



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Fixin' For a Fight

Featured Stories:

Cover Story	Page 26
Ontos Story	Pages 29
An Overdue Purple Heart	Pages 43



**USMC Vietnam Tankers Association
Fort Benning Mini-reunion
September 8 – 12, 2020
Tank Restoration Program**

The USMC Tank School located on Ft Benning, currently has an M-60 tank on display that is painted with the "Desert Storm" camo colors sitting in front of the school building. The powers-that-be, are moving that display tank to another location and they want to replace the current display with a Vietnam-era M-48A3 tank. The new display tank will need to be refurbished, cleaned up and painted. The gentleman who runs the Tank Restoration Program asked the USMC VTA to (a) purchase the paint for the tank restoration – which we are in the process of doing ... and (b) to provide a working party to actually clean up and then paint the tank so that it looks like it was in Vietnam last week.

Please be sure to bring your old clothes, old shoes and some work gloves to serve in the working party. And also note that not everyone will be required to serve on the working party so please don't stay home just because there may be some extra work involved. Come on down and enjoy our time together.

Two years ago during our 2018 mini-reunion we found that one of the real benefits of the mini-reunion gathering was to be able to meet and greet the young Marines who are students at the USMC Tank School that is located at Ft Benning. We truly feel that the benefit of such a "mentoring program" could possibly result in a better informed and a higher educated active duty Marine Corps tanker community.

Please see Page 46 for more details...

Gentlemen: We are now already four months into the year 2020. If you have not already paid your 2020 USMC VTA \$30 Annual Membership dues ...or your 2020 – \$20 Annual Life Assessment, please send the VTA a check now. If you will look at the address label on the back cover of this issue of your magazine, you will see a number next to your name...that number is the YEAR that you have paid up to. If it reads 2019 then you are now past due.

As always, tax deductible "over and above" donations are always appreciated.

As an aside, you can also go on line to the VTA website Store and pay with a credit card although an additional "credit card fee" will also apply.

Letter from the President

LIFE MEMBERSHIPS: In the early years of many organizations, they could have a start-up program which is one of the ways that they can generate larger-than-normal startup funds and that is to offer a "Life Membership." For some of the members who may have the financial resources available to them, the idea of paying a one-time larger-than-normal dues and then not having to bother to remember to reach into their wallets in the future, can be very appealing. The VTA did offer a Life Membership in the early years of our existence. Over the first few years, about 140 of our members availed themselves of this offer. As the years progressed and the cost of publishing and mailing the quarterly Sponson Box magazine increased, we have recently found that we needed to have the Life Members begin to help us pay for producing and mailing their own personal copies of the magazine. We also offered that if any Life Member had a problem with the "annual assessment of \$20", we do publish an online version of the magazine on the USMC VTA website about a month after the printed versions are mailed to the membership ... so that all of the information contained in each Sponson Box is available with or without financially helping. As a result we are very fortunate that the vast majority of Life Members are more than willing to help contribute to the publication and mailing effort. We thank you. As a side note, in the interest of a positive cash flow, we no longer offer Life Memberships for our organization.

REMINDER: Please pay your 2020 annual membership dues and / or your 2020 Annual Life Member Assessment now.

FT BENNING MINI-REUNION: Please check out Page 46 of this issue of our magazine. We look like we are going to have yet another fantastic gathering this fall. Please be sure to call either John Wear at 719-495-5998 ... or Rick Lewis at 858-735-1772 ... with your name and shirt size so we can include you in the head count. Also don't forget to call the Ft Benning hotel for your own room reservation. We had originally hoped to have a \$119 per night room rate but it was bumped up to \$125 per night. And lastly please note: There is no reunion registration fee since this is a mini-reunion ... so unlike our normal biennial reunions there will be not extra benefits or frills for our 2020 gathering at Ft Benning.

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

ELEPHANT TANKS: We put out a request in the last issue of the magazine for anyone who was assigned to the M-103 – 120 mm gun tanks, please submit a story or two. So far, per normal, we've received a few stories. We really do not understand how or why so many members are so reluctant to offer any effort to enhance the history of our brotherhood. If you cannot type on the computer then ask your wife, your children or your grandchildren to type out your story on a WORD document and have them email it to John Wear. It is not that difficult and the membership will thank you for your participation.




"The difference between a successful person and others is not a lack of strength, not a lack of knowledge, but rather a lack of will." -- Calvin Coolidge

Executive Directors

John Wear, *President*

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

1st Sgt. Richard "Rick" Lewis, *Vice President*

5663 Balboa Ave (#366), San Diego, CA 92111-2793
858-735-1772 Email: ricklent@aol.com

Bruce Van Apeldoorn, *Treasurer*

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

Ronald C. Knight, *Secretary*

6665 Burnt Hickory DriveHoschton, GA 30548
(678) 828-7197 Email: rckusmcvta@att.net

Directors

Lt. General Martin R. Steele, *USMC (Ret.)*

16331 Ashington Park Drive; Tampa, FL 33647
E-mail: mrsteele46@aol.com

Carl Fleischman

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

Fred Kellogg

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

Robert H. Vaxter

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

Pete Ritch

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

Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri

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

Greg Martin

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

Col. William (Bill) J. Davis, *USMC (ret)*

518 Mowbray Arch, Norfolk, VA 23507
Phone: 757-622-6973 Email: billandjandavis@gmail.com

Jim Raasch

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

New Members

Charles E Rice

36799 Barracuda Court
W Fenwick, DE 19975-3856
Phone: 302-436-8646
Cell: 302-519-9853

Email: chuckrice98@gmail.com

B Co, 1st Tanks, .66 – '67

MOS: 1811

DOB: 3/13/46

Wife: JoAnn

Recruited by: Website

James T New

221 Asphodel Drive
Dothan, AL 36303

Cell Phone: 210-540-0827

Email: jamesnew318@yahoo.com

C Co, 3rd Tanks, 1967

MOS: 1811

DOB: 10/11/44

Wife: Vicky

Recruited t Website

Member Info Changes

Harry Christensen

Email: Harry.Christensen3@verizon.net

Dave Nicodemus

Street Address: 10 Keeher Ave

Guy Everest

Email: geverest47@yahoo.com

Ev Tungent All New Contact:

New email: dtolkmitt630@live.com

No land line

Cell phone: (425) 512-4874.

Mailing address: 630 Randall St., Ridgecrest, CA

93555

Conrad Gordon

Email: congo1@comcast.net

Gerry Hearne

Email: ghearne@gerryhearne.com.

Sterling "Lynn" Young

Phone: 606-669-4971

Committees & Chairmen

SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll

Nominating Chair & Reunion Chair
CRCS/CR Representative
651-342-0913 CST

Bruce Van Apeldoorn

Audit & Finance
585-613-6564 EST

CW04 Bob Embesi

CRCS/CR Representative
406-821-3075 MS

Joe Liu

Jerry Clark Memorial Buddy Fund
801-731-7591
Email: gjliu@hotmail.com

Ron Knight

Member Data Integrity
678-828-7197 EST

1st Sgt. Rick Lewis

VA Information
VTA History Project
858-735-1772 PST

Bob Peavey

Fallen Heroes
770-365-3711 EST

Pete Ritch

VTA History Project
850-734-0014 EST

OPEN

Scholarship Committee

Greg Martin

Webmaster
National Recruiter
360-480-12060 PST
Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Web Site: www.usmcvta.org

Copyright 2012. USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. All rights reserved. No part of this document may be republished, reproduced, copied, faxed, electronically transmitted or in any other manner duplicated without express written permission from both the USMCVTA and the author or authors.

John Wear – Editor & Publisher – johnwear2@verizon.net

Tuyen Pham – Layout and Design

Printed in the USA



ON THE COVER:

A-14 Crew: (L to R) Cpl. Jack Pierce, LCpl Jan "Turtle" Wendling, SSgt Young, TC Sgt Eddie Meyers and LCpl Steve Beckett – A Co, 3rd Tanks - March 1969.

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

Message from Herb Steigelman

We got an email note from "Herbie" and in reply we asked him about attending the Ft Benning mini-reunion. Here is his reply:

I've had to back off from the WW2 History Museum here in Florida and I am only one of the Directors now. I had some a health problem and have had a double amputation from the knee. Too many hits in football, lacrosse, judo and skydiving. I'm back out of the hospital and I am learning to walk with my prosthetics. I spent a long time on my back but am now in a wheel chair. I've always had some problems with my knees. Would you believe that my doctor said that walking across my lawn added to my overall problem?

I'll try to make Fort Benning in Sept. but no promises.

S/F – Herb

M-103 Tanks

Bob Haller writes: What a nice edition of the "Sponson Box" this past issue. Great work to all of those involved – especially you...as I told you in the past if it were not for you this organization would just fade away.

The inside the cover mentioning the M-103 tanks. I have a few stories for you.

