our little bunker zeroed



in. When I found a hole to jump in, the Marine in it mistook me for a corpsman and called me "Doc." He said, "Doc, that is some of the fanciest footwork I have ever seen. They were following you all the way down. You would go right and they would explode left, then you'd go left and they would explode right. You probably saved all of those guys."

I told him, "I'm not a corpsman. I'm a Marine, and I just got here. I was scared and following orders. I don't know enough to plan anything!"

He just looked at me for a long while and said, "That was still some run, Doc!" (Jarheads!!!) Con Thien, by the way means "Place of Angels." We were under siege there for several months and were cut off from food and water for much of it.

Leatherneck Magazine called the siege of Con Thien "Time in the Barrel." We received a minimum of 200 incoming rounds a day. Since it was a small place, it felt like they hit every square inch. One thing I quickly learned was how to know the difference in the sounds of incoming. That knowledge was literally a matter of life and death. Mortars made a high arch and the initial blast in the distance was a muffled report. An artillery round has a bassier sound. It gave you slightly more time to find cover, but if it was on you, then you were in deep trouble. The other one was the most terrifying. It was the rocket, and it screamed as it came in. You could not tell where it might come down, and it came fast. They also had recoilless rifles that fired large shells. They went off almost at the same time you heard them fired at you, and they had a flat trajectory.

My second day in the field another Marine and I wiped out an artillery section that had us pinned down. The Phantoms that flew over reported we had killed 162 of the enemy. This was L/Cpl Arthur Kennedy and myself. We went out under direct fire and had to get out and make sure the grunts (infantry) were down before we could fire our Ontos. If we had been in any other branch, both of us would have received the Congressional Medal of Honor. The truth I learned >>

over and over is the Marines were too small an outfit to allow its members to go to receive them, and many of the Marines I knew were cheated out of them. During 1967 and 1968, the Marines bore the brunt of the war, and that is a fact. World Book Encyclopedia reported that fact. Don't get me wrong. I am not medal happy and I wasn't then. When I returned I had at least four rows, and the Marines make you earn theirs.

After months of carnage we had a cease fire on Christmas Eve of 1967. I arrived there about the second week of August and saw many good men die. All of us lived with death every second of every day. On this particular Christmas Eve, I heard a broadcast on Armed Forces radio and learned the "Clinton-

ites" were marching on our Capitol protesting against us! I could not believe what I was hearing. Here we were fighting for freedom and these low life commies back home were fighting against us. I was dazed. I just could not understand it. I was hurt to my soul, angered, and disgusted. (This motivated me to write a message on a C-Ration case.)

Not very long after that night we got the word that we were going to a resort area called Khe Sanh. It had not seen any of this type of action. It actually had a mess hall and a laundry, and they marched to chow. Wow!!! What unfathomable luxuries. Also, during this time I was on an operation with B Co 1/9 called Kingfisher, where we got the name "Walking Dead", and a new phrase was coined "thousand yard stare." One of the Marines started cussing one night, and there was a big commotion. The next day we found out a tiger had grabbed him by the arm and was just carrying him off. He was punching it in the snout. It got as far as the Ben Hai River and didn't know what to do with him, so it just let him go. That story was in Stars and Stripes. (I was afraid to write back home about that one for fear they would think I was nuts.) The Marines just kidded him about being too grisly for the tiger and that it wanted a softer cut of meat.

When I got to Khe Sanh, sure enough, they were marching to chow, had on starched utilities, and what really blew my mind was that all of their bunkers were built above ground!!! What was wrong with these people? We were met by our new CO, whom I had met at Con Thien. I didn't know who he was, just that he was a big wig. Captain James Lea told us in no uncertain terms that we would fall out in the morning clean shaven and in freshly starched utilities, because special arrangements had been made for us. The junior officer took over after Captain Lea left and asked if we had any questions. Being an old salt by now I told him, "Sir, with all due respect



for your rank you can go — yourself, because me and my men are not going to live in any of these above ground bunkers." He said, "Fine, Corporal Craft" (Actually, I was only a L/Cpl). He said, "See that wire over there? You just take your merry men and go right out there and pick out any real estate you want because that is enemy territory and they will be glad to have you. But, as long as you are here, you will comply. Is that clear?" I said "Yes sir, perfectly."