Nightmares for Years

I have a US Marine Vietnam grunt buddy who lives in Denver. He is the former Colorado State Trooper who wrote several First Responder stories in a recent issue of the S-Box that were about drunk Indians and hippies when he was on duty. Here is another story that he shared with me:

Frank Rodriguez writes: Maybe I told you this story, maybe not. Golf 2/7 was at LZ Ross in August of '69. My squad was pulled from the Que Sans for a couple of days to rest and regroup. Ross was still in "Indian country" but not the hump. One evening I was approached by an LT who stated that he was with our arty FO with the 11th Marines. He added that he was going home the next day and he asked me if we could put him up for the night as he did not want to be around the noisy 105's etc. I said, "Sure Lt." and I put him in our supply hooch and got him a cot and a blanket.

Well bigger than your sister's tits we got rocketed and mortared that night. After several barrages were over, we started checking assholes as was custom. All were accounted for. Then I looked at the supply hooch. It had taken a direct hit or two. I ran in and the LT had a sucking chest wound. Blood and guts all over. I picked him up thinking he was still breathing and started running to BAS which was about 75 yards away. BAM! A couple more rounds that

knocked me off my feet and I dropped the LT. I picked him up again and ran. I got to the aid hooch and the corpsman told me, "It's was too late. The LT is dead."

I said. "Fuck you Doc! Fix him up! We just been thru hell together!!!"

Corpsman said. "Rod get back to your men."

I never got the LT's name.

Over the next 10 years or so, I had dreams of us running to BAS, dreams of me letting him down. Then about 40 years later we were at a 2/7 reunion in St. Louis. My wife and I meet a Marine sitting by himself at the bar. I asked him to join us. We then had all of the regular questions back and forth. He said he had been our arty FO. So I asked him if he knew the LT who I had tried to save.

He said, "Hell yes! I was LT Fisher's replacement!"

BINGO!!! I had a name after all of those years ... LT FISHER.

He asked, "Were you the Marine that tried to save him?"

Closer!!!! I have a name.

When I got back to my men at the reunion hotel, they said, "Rod, you look like you have seen a ghost."

I said I have, and told them the story.

Jim Coan's Labor of Love



Remembering Steve Falk

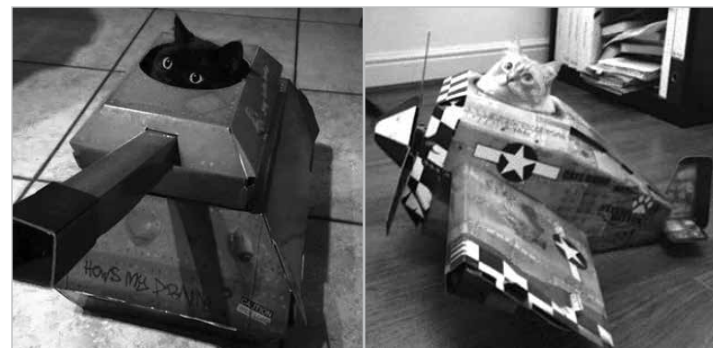
From Steve's widow Marcia: Hi John, the Sponson Box just arrived today and I want to say, "Happy 20th!!!" Wow! How wonderful! Twenty years of reuniting with those who served this good country of ours and having a publication that supports them. Awesome! Congratulations!

I hope your holidays were enjoyable. My family came to help with decorations and trimming the Christmas tree. I have a little story to share with you: My granddaughter, Katie (9 years old) announced that she would like to put the first ornament on the tree which she held hidden in her hand. Being the youngest of my grandchildren and >>

the only girl, the moment was all hers. She insisted that we all please stop what we were doing to watch. Hummmmm ... she generally doesn't call that much attention to herself but we were all eyes. She proceeded to place a glass ball ornament on the highest branch she could reach. It was a red ball with a white, blue and gold circle and an EGA painted smack in the middle of it. I don't think any of us had a dry eye. It took my breath away for a moment. My son, Tom, raised it to the top branch and there it stayed in my husband's honor as well as for all the men and women in the Corps. Katie never lets a day go by without some memory or thought of her "Pop." He will always be honored and remembered. Isn't that sweet? That's how our holiday began and just got better from there. I hope yours was special too.

Ok, time to have lunch and read through the Sponson Box.
Love, Marcia

Kitty Tank and Plane



From Don Gagnon

Your newsletter came in the mail a couple of days ago! I will get a check in the mail in a couple of days with a check for the Sponson Box Magazine!

The magazine is really good looking and has taken talent to put together a magazine that opens eyes with really good photos!

I hope this finds you well and motivated with this new progressive magazine!

Semper Fidelis!

Donald

Fill 'er Up!!!



Asleep at the Wheel



Art Nash writes: I saw this photo online, the tank TC reported that the SUV driver nodded off at the wheel at night and didn't see the tank crossing signs, the SUV driver survived.....

"He ran into me doing 55+ MPH and he should have died" – said the TC

A Good Word from the VA

I enjoyed the latest issue of the SB, especially the article on the history of the VA. A lot of heart ache before us, a lot of brave people before us making the sacrifice for better treatment for veterans.

My "Good Word for the VA" involves a hernia operation I had in April of 2019. It was performed at the VA Hospital in La Jolla, California. Old timers may remember the location of the Rifle Range at Camp Matthews, same place. My son had a hernia operation in late December 2019 at the Scrips Clinic in San Diego, California. Scrips is a large conglomerate in San Diego, they are into all kinds of things, and they have a great reputation in the medical world.

When I was arranging my operation with the VA, I had a pre-op consultation, where the procedure was explained to me, and I was given a stack of information to take home and read. The day of the operation I was counseled again in the pre-op room by a male nurse, probably a Corpsman? I was told the number one reason these operations fail, is because people lift something heavy to soon. Don't make the mistake that everything was peaches and cream, no way, they made me stop drinking wine, and beer about three weeks prior to the surgery. I also had to start taking blood pressure meds, they told me on the day of the surgery that if my blood pressure was too high, they would send me home. They also require you to wipe your body with these nasty antiseptic wipes. One of the best things about the VA, was my doctor, a thirtyish looking young lady, named Rachel Rose, she did a fine job. All in all, not an unpleasant experience.

My son's experience with Scrips was a little different, very

little information, prior or post operation. The worst thing was they screwed up his back to work date, and he had to battle with them to correct it, which took a week, and delayed his disability payments.

I also enjoyed Ed Hiltz's story, he and I have some common experiences. I bought my 62 Ford when I came home from Vietnam in 1966. It was a root beer brown Galaxia 500 two door hard top. I drove it to Camp Lejeune by myself as a 19-year-old. By the time I got it back to California 2 1/2 half years later, I had put 40,000 miles on it. Drove that car all over the east coast. Those 40,000 miles were accumulated even though it was in storage during a 5-month Caribbean cruise, and a 9-month Mediterranean cruise. I bought my BSA in 1968 while I was a Sea Going Marine aboard the USS Franklin D. Roosevelt CVA 42. It was brand new, had it shipped to Los Angeles Harbor in a wooden crate, had to put it together, with some help from my dad, total cost \$448.00.

The poem "They Don't Wear Purple Hearts in Heaven" is a real tear jerker!

And, thanks for posting all of those photos, I wish I could remember who was taking the pictures with my camera. A couple of them are not mine, but don't know who took them.

Semper Fi

John Hunter

My First Letter to Leatherneck

I have been a Leatherneck reader since March 1953. Many times I've thought about writing, but never have. I just finished the article, "One Man Stand," on Master Gunnery Sergeant Riensche, by Kyle Watts, in the September issue.

It was an outstanding piece of Marine Corps history.

I retired in April 1985 after 32 wonderful years. I had two tours in Vietnam-as a grunt the first time and as first sergeant on my second tour. I waived the sole survivor right since my brother, Sergeant Major Melvin Davis, was killed in action in 1967. I have been involved in Marine support activities ever since, both active duty Marines and JROTC.

I cannot believe that MGySgt Riensche did not receive the Medal of Honor. What he did was amazing. During my 32 years, I've never heard of anything more heroic. I've of ten heard that the Corps almost always downgrades awards. In 1966, I recommended three of my Marines for the Bronze Star. They finally were awarded Navy Achievement medals with combat "V." This was for an action under enemy fire, saving two wounded Marines.

After reading the article I guess the scuttlebutt about downgrading is straight scoop. I wish that I had the honor of knowing "Top."

SgtMaj Earl R. Davis, USMC (Ret)
Mathews, N.C.

Sergeant Major, I've never been able to ascertain what actions rate the Medal of Honor vice a Navy Cross or other awards. I agree with you that MGySgt Riensche is deserving of the nation's highest award. I also strongly believe that more than three Marines should have received the Medal of Honor in Iraq and Afghanistan. As a former adjutant, I absolutely understand the need not to inflate awards and to ensure consistency but much like Supreme Court Justice Felix Frankfurter's famous quote about "knowing it when I see it," it seems obvious that heroics such as MGySgt Riensche's should be recognized with the Medal of Honor. – Editor ■

Photo from Vietnam



Captain Danial W Kent,
Skipper Bravo Co,
3rd Tanks, 1967

Three Tanks from the Three Nations that Protected West Berlin

During the Cold War West Berlin was isolated 100 miles inside East Germany. It was defended by Brigade sized forces from France, the UK and the USA. This photograph was taken on the 11th October 1962 during a demonstration on the Grunewald training area, run by the British.



From right to left: The AMX-13 from the French 11e Regiment de Chasseurs a Cheval, a British Centurion from C Squadron, 4th Royal Tank Regiment, and an American M48 from Company F, 40th Armor Regiment.

Almost a year earlier this M48, 9A2969, 'General Sherman,' had been one of the tanks on the very front line of the Cold War during the stand-off with the Soviets at Checkpoint Charlie.

The Tank Museum, located at Dorset in Southwest England, has an M48 on display in the Tank Story Hall.

USMC Tracked Vehicle Officers Orientation Course

CAMP PENDLETON, MARCH 1965

This was a combined class. We did not know until near the end of the course whether we would be Tank or AAV (amtrac) officers. Many of these officers went straight to Vietnam after the school and others followed when the 1st Marine Division mounted up and left for Okinawa in August 1965. We finally got into Chu Lai in about March 1966. The below info is the best that I can do in coming up with names.

Semper Fi – Tom Kelly



1st Row:

Dan Beckner
Ken Tomcich
George Musser
Peter Little
Ky Thompson

2nd Row Kneeling:

GySgt Thole (LVT Instructor)
Sgt Caraliez (LVT Instructor)
Phil Harris
Tom Kelly
Wes Evans

3rd Row:

1st Lt GD Solis (LVT Instructor)
SSgt Belin (08 – LVT Instructor)
SSgt Patrode (LVT Instructor)
GySgt Daker (Tank Instructor)
Tom Old
S. R. Pohaski
Greg Tasonis
Jim Patrick
Don Gressley
SSgt Belanger (Tank Instructor)
GySgt Duncan (Tank Instructor)

4th Row:

1st Lt. Edward Harrison (Tank Instructor)
John "Black Jack" Matthews
Dave Warden
Rick Beirne
George Rose
Charlie Tyrian
Joe Giacinto

Editor's note: The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association is extremely lucky to have a very talented gentleman who assembles and lays out the writing plus he creates the graphics for our quarterly Sponson Box magazines. One of the most interesting facts about Tuyen Pham is the he not only is an ardent naturalized American citizen... but he and his family are refugees from South Vietnam.

<https://13wham.com/news/local/new-warplane-museum-memorial-once-used-to-help-family-friends-flee-vietnam>
Tuyen writes: "My niece just forwarded me this video and I think it's also appropriate to forward it to y'all, our forever wartime heroes, US Armed Forces and especially USMC Vietnam Tankers Association whom I have had great privilege and honor to work with.

The plane took off from an airstrip in Long Binh on the outskirts of Saigon with 57 people on board including my parents, my sister and brothers with their family, his family and in-laws. I was the only one

left in Vietnam and was kept there for 17 years until we reunited with my parents and siblings in 1991 (I have 9 other brothers and sisters all made it out the country 2 weeks prior to the collapse of Saigon). I only learned those details of my family's escape after I set foot in America in August 1991.

You can see my brother in the video link above. He used to fly for the UPS and for the most part for US Airways until he retired."

Below is the article about Tuyen's brother:

New Warplane Museum Memorial was Once Used to Help Family and Friends to Flee Vietnam

By Tanner Jubenville
December 4, 2019

Geneseo, N.Y. (TV Station WHAM) - Khiem Pham distinctly remembers using a C-130A plane to smuggle more than 50 family members and friends out of Saigon. He says he watched as American troops and personnel pull out of the area, as North Vietnamese forces were moving closer, and knew he had to leave.

"I'll tell you this: I'm not a brave man, but I was so calm," said Pham. "I know it's illegal, but I did it like normal, timing and fuel, and everything happened so fast."

Pham says he called his family and told them to rendezvous at a nearby airfield. He says every factor played into his hands, and he was able to get his family on board, before fellow crew members could object. He says he gave crew members the option to leave. It was one of the final planes to leave Vietnam before the conflict ended.

"My family was scrambling, running to the aircraft," said Pham. "I tell all the crew members, I say, 'Gentlemen, this aircraft doesn't go back to Saigon anymore.'"

Some crewmen stayed, and left with Pham and his loved ones. They flew to Singapore, where they were granted asylum. The aircraft was given to the South Vietnamese Air Force by the U.S., as the countries were allies.

"I think I did the right thing to help my family out," said Pham. He says he later reunited with his commanders in the U.S. once the war ended, and they forgave him for illegally using the plane to smuggle his loved ones. The plane Pham used, once owned by the Smithsonian, is now at the National Warplane Museum in Geneseo., New York. Museum President Austin Wadsworth is awed by Pham's story.

"It's worthy of a movie, his story," said Wadsworth. Now, the plane is the centerpiece to a new Vietnam veteran's memorial at the museum. "It's going to be for all the Vietnamese veterans, but I think it's going to be one of the first times that there's been recognition of the participation the South Vietnamese had in that struggle," said Wadsworth.

The museum is in the process of rehabbing the plane. Wadsworth says the plane will be painted with South Vietnamese Air Force colors. "Now, they repaint to Vietnamese Air Force, 100 percent, and that makes me proud, and my friends proud, too," said Pham.

Pham currently lives in Ohio. He worked as a commercial airline pilot for 20 years before retiring in 2006. Wadsworth says he hopes to have the memorial complete by next summer. ■



My brother & his first-born daughter in Washington DC, in front of the C-130 A he flew out of Vietnam and 40 years earlier in Vietnam with same daughter (bottom left inset).



With his wife & daughter's family 2013 in front of the plane at Smithsonian National Air and Space Museum, Washington D.C.

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

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

Remember Me

By Robert Bramell

Do not gather at my grave to cry
I am not there to see your tears.
Remember me for all those stories I told
more than once throughout the years.

Remember me with your hugs and smiles
do not stand at my grave and cry.
Remember me with your memories knowing that
I am not there; I did not die.

Clarence W Obie, III



Remembering Marine LCpl Clarence W. Obie III, 20, of Staunton, Virginia; assigned to 3rd Platoon, C Company, 1st Tank Battalion; KIA on Dec 22, 1967, Vietnam. You are Not Forgotten Brother. Found on Facebook

John H Beck

Lt Fuzz – (aka Rod Henderson) reports: Rest easy Marines, the Great Tank Park in the Sky has yet another fine tanker from the 3rd Herd standing guard for all of us. Sgt John H Beck passed away July 5, 2019. He had battled cancer for a number of years. John was Tank Commander of B-31. He joined the Marine Corps at age 17, dropping out of high school. I first met John in November 1966 when he had his tank & crew at the Namu Bridge. They invited me to a fish fry. Catching fish was easy – a couple of M-26 grenades tossed in the water, wait for the whoomp! And then swim out and gather them in!

While on Hill 41, I decided to grow a mustache. It is true that some of us reach puberty later than others – that must have been the case with me. After several weeks of mustache growing, the Company Commander asked me if I was trying to grow a mustache and then walked away. Amongst chuckles and snickers from the rest of the 3rd Herd, (then Cpl.) Beck nudged me and suggested that when no one was looking, get some soot from the tank exhaust and color it! I think that's when I acquired the nickname 'Lt Fuzz'. I have worn it proudly ever since.



When I got in touch with Johnny in 2009, he told me he wanted to make me proud of him – he had finished high school, got his college degree and law degree and had been a practicing attorney for the State of Florida. That he and his wife, Kathy, were in their own legal counseling service for transportation issues. I told him I always knew he was a sharp individual, but I didn't mean for him to get that carried away! Johnny will be missed by us all, but so glad to have known and served with him. Semper Fi, Marine, "Mighty fin e job, ole' man", as Gunny Garza would say. ■

Tanks & Medals of Valor

Ronald R. Prather, Jr

Home of Record: Cave Junction, Oregon

Date of Death: 7 Feb 1968

Silver Star

Awarded for Actions during: Vietnam War

Service: US Marine Corps

Rank: Sergeant

Company: A

Battalion: 1st Antitank Battalion

Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF



GENERAL ORDERS:

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Sergeant Ronald R. Prather, Jr. (MCSN: 2177783), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as an Ontos Commander and Section Leader with Company A, First Anti-tank Battalion, FIRST Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam on 7 February 1968. While providing rear security for an artillery battery moving through enemy controlled territory near Thien Tri Village, Thua Thien Province, Sergeant Prather's Ontos was ambushed by an estimated battalion of North Vietnamese Regulars. During the initial burst of enemy fire, his Ontos was damaged by 57-mm. recoilless rifle fire, seriously wounding two of his crew members and throwing them from the vehicle. Disregarding the intense enemy fire, he left the

commander's compartment and moved to the driver's position to maneuver his vehicle to a more advantageous firing position. Upon returning to the commander's compartment, he discovered that, with the exception of the .30 caliber machine gun, all the armament had been damaged by the enemy fire and rendered inoperable. In order to divert enemy fire from the other Marines in the convoy and enable them to dismount and deploy against the enemy ambush force, he courageously commenced firing his machine gun. Disregarding the intense enemy fire and his own safety, Sergeant Prather fired his weapon until he had expended his supply of ammunition. As he attempted to reload his weapon, he was mortally wounded by enemy recoilless rifle fire. By his bold initiative, gallant fighting spirit and loyal devotion to duty, Sergeant Prather was instrumental in defeating the enemy and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■

VIETNAM REFLECTIONS - STORIES AND LETTERS

BY KEITH NIGHTINGALE - AUGUST 21, 2016

COURAGE

The general public equates courage with acts of potentially great danger where a single individual may stand out as performing an extraordinary feat at a moment of mortal consequence. It is different for Infantry.