When he turned away and went back to the HQ, we beat feet for the wire and told them we were going to be an LP (listening post). You can bet we would be, too! They said, "And you're taking an Ontos to an LP?" I just said "You never can be too careful!" We went out and started digging in. We were the diggingest bunch of guys you ever saw. We just dug and filled sand bags. I think they knew they had been had because they ignored us for nearly a week. Then, our Lt. was sent out to read us the riot act. En route, the siege began. The enemy hit the ammo dump, and it sounded like Volkswagens flying past us. It was Con Thien all over again. The next day I was

sent for and they wanted me to work with some Seabees to show them how to build the new bunkers. (I wonder why?)

This siege lasted for 77 days and was the most intense fighting of our history. Some reports say there were 1,000 of us and as many as 400,000 of the enemy. Other reports show 6,000 Marines at Khe Sanh, but this was not the Combat Base. This figure had to include the surrounding hills and supporting units. Khe Sanh Combat Base wasn't that big! Essentially, it was a runway. We were taking some 1,600 rounds of incoming per day every day on this tiny piece of real estate. Someone calculated that we had an explosion from an enemy device every 30 seconds day and night for 77 days. I had been called away from my safe hole when they found out my secondary MOS was Ammo/Tech.

It was during this time that I spotted a reporter and asked him if he would please mind getting a message back to the world for me.

He asked "What is it?"

I told him and he looked shocked and asked if I would mind writing that down. I said "Sure" and wrote it on a C-Ration case. That message was: "For those that will fight for it... FREEDOM...has a flavor the protected shall never know."

*Editor's Note: This story appeared in the #3 – 2010 issue of the Sponson Box but we felt that it would be appropriate and meaningful to repeat it in this special Ontos edition. ■*





# 2019 Seattle Reunion Schedule

Thursday, October 31 – Monday, November 4  
*Schedule is subject to change*



<b>Thursday (Oct. 31)</b>	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	<b>Arrival Day</b> – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside The Torsion Bar hospitality room (in the _____ room). <b>Sign up for VTA History Interviews Fri and Sun</b>
	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	The Torsion Bar is Open <b>Lunch &amp; Dinner on your own</b>
<b>Friday (Nov. 1)</b>	<b>0600 – 0845</b>	<b>Complimentary breakfast buffet</b>
	<b>0900 – 1100</b>	Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (in the _____ room) <b>Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion!</b> <i>Must submit ticket before 0900 in the meeting room and be present for the drawing to win</i>
	<b>0900 – 1100</b>	Ladies Coffee (The _____ Room)
	<b>1100 – 1530</b>	<b>Free Time and lunch on your own</b>
	<b>1100 – 1530</b>	The Torsion Bar Open
	<b>1600 – 1700</b>	Italian Buffet Dinner (in the _____ room)
	<b>1700 – 1900</b>	Live Auction! (in the _____ room)
	<b>1900 – 2300</b>	The Torsion Bar Open
<b>Saturday (Nov. 2)</b>	<b>0600 – 0930</b>	<b>Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!!</b> Complimentary breakfast buffet
	<b>1000 – 1015</b>	Load buses to tour downtown Seattle (On side of hotel)
	<b>1045 – 1300</b>	Tour Pike Place Market <b>Lunch on your own</b>
	<b>1300 – 1315</b>	Load buses for next tour

### Video interview schedules at the Seattle reunion

Hey marines, we are now scheduling video interviews for the USMC VTA reunion in Seattle. The interviews will be thirty (30) minutes in duration and will be held on Sunday, November 3, 2019, from 0900 to 1500 in the conference rooms at the hotel. If you would like to be interviewed, please contact Pete Ritch by phone: 850-734-0014 or via email: goldendog@mchsi.com. The interview schedules at the St. Louis Reunion were 90% full prior to the reunion, so please schedule your interview now to insure you get a slot.

If you would like to view the wide assortment of interviews from our previous reunions, please go to the VTA website and click on Members Stories, Reunion Interviews.

If you have any questions please contact Pete as listed above.



OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM  
**2010 Seattle Reunion**

Double Tree Hotel–Southcenter  
October 31 – November 4

**Want to save \$30?**  
**Mail your registration before August 30**

	<b>1345 – 1600</b>	Tour Museum of Flight and VN Memorial As soon as we off load buses we'll take reunion photo
	<b>1600 – 1645</b>	The Torsion Bar Open <b>Dinner on your own</b>
<b>Sunday (Nov. 3)</b>	<b>Open Day–All Day</b> Open day to tour city if you choose <b>Interview Schedule Posted in Torsion Bar</b> <b>Lunch on your own</b>	
	<b>1000 – 1600</b>	The Torsion Bar Open
	<b>1700 – 2130</b>	<b>FAREWELL BANQUET</b> (_____ Ballroom) NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat & tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket is highly encouraged.
	<b>1700 – 1745</b>	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	<b>1800 – 1815</b>	Presentation of Colors and remarks
	<b>1815 – 1900</b>	Dinner Served
	<b>1900 – 1905</b>	05–minutes–Head Call
		<b>1905 – 2130</b>
	<b>2130 – 2400</b>	The Torsion Bar Open – Last Call.
<b>Monday (Nov. 4)</b>		<b>Departure Day</b>

Please Print all information

Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest's Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_  
and relationship \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

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

Vietnam Tank or AT Bn: \_\_\_\_\_ Co: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in-country: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
(Circle "Tank" or "AT" above)

**Are you a first time attendee?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ MOS \_\_\_\_\_

**Would you like to participate in our personal interview program?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

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

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the Seattle reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to Aug 30, 2019. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

NAME(S) as you want them to appear on your reunion name tag

Men's T-Shirt Sizes S – XL = \$15 each  
(\$5.00 extra for XXL & XXXL)

○ \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ○ \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ○ \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_  
 ○ \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL REUNION FEES**

**My Registration Fee:** \$170 \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
*(After Aug 30th the late registration fee is \$200 each)*  
 My T-Shirt \$15/\$20 \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 Number of guests \_\_\_\_\_ X \$170 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Early registration fee for each guest is \$170.00 and late registration is \$200 for each guest)*  
 Guest T-shirt \_\_\_\_\_ X \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
 SUB TOTAL = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
**Optional:** Would you like to donate a few dollars to help with expenses? \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel room reservations by August 30<sup>th</sup> to get the low room rate! Call: **1-800-222-8733** and be sure to mention both the **“Double Tree Southcenter”** and **“USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion”** for the special room rate of \$129.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$190 per night.

**CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has an Aug 30<sup>th</sup> deadline.**  
**HOTEL REGISTRATION MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY BY YOU BY AUGUST 30, 2019**

**HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$30.00**  
 Submit this form along with your payment by Aug 30th to purchase a reunion t-shirt and save \$30 off of the Reunion Registration Fee.  
 Send check or money order made out to: USMC VTA and the completed registration form to:  
 USMC VTA  
 c/o Ron Knight  
 6665 Burnt Hickory Drive  
 Hoschton, GA 30548-8280



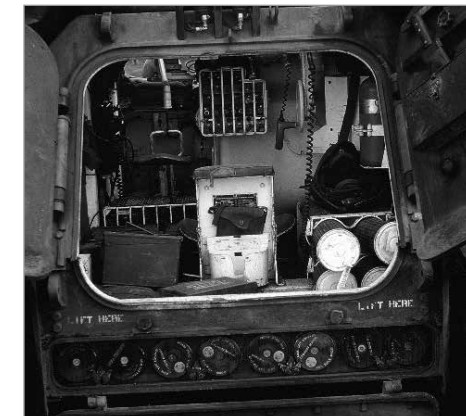
Cruising Da Nang



Bob Haller 1966



U.S. Marine M-60 "Ontos" Anti-Tank Vehical.  
DaNang, Vietnam, 1966.  
Fred "Butch" Hunt - Hinsdale, MA



A-25 at Khe Sahn 1968



Lee Matual in Hue City 1968



Hue City – Feb 1968



Mine Damage 1966



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

**Please note: If the last two digits of “EXPIRE” on your address label is “18” then your 2019 membership dues are now payable.**

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

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