Courage to the Infantry is not a single heroic act at a crucial moment in the unit's life. That is for the movies and award narratives. Rather it is enduring the daily insults of life in a forbidding and unforgiving environment and the willing subordination of the each in favor of the whole. Family first. Me second.

Courage is best equated with endurance, perseverance and subjugation of the one for the betterment of the whole. It is the patience and confidence to follow someone into the unknown for either a nebulous or uncertain purpose because that is where the family unit is going.

Courage is knowing that where you are going, you may never return from but still going because that is what you must do. And

you know both to be true.

Courage is doing exactly what is required and how it is required as training previously taught and the present demands. Courage is doing your job. Courage is an open appreciation of and a willingness to accept the consequences of your actions should bad luck and ill-fortune prevail.

Courage is the act of praying to see darkness during the light of day and praying again for the first morning beams of light during the shroud of night.

More than anything, Courage is the quality of rejecting the cold choices between personal desires and organizational needs. It is a fixed resolve to keep that choice during every moment of service. Quitting is easy. Enduring and performing is much harder and the true measure of the man. One moment's performance is a potential within every man. Doing what needs to be done every day is a far better mark of the true level of courage that resides within. ■

Book Review

COOPER – The Making of a Service Dog

WRITTEN BY A VTA MEMBER, CLYDE HOCH
REVIEWED BY JACK MAGNUS FOR READERS' FAVORITE
7/20/2019



Having his superiors blame him for the incident made it even more upsetting. He came home from Vietnam feeling angry about the incident and the shoddy reception he and other Vietnam vets were receiving and had problems reintegrating into society. He couldn't find a job and had trouble dealing with crowds and loud noises. When he did find work, interpersonal relations on the job were challenging. Hoch had trouble accepting himself. "I thought I was one of the most screwed-up people ever."

His first reaction on reading about PTSD was that he could "grow up and get over it." Then, as he learned more about the symptoms shared by many vets, he began to accept the situation and the idea of a service dog. Hoch wanted the experience of training his service dog himself. When he began seriously considering it, he decided to go with his long-held admiration for Doberman Pinschers, and he found a breeder close enough to deal with. He also located Tails of Valor, an organization that works with shelter puppies and was willing to work with him and his new pup.

Cooper is a well-written and informative look at the process of training a service dog. Hoch's work with his best friend, Cooper, starts from the time he brings that puppy into his life and it's marvelous to see how well the two of them become a committed and enduring team. The photographs he includes in his memoir are outstanding, and watching as Cooper grows from a six-week-old pup into a strong and muscular two-year-old is a marvelous experience. I loved learning about the work that goes into training a service dog and found this account moving and powerful. Cooper is most highly recommended. Available on Amazon.com ■

Cooper: The Making of a Service Dog is a nonfiction memoir written by Clyde Hoch. Hoch was a tank commander in Vietnam in the late sixties, a time when that conflict was at its peak. He was hospitalized when the tank he was riding in hit a landmine.

An old Marine

An old Marine he is.
Dreaming of a piss tube where he used to take a whiz.
Cracking open a pack of C-rations.
He never thought Ham & Lima Beans would become one of his
lifelong passions.

Craving a FALSTAFF beer
Knowing they're no longer available, he sheds a tear

Busting track & pulling a pack,
Awakens him with an aching back

Standing in the cupola on 3 hours guard duty
Is just another reason why he's so damn moody?

Breaking brush
Still gives him a rush.
Knowing anything that gets in his way he'll certainly crush.

An old Jarhead he is, a damn good Marine he was, and a Marine
he'll always be.
Better yet a TANKER for eternity!!!

Author Unknown

Looking For

Can Anyone ID any of these Tank Mechanics?



Please call John Wear at 719-495-5998 if you can identify any or all of them.

William F Shands, Jr



Looking for anyone who served with my dad in Vietnam. He was Sgt. Williams F. Shands, Jr. He was in 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. Contact Kristi Sands, Texas_Kos@yahoo.com

Randy Champe



I wonder if any of the members of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association may have served with 2nd Lt. Randy Champe.

After contacting you about him, I finished the book "First Force Recon Company." In the end, the author, Dr Peters, talks about the men he served with in Vietnam. Randy must have been with tanks in '67 - '68, most likely as a 2nd Lt. The book says that several of the Recon guys became senior Marine officers but Randy became a LAPD chopper pilot. In 1991, he crashed his disabled plane away from a school, killing himself and saving the children in the school. The book says that his first tour was with USMC tanks and his second with Recon.

During our Active Duty time Randy and I served in Pearl Harbor together in '72 - '73. Great guy, will be missed but not forgotten.

S/F - Gunny Jim Gregory (ret - USMC)

Please contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 if you have any information of anyone on this page. ■

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

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



Last Issue Winner

Last issue's winner was "Cappy" Everhard who called at 7:05 pm on Jan 1, 2020, and correctly identified Fred Goger who is on the right wearing the piss pot.

As a side note: Fred also called earlier on the same day to identify himself and to identify Joe Staskiewicz, from New Britain, CT, who is standing on the left.

Fred added: The other guy is Joe Staskiewicz (from New Britain, Conn). He arrived in-country and stayed the 20 months with me. I wrote his sister for over a year and when he and I got discharged Joe Keely, Terry OBrien (tank crewman) and I traveled to Conn. to see Joe for a weekend. On the way back home we met some newly graduated high school young ladies and one of them drugged me. When I came out of the Corps, I had five kids. WHAT THE HELL HAPPENED? ■



V. A. News & Updates

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

Commissary/Exchange News

Update 15: Unanswered | How Will New Users Access Bases

Just how the Defense Department will allow an estimated 3.5 million veterans and their caregivers on base early next year to use commissaries, exchanges and some recreation resources is still largely unanswered, despite a looming deadline and potentially complicated access issues. Beginning Jan. 1, 2020, all service-connected disabled veterans, caregivers enrolled in the Department of Veterans Affairs' Comprehensive Assistance for Family Caregivers program, and former prisoners of war will be able to shop at on-base grocery stores and exchanges. They will also be allowed to use some MWR amenities, such as golf courses and bowling alleys. Congress extended that access as part of 2019 National Defense Authorization Act. But before shoppers can start using the stores and services, the Defense Department needs a plan for easily getting them onto secure military installations.

The DoD announced early this year that part of its plan relies on letting veterans who hold a Veterans Health Identification Card use it as their base ID card. Officials also said they plan to issue access cards to veterans and caregivers who don't hold that form of ID; users will be able to receive those cards by presenting a letter of eligibility from the VA. But neither officials with the VA nor the DoD were able to offer access details early this month. Although DoD officials initially said they anticipated a policy in hand this week on when and where veterans and caregivers can start applying for the access cards, as well as on how bases and commissary stores will manage the expected influx of visitors, that rollout has been delayed, they said.

And officials with the VA were unable to say how or when veterans who had received a disability rating through the VA system and caregivers enrolled in the VA's program would be able to access verification letters. A VA spokesman referred all questions about access to the DoD. "The Department of Defense is in charge of implementing the expanded patronage effort, and we refer you to DoD for comment," the spokesman said in an email.

On top of the 5% surcharge all commissary customers must pay, new customers will have to pay a 1.9% fee when using a commercial credit card at the commissary and 0.5% fee for debit cards. There's no extra charge when paying by cash, check or using the credit card

offered by the military resale system, the Military Star card.

[Source: Military Times | Dorothy Mills-Gregg | November 7, 2019 ++]

VA Claims Assistance

Update 09: How to Use New Tool When Filing Disability Claims Online

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is transforming the way Veterans learn about and apply for benefits earned, through a new video tutorial completed in October highlighting the digital Disability Compensation Benefits Claims tool released earlier this year. Built with Veterans, for Veterans, — an iterative development process that incorporates user testing and human-centered design principles — the tool is now available allowing Veterans with previously filed claims to have more control over submissions and represents an innovative leap forward in VA services "The Disability Compensation Benefits Claim tool lessens the administrative and paperwork burden for Veterans, and shortens the processing timeline for benefits claims," said VA Secretary Robert Wilkie. "This innovative tool, along with the companion tutorial video series, represents VA's commitment to providing Veterans quality service through digital transformation."

The accompanying five-part video tutorial series is accessible on VA's Office of Information and Technology (OIT) YouTube page. The tutorials describe steps Veterans can follow to complete disability compensation claims applications online using the new digital tool. The videos feature:

- An overview of the online tool's user-friendly platform, and its efficient functionality that streamlines the claims submission process.
- Log-in instructions for starting the process of filing a disability benefits claim, and how Veterans can track existing disability compensation claims.
- Instructions on how the tool automatically checks the Veteran's record to find out if there is an active intent to file date already pending.

Visit the full tutorial series for instructions: (https://www.va.gov/COMMUNITYCARE/providers/EDU_Training.asp)

[Source: VA News Release | October 15, 2019]

VA Benefits Assistance

Update 02: VFW VSOs Recover \$9B+ in Benefits for Vets
Veterans of Foreign Wars (VFW) Service Officers recovered more than

\$9 billion in benefits for veterans VFW service officers were responsible for the first time for the recovery of a total of \$9,059,726,902 for veterans this past fiscal year according to the U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). "This is a true testament to the dedication and service our VFW service officers have for every veteran he or she comes in contact with," said VFW National Commander William "Doc" Schmitz. "Our veterans deserve nothing but the absolute-best customer service experience that our organization has proven to deliver day-in and day-out."

This year, as part of the VFW's Century of Service, leaders issued a challenge to its Department service officers nationwide to assist as many veterans possible who required help in filing benefits and compensation claims with the VA. "The VFW's global network of professional veterans' advocates should be incredibly proud to have reached this milestone in our 100th year of helping veterans," said Ryan Gallucci, director of VFW National Veterans Service. "This demonstrates the hard work of our advocates who meet face-to-face with veterans every day. The founders of our humble benefits assistance program would be proud of the legacy that the VFW has built, proving that 'No One Does More For Veterans.'"

VFW Service Officers are trained experts, helping veterans develop their case with ease by reviewing and applying current law, pertinent legislation, regulations, pension and death benefits, and employment and training programs. Service officers are also prepared to present oral arguments on behalf of veterans when needed. Schmitz explained that veterans who come to the VFW for help in filing claims receive nothing short of positive results. "Veterans rely heavily on our expertise in assisting them in receiving the benefits and compensation they have earned and our professionals continue to answer that call with dynamic results," said Schmitz. "Our outstanding service officers are amazing stewards and dedicated professionals who pride themselves on serving every veteran who needs help in the claim process and will not stop until every veteran's individual need is met."

If you are a veteran who seeks help in filing a claim, visit the VFW website and click on the Assistance tab. The VA Claims and Separation Benefits section will help you find a service officer in your area.

[Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly | November 8, 2019 ++]

Vet Best Places to Live

Update 01: 2019 Survey Results

Tampa, Florida, topped a poll for best places to live for veterans among 100 cities nationwide. Veterans might want to think twice when choosing a city to live in, and then think again before buying a home, according to separate surveys recently conducted by private firms. Tampa, Florida, was rated No. 1 for veterans among 100 cities nationwide on the basis of affordability, access to Department of

Veterans Affairs facilities and other factors, according to the 2019 Best & Worst Places for Veterans to Live survey by the personal finance website WalletHub.

Detroit was ranked No. 100. A separate study by the website House Method on the best cities for veterans to buy a home put San Antonio at the top of a list of 50 cities and Los Angeles at the bottom. The House Method study ranked the cities on 10 factors, including cost of a home, average veteran income, and quality of VA health care. The top 10 cities for veteran home buying are:

- San Antonio
- Raleigh, North Carolina
- Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Columbus, Ohio
- Orlando, Florida
- Richmond, Virginia
- Providence, Rhode Island
- Salt Lake City, Utah
- Kansas City, Missouri
- Cleveland, Ohio

At the bottom of the list of 50 cities were Miami, San Francisco, New York City and Los Angeles. In a release, House Method said the big cities at the bottom ranked poorly for cost of living and other factors. WalletHub's best and worst places for veterans to live survey listed the following top 10 cities:

- Tampa
- Austin, Texas
- Orlando, Florida
- Raleigh, North Carolina
- Scottsdale, Arizona
- Colorado Springs, Colorado
- Virginia Beach, Virginia
- Gilbert, Arizona
- St. Petersburg, Florida
- Jacksonville, Florida

The bottom five places on the list of 100 were Indianapolis, IN; Memphis, TN; Jersey City, NJ; Newark, NJ; and Detroit, MI. In a release, WalletHub said the cities were compared on a total of 20 indicators, such as livability, affordability and veteran-friendliness. It also found that the lowest veteran unemployment rate was in Santa Ana, California, and the highest was in Newark, New Jersey. The city with the fewest homeless veterans per veteran population was Virginia Beach, VA while the city with the most was San Francisco, the WalletHub study found. The full WalletHub survey can be found here. The full House Method survey can be found here.

[Source: MilitaryTimes | Richard Siskl November 6, 2019 ++] ■

Short Stories

A Vietnam Vignette – 1966

BY BILL “LURCH” LOCHRIDGE

Recall, I was 3rd Tank BN's S-5, Civic Action Officer. Late in 1966, LtCol Corson was very pleased at all the civic action projects that we had created and that were still underway. Seemed like at least once a week, a number of senior division officers; Army officers, CORD officials, and Revolutionary Development people from Saigon; and, press people would show up for briefings on our program.

One morning the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Thomas M. Moore and his staff flew in for briefings. Corson started, and then turned it over to me. I began and I guess I went beyond my time limit because a Marine Col, who was sitting right behind the Admiral, raised his hand and pointed to his watch. I said, “Col please give me a few more minutes”. The Admiral turned to the Col and said, “Let him continue – this is good information”. So, I continued my briefing. Later, after all the officials

had left, LtCol Corson called me into his office and said, “Lurch, you got to have big balls, son, for what you told that Col this morning. Job well done”.

A week or two later, we received a message that Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and General Westmoreland would be coming in for briefings. On the day of their arrival, Corson had all hands lined up at our helicopter pad. In they came, in two or three helicopters. I said to myself, “Oh, shit”. They de-planed, and were escorted to our briefing facility (the enlisted man's club that was constructed at the top of our hill). Again, LtCol Corson began the brief, and then, turned it over to me. I kept saying to myself, “Holy shit, I can't believe this I'm only a 2ndLt”. The briefing went off well, and the Ambassador, who was dressed in civilian clothes with highly polished shoes (like ones that you would expect to see “suits” wearing in NY City). At the end of my briefing, the Ambassador

said, “Let's go see what you guys have done”. So, out one of the gates we went with me leading and the Ambassador right behind me. He was followed up by General Westmoreland. Coming down from our hill we entered some rice paddies. Walking on the paddy dikes which were still wet from rains the night before, the Ambassador suddenly slipped and fell into the paddy. Before I could do anything, General Westmoreland jumped into the paddy and pulled the Ambassador out of the mud. “Holy shit”, I said to myself. Ambassador Lodge was covered in mud, but he made a joke about it to Westmoreland and me. That said a lot to me about Lodge. He instantly became an okay man in my book.

Ed note: We lost Lt Colonel Lockridge last year. He was a prolific writer and we will miss him. We have a few more stories of his to share in future issues of our magazine.

Second Battle of Fallujah

BY JIM COAN

While recently reading Fiasco: The American Military Adventure in Iraq, by Thomas E. Ricks, I was struck by the similarities between the second battle of Fallujah and our battle in the streets of Hue City. Several of our USMCVTA members fought in the battle for Hue City and can relate to the fierce house-to-house fighting that occurred November, 2004, in Fallujah.

In April, 2004, the Marines were making steady progress in the first battle of Fallujah when, with victory in hand, they were inexplicably ordered to cease fire and hold their positions. Whomever in the chain of command was responsible for that defeatist order has never been revealed. Our Marines and soldiers fell back and, in effect, returned control of the city to the insurgents.

The second battle of Fallujah in November came just after our presidential election. The purpose was to send a strong message to the rest of the cities in the Sunni triangle: “This will be your fate if you tolerate the presence of insurgents.”

In preparation, huge stockpiles of supplies were placed just outside the city to prevent the insurgents from attacking our supply lines. Several U.S. units were stationed at the Iraq/Syria border to prevent an influx of military aged males wanting to join the insurgents. The U.S. made a concerted effort to warn civilians of the impending attack; thus, out of a population of 250,000, less than 500 remained behind.

An attacking force of 6,500 Marines, 1,500 Army, and 2,000 Iraqis commenced the ten-day attack. The

detailed preparation and huge size of the attacking force were reminiscent of major battles we fought in Vietnam, such as Operations Starlite and Hastings. The house-to-house fighting was reminiscent of the battle for Hue City. Some even thought it was more like what the Marines faced in WW II, where enemy defenders knew there was no escape, so fought to their deaths from holes and bunkers.

One reporter described how three companies from 3/5 and a company of Abrams tanks moved forward in a systematic, block-by-block clearing attack, preceded by a rolling barrage of mortars and artillery, plus air strikes. The tankers would fire their 120 mm main gun at a building, destroy it, then the grunts would take care of eliminating any survivors.

American scout-snipers were limited by their rules of engagement which mandated that they could only fire if they saw a weapon in an insurgent's hands. Not so the Polish snipers. They could pick off anyone they suspected of being armed. They had an impressive 80% kill record at distances of 600 yards.

After ten days, the city of Fallujah was in allied hands. An estimated 1,000 insurgents were killed. The Americans suffered 54 KIA and another 425 wounded. The mopping up operation continued for another six weeks. U.S. troops found two carbomb factories, 24 IED factories, and 455 weapons caches. They also located three buildings used for torture, including some cells where corpses had their arms or legs chopped off while still alive, then left to die.

The Marine tank company commander reported his tanks fired 1,600 120mm rounds, 121,000 7.62 mm machine gun rounds, and 49,000 .50 cal. rounds. A weapons platoon commander with Lima Co., 3rd Bn., 1st Marines stated that during a typical day of battle, his assault teams used 6

satchel charges, three cases of Bangalore torpedoes, and a dozen anti-tank rockets. A new weapon devised for use against multi-room buildings and sewers employed thermobaric explosive technology. The extremely high temperature at detonation reached throughout the building, consuming all the oxygen and causing suffocation and fatal burns to all the inhabitants. That awesome weapon would have saved a lot of Marine lives at Hue City.

John Wear replied: As a side comment to your last paragraph: If the “brass hats” in MAC-V had allowed us, the US Marine flame-thrower tank would have helped save a lot of Marines in Hue City. Instead, we were a 52-ton .30 cal. machine gun platform. They did not allow any mogas or air compressors into the city until the battle was just about over.

And one more comment: When the MCTA dedicated their Tankers Memorial at the Patton Museum at Ft Knox (in about 2003), the VTA BoD also attended the ceremony. During one of the afternoon breaks, most of the VTA BoD members sat in the hotel lounge enjoying a few adult bev-

erages when a young Marine officer dressed in civilian clothing walked up to us and introduced himself. It turns out that he was one of the Marine tank company commanders during the second Falluja campaign. His story is fairly well known ... he got shot in the neck between his flak jacket and his comm. helmet. One of his other crewmen dragged him out of the turret and laid him on the ground while the enemy continued to pour fire into the Marines. The crewman shielded the skipper's body with his own body thus saving his officer's life. At the Lexington, KY MCTA reunion hotel the skipper had a bandage on his neck and talked with a whisper. I believe that he was the guest of the USMC Tank School CO and was lecturing the tank school about Falluja and deployment of tanks. The comment that I want to share with you is that he told us that they took their tanks' 120 mm main guns, pointed them down an alley, let off a round and all of the locked doors facing the alley blew down thus making the grunts jobs a lot easier. And of course, he was fascinated by some of my tales of Hue City.

SITTING ON A GOLD MINE

BY TESS DE LA MARE AND ROB PERKINS

April 19, 2017

Tank collector, Nick Mead, 55, was shocked to find £2million gold bullion

hidden in the fuel compartment of his £30,000 vehicle. He believes the gold



bars were looted by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait during the Gulf War. He discovered the five gold bars in the Russian T54/69 while restoring it to add to his collection of 150 military vehicles. He and mechanic Todd Chamberlain were filming themselves pressing open the diesel tank in case it contained munitions

£30,000 vehicle. He believes the gold bars were looted by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait during the Gulf War. He discovered the five gold bars in the Russian T54/69 while restoring it to add to his collection of 150 military vehicles. He and mechanic Todd Chamberlain were filming themselves pressing open the diesel tank in case it contained munitions

tions and needed to show it to bomb disposal crews. Instead, they pulled out the bars, weighing up to 12lb — 5kg — apiece. Todd, 50, said a quick calculation suggested they were worth in excess of £2million.

He added: “We didn't know what to do. You can't exactly take five gold bullion bars down to Cash Converters without questions being asked, so we called the police.”

Nick runs Tanks-a-Lot, giving petrol heads the chance to drive any of his tanks on his farm in Helmdon, Northants.

Nick traded in an Army lorry and an Abbot self-propelled gun for the T54/69 in a deal worth about £30,000 after seeing it advertised on eBay. Todd and Nick had al- >>



But rather than weaponry, the pair were shocked to uncover five gold bars

ready found machine gun ammunition while stripping down the tank and were worried they would find guns. Instead, they discovered the gold, which they believe was looted by Iraqi soldiers in Kuwait during the Gulf War. The tank was later captured and shipped to Britain.

Nick said: "They must have cut a hole in the fuel tank and rammed it full of gold bars."

Scared Sh*tless

BY TOM FENERTY

I was in country a little more than 30 days on November 30. This certainly qualifies me as an FNG. Unfortunately that's also my perspective of that day all these years later. I'm pretty sure the whole battalion was out on this operation (name?). We were out near the 'Trace' and dug in for a few days when a chopper bringing supplies also dropped off a guy dressed in cammies and sporting a soft cover. He had no markings on his uniform and the scutlebutt was that he was CIA. He also carried an M-14.

The next day we moved out in a column that stretched out beyond my line of sight. It was hot (and that is no shit). I remember my canteen being empty and foolishly filling it up in a paddy. After the usual fits and start, the column moved out of the dry area and in to marshy, wet, low lying terrain. Again, I'm a New Guy so I'm just following the guy in front of me and doing what I'm told. The further we moved forward the deeper we sank in the marsh.

It was then that the shooting be-

gan. I have no idea what Order of Battle was. Was Fox Company the lead company? Was it Gulf? I was in third platoon. Was first or second out in front? The order was to move forward. Those ahead of us had already moved through the mud and were moving uphill toward the fighting. It seemed like it took forever to get through that quagmire and up to the higher ground.

What we had come upon was a camouflaged bunker complex. I'm sure that the lead squad got tore up pretty bad; and then, through fire and maneuver, others engaged the enemy. In the end there were quite a few casualties, both KIA & WIA.

The clouds and subsequent rain kept the smell of gunpowder, cordite, blood, and death pressed hard against the earth as we cleared each bunker. I don't remember how many gooks died. I should know because I was detailed to collect the bodies, and, along with several other New Guys, we tossed them into a bomb crater. There were quite a few. I don't recall any enemy wounded.

After calling police, two officers took away the bars and gave them a receipt.

The military buffs have stored it in a safety deposit box in London. Nick said: "Even if I don't get any of the gold back I will still have my beautiful tank."

A Northamptonshire Police spokesman said they could not comment "for operational reasons".

The medivac chopper arrived when it was almost dark and took our wounded. We dug in and spent the night. My first firefight was over—I was bug-eyed.

Bill Taylor took out an enemy gun with his M-60 after Nelson McKenna was killed trying to do the same and was awarded a Silver Star. Sgt. Peter Delandro, third platoon (the bravest Marine I ever met) was severely wounded and no one thought he would make it. He survived and even came back to lead us again.

42 years later I think that the guy in the soft cover knew exactly where the bunkers were and lead us right to them. I think he probably knew what provisions they had.

I remember seeing the biggest, deepest bomb craters ever--arc-light aftermath probably. I'm sure I'm not the only one who can shed some light on the events of that day. Hopefully, someone has a better handle on it than me. It was during these early days of my tour that it dawned on me that the term 'Scared Shitless' was a misnomer.

named her "Betel Nut Betty." She went everywhere with me and I gladly shared her with the squad. Then when I got hit for the last time and

they took me out of the game so I subsequently lost her.

Twenty years later, I am at a reunion and talking with "Doc" Scala. He had arrived in-country about the time I left. Doc said, "Rodriquez, I just want

This is a time to recollect, to contemplate, to reflect. This is my reflection: I was wearing a Vietnam Veterans patch on my vest the other day and a nice lady at grocery store asked me, "When were you there?" She looked surprised when I responded, "Well, ma'am, I was there just last night and yesterday during lunch."

Combat Vets were and are in the business of death and, I think, we all go back there often. "Yes ma'am, I was there." Death was there too. Not the "If I die before I wake" kind, the real kind, the kind that has a knowing smile every time you cheat him. The kind of death that when you look in the mirror you see him standing behind you, pointing a bony finger and saying, "Don't fly tonight, you're next." That kind of death. Frightening, yes, but we all tried hard not to show it. We joked about dying, sang funny songs about going home in a body bag and crashing our planes on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Ha! Ha! Ha! Morbid senses of humor. Inside, quietly, we were thanking God for getting us through the last mission.

Yeah, I was there. I can still smell the fuel and oil in the air as I walked alone in the dark to my airplane. I can still smell the mud of Southeast Asia. It smells like something dug from an ancient grave. It stains your flight suit and your soul. I try to remember what the Intel guy said about the anti-aircraft fire that we should expect tonight. I try NOT to remember my friend whose airplane slammed into the jungle with him still strapped in

to let you know that I inherited Betel Nut Betty and took good care of her for you. She was patched up many times."

He added that he figured that somebody must have long dicked my "old

Veterans Day, 11-11-2015

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

the cockpit. I know, as I prepare for flight, I will smell the cordite gunpowder hanging in the air and see tracers arcing up from seemingly every direction leaving only narrow alleys for escape. Like a bizarre 4th of July. I know I will see the target area illuminated by parachute flares: Mini suns lighting up an eerie moonscape scene below. There will be ghostly shadows, cast by fighter planes and AAA tracer paths that flit around on the bomb cratered ground like malevolent spirits looking to do us harm. I recall the thump a fighter pilot hears and feels as two 500 pound General Purpose bombs made of iron and black powder are released from his airplane and go crashing into the earth exploding on impact, sending fire and bits of steel in every direction. Yeah, I was there. Sometimes I am still there.

But today I am pushing my personal memories back and thinking about the vets who will never celebrate this day. I am thinking about the guys who didn't make it back. I am thinking about the warrior foot soldiers that are still lost in the steamy jungle or the mud of a rice paddy. I am thinking about the pilots that crashed and burned doing Americas bidding, I am thinking about the grunts, brave men huddled together on a hilltop unloading their weapons into the night thinking, "One more fire fight, God, let me get through one more fire fight." Meanwhile a buddy takes an enemy AK-47 bullet in the chest and is instantly gone. I am thinking about the POWs who died beaten, ill, starved and broken, on a cold stone

FAMILY

BY FRED GOGER

I always tell people after 4 yrs. In the corps, i woke up one morning with 5

kids. I don't know what the hell happened. Well i raised 3 boys and 2 girls

lady" and so after a fruitful career, they finally buried Betty. True story.

And by the by, Doc Scala received the Silver Star in the Que Sans.

floor seeking comfort in a bloody, filthy scrap of blanket in North Vietnam's Hoa Lo prison (Hanoi Hilton) never being able to get home to be honored on Vets Day. We don't even know how many! I am thinking about those still missing in action, never to see a Nov 11th again, their families aching to just have closure. I am thinking about 1200 guys who we know died but their bodies never recovered and I am thinking about the 500 pilots shot down over Laos and never heard from again. I am thinking about the families and their anguish. I am thinking about the more than 58,000 names on a black granite wall that pushes out of the earth like a massive, dark grave stone in Washington, DC. I am thinking about my friends, my Brothers in Arms, who gave it all. Their names are there on the Western section of that wall. I am thinking about Southeast Asia and a war called Viet Nam because it is part of what defines me. I know other vets are thinking about their wars and I know we are all thinking about each other because we are brothers bound by war, duty and honor. I want the lady in the grocery store, and indeed everyone, to know I loved the guys who shared that part of my life. And I hope everyone today thinks about those who serve, past and present, ready if called. Yeah, we were there... are there... and will be there. Thank a Vet today.

Submitted by Ben Cole

This story was written by a grunt who was with the 7th Marines and is now a buddy of John Wear and who lives in Colorado.

Betel Nut Betty

BY FRANK RODRIQUEZ

A Marine rifleman with Golf - 2/7 was nothing on it at all! I open it and inside is a blowup naked doll. I said, "Yes." I paid the kid a few bucks and was on my way. Me and the squad

So one day while on patrol we stopped in a ville. A Gook kid tells me he had something special for me. He takes me over to a box with no label, there

got divorced and we got custody as my son went to 10th mt. Div. (Of the 6 kids i raised – 5 went into the military). When my grandson graduated high school he joined the corps and went off to the island. During training he tore ligaments and received a stress fracture in his ankle so he went into the hospital. About 2 months later my son called me and told me zack was told since he was in the hospital 6 weeks already, he had to go home. I told my son it don't work that way and to relax. This was a sunday night and my wife and i were watching tv. I told her of the phone call, then told her to go upstairs and take her bath. I would be up shortly. Well i grabbed a small bag, some skivvies, socks, shirts and another pair of pants and jumped in my ram and headed south. (We live in jersey. I didn't call anyone until i was in my room on andrews airforce base. I called my wife and told her i was going after zack. I have a va rating of 100% so i can stay on any base. I also stayed on fort bragg on the way down. My ram1500 has a 3rd div decal covering the entire hood and marine corps stuff all over it. When i got to paris island i got a room at the osprey house. I rode around the island and went and parked in front of the hospital but never saw my grandson. The next day i went to the parade ground to watch a graduation practice. I went to the middle of the bleacher

seats and up about 15 rows. The bottom rows kind of filled up with marine ncos and officers. Then i see a marine walk in with cammies on and a di hat. I can see he is a high ranking nco by the large chevron group on his collar and all the marines in the bottom rows are greeting him and shaking his hand so i figure he's either a war hero or a big shot here. He looks up in my direction and starts to walk up the stairs. I'm wearing my red satin jacket with tats up and down my arms that denote where i've been in the corps from san-to domingo to vietnam and cuba. On my head is a 3rd div this e-9 comes in my row and asks if he could sit. I said "sure top". Then he asks me who i was with in the 3rd. So we had a nice talk for about 15 mins. When he asks me if i had someone graduating. I said no, that my grandson was in the hospital and was told he had to go home because he was there too long. I said you and i both know that's bullshit. He told me to go to the hospital on the 2nd floor and tell ssgt masters that you want to see your grandson even though they're not allowed visitors. So i go to the hospital and go into the office on the second floor. Now i'm 6 foot 5 inches tall and weigh 300 lbs. So when i walk into an 8 x 10 room, i get attention.

There were three dis in that office and i walk up to the first desk and he asks if he can help me. I said – you have

my grandson here, i know he is not allowed visitors but i only need him for 30 seconds and you can have him back. He asks me what his name is and i told him goger. He goes on the computer and tells me to follow him. We go around the corner to the squadbay and the recruits in there stop what they are doing and yell "attention". The di says "where is goger?" Someone says he is at the barbershop. The di tells one of them to go get him. The di tells me to sit outside on the bench and wait for zach. Now zach doesn't know i'm there so i could see his surprise when he turned the corner and saw me. My grandson is a little taller than me and i went up to him and got right in his face. As i poked him in the chest i told him when i graduated i limped off this island with a dislocated knee and sling palsy. I told him if he didn't graduate, i would "shoot him in the fucking foot" then i told him to report back into the office. I don't even believe that took me 20 seconds.

Well, during his rehab his old drill instructor came and told him he wanted him back in his new platoon. When he graduated i took my wife and the other 5 down to his graduation. We stayed at the osprey house for three days and my sons harassed him every time we saw his platoon outside. Now I'm glad to say all my kids are home.

A Marine Tank versus a Water Boo

WRITTEN BY A GRUNT MACHINE GUNNER WITH 1/9

I love tanker stories since they do some funny and crazy things. There was a tank unit working with us as we were conducting a sweep. The tank could only operate on the road which was a rather primitive track. An enemy unit was to be moving out of the area and a patrol of our guys were trying to catch them. Some old Vietnamese farmer moved one of his water buffalo up on

to the road to block the tank. Everybody was shouting for the farmer to move the buffalo off the road. To the tankers and the grunts that were with the tank it looked like the farmer was pretending to move the buffalo but he was really just keeping it in place. The tanker decided he was going to blow it off the road. He fired a high explosive round and the buffalo went down

like a stone right in the middle of the road. The farmer was running around yelling and screaming while we could not move the dead animal. The grunts were laughing their ass off and our CO was screaming over the radio. To top it off one of the crazy grunts wanted to call in a napalm strike on the dead animal. Now that's when the Marine Corps was fun.

Model Making Marine

BY BRUCE VAN APELDOORN

Over the past three years, a Marine who served his tour in Vietnam as a he-

licopter door gunner, has built and delivered models of four M48A3 Tanks,

a Flame Tank and a Tank Retriever to members of VTA. Why? Because he



(L to R) Cliff Wiley and Tom Reich



One of Cliff's masterpieces

really likes tanks plus his reward for making award winning models of armored vehicles is the look on the face of the Marine who receives the final product.

Cliff Wiley belongs to the Marine Corps League's Genesee Valley Detachment in Rochester, NY with VTA members Bruce Van Apeldoorn and Tom Reich. The two focuses of Cliff's

retired life are Toys-for-Tots and building model tanks.

Bruce has shared the Sponson Box and Forgotten Tracks with Cliff along with some pictures. Shortly thereafter Cliff presented Bruce with a totally awesome replica of 'C' Co., 1st Tk. Bn.'s C22. Tom Reich joined the Detachment shortly after and was recently presented his tank of 'B' Co., 3rd

The German Hospital at An Hoa

BY RICHARD PEKSENS



Tk. Bn. (pictured)

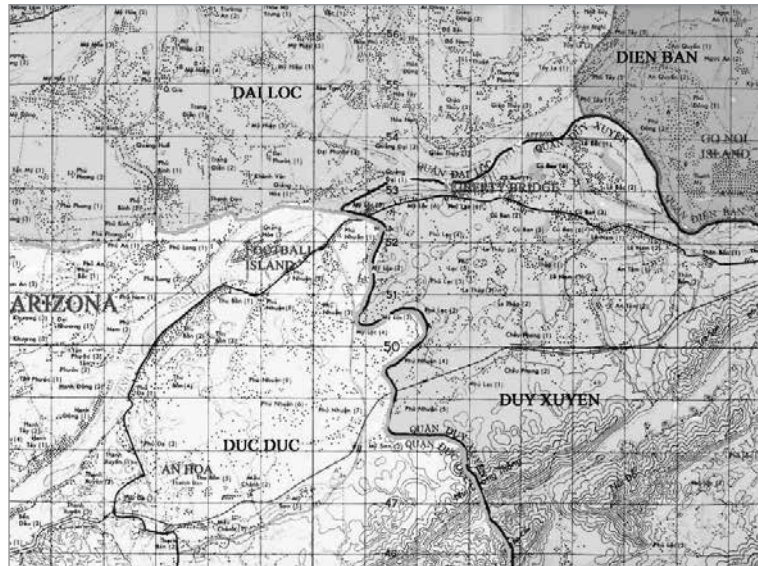
Two of the M48A3s, one 1st Tank Bn, and the other 3rd Tank Bn., were raffle items at the Washington, DC Reunion. The M67 Flame Tank was presented to John Wear and the M51 Retriever was built for Harold Rieneche.

These are not out-of-the-box builds. Cliff enjoys talking to the Marine for whom he is about to build the vehicle and requires as many pictures of the vehicle he is building as possible. His attention to detail is the signature of his work. All of the little things we remember such as C-ration boxes, medivac stretchers, blocks of track and ammo linked to guns are just a few of the details. Coloring to replicate the dirt and stains of war are also extremely accurate.

Other tanks built by Cliff have been the M60 which he presented to the former Commanding Officer of 8th Tank Bn. (Operation Desert Shield/Storm) and several members of the Battalion. Cliff has also built several LAV-25s for Marines of our local Reserve Unit.

In late 1968, I arrived as the "second XO" to oversee the Bravo Company, 1st Tanks that was stationed at An Hoa and at Liberty Bridge. The bridge was built in 1967 to cross the Song Thu Bon River north of An Hoa. The need for a second XO was due to the "dangerous" travel from Hill 55, HQ of Bravo Co, 1st Tanks, to An Hoa. The CO had attempted this trip after my arrival, but his jeep hit a mine as his vehicle was driving at high speed and the mine obviated any future attempt to visit the two platoons at An Hoa.

Although, not Khe Sanh, we were rocketed "daily" with NVA 122 mm rockets and artillery from the Charlie Ridge location. Many tankers were killed or wounded from the constant barrage. The basin held rich copper deposits and a train track ran north >>

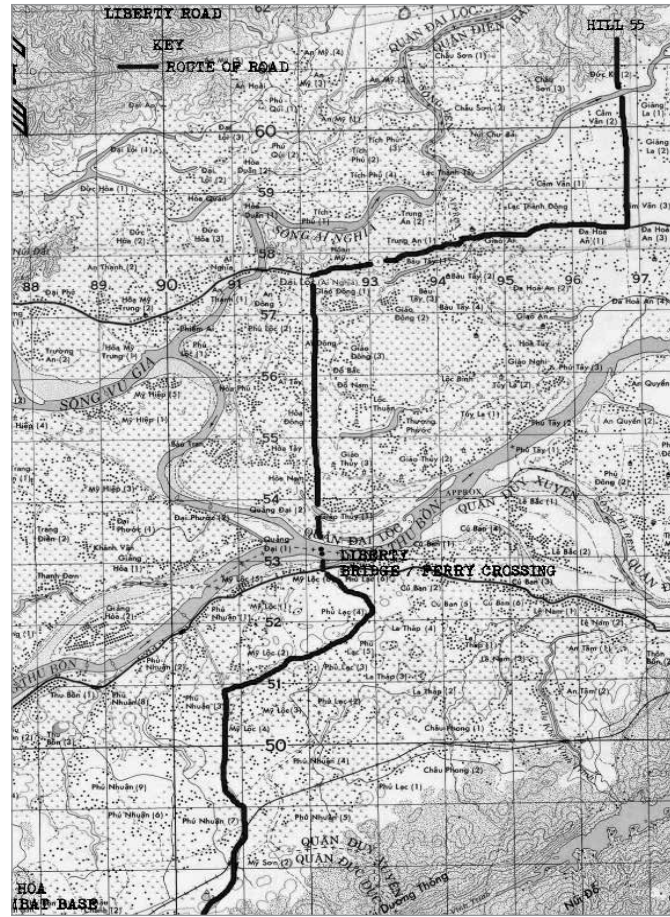


from An Hoa to the port city of Da Nang.

In 1967, elements of the 3rd Marine Division had made significant contact with NVA forces in multiple operations. In 1968, the 5th Marine Regiment deployed from combat operations around Hue to descend on the "Arizona Territories." Operation Allen Brook found the 5th Marines, working with the 7th Marines from Hill 55 and the ROK Marines from Hoi An to clean up the areas known as Go Noi Island, Dodge City and The Arizona.

Before the arrival of the Marines, a German hospital had been construct-

ed near the boomtown of An Hoa to care for the local populace. When I arrived at An Hoa, I was told about the many blond German nurses at the local hospital just south of our wire. Shortly after my arrival, the NVA entered the hospital and captured the doctors and nurses so that they could care for their wounded in the hills surrounding the basin. Recon units were dispatched to hunt for the German prisoners but were never successful. Later, I heard from an amtrac friend



that a firefight north of Phu Loc, near the Liberty Bridge, had resulted in a number of NVA killed exiting a tunnel complex. Amongst the dead was a German nurse.

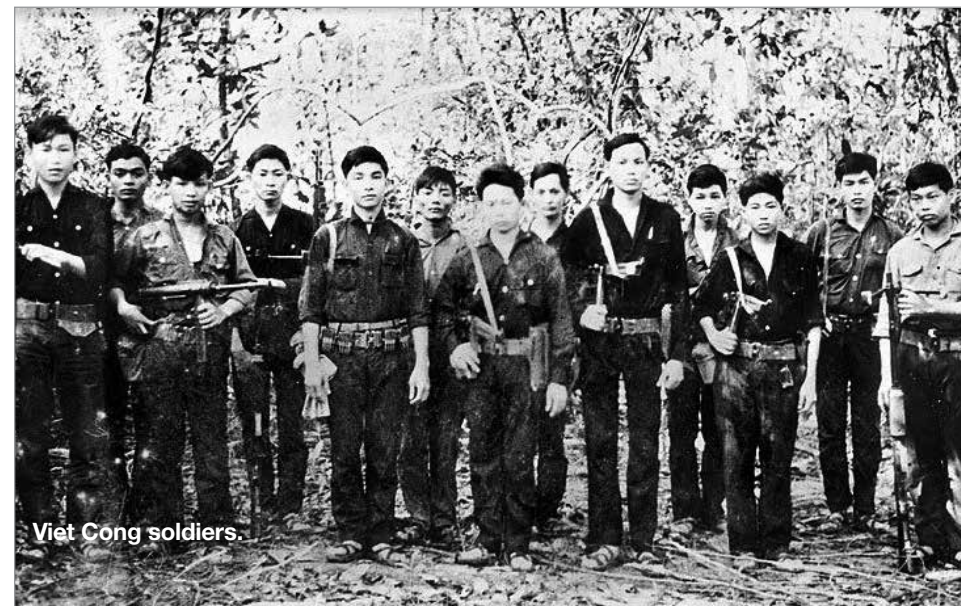
LT Richard Peksens
XO, Bravo Company, 1st Tanks

The US purposely gave ammo to the Communists during the Vietnam War

Why on Earth would an army provide its enemy with ammunition? So they would use it, of course. The United States wanted the North Vietnamese to use the ammo they provided because they would take out the weapon (and maybe even the person) using it.

There was no unconventional war like the one that played out behind the scenes of the greater war in Vietnam. One small aspect of that hidden war was Project Eldest Son, a plan that would take out the enemy's individual infantry rifles using its own ammunition.

It was carried out by a U.S. military entity called the Studies and Observations Group, the Special Forces unit



Viet Cong soldiers.

could kill an entire mortar crew.

that was behind many of the top secret missions and operations inside the Military Assistance Command Vietnam. The unit was in many of the major battles and offensives of the war, including the Tet Offensive and the Easter Offensive. But Project Eldest Son was different. It was a slow burn, a subtle influx of materiel into the enemy's supply and ammunition depots, with one marked difference – one that wouldn't show itself until it was too late.

Starting in 1967, the United States and the MACV-SOG began sending the Communist forces throughout the area ammunition for the AK-47, machine guns, and even mortars. They all looked ordinary, but they didn't work like any ordinary ammo – and they weren't just duds, either. These rounds were filled with high explosives, enough not just to fire the projectiles, but enough to destroy the weapon and severely wound the shooter. For the mortar rounds, the explosives together

After a while, the United States hoped the Vietnamese Communists would be afraid to use their own weapons and ammo. Killing the enemy was a good side effect, but the SOG needed some of them to survive.

For two years, special operators would capture ammunition and supply centers, infuse cases of ammo with the faulty ammunition and then let it end up back in the hands of the enemy. Like seemingly everything in Vietnam, you never knew what might be booby-trapped. Eventually, the SOG would have to warn U.S. troops



Soldiers from the regular North Vietnamese Army.

against using Communist weapons and ammo over the defective new M-16 to prevent the explosives from killing friendlies.

The program only ended because it was leaked to the media in the West, but even so, the efficacy of the program was never fully known. ■

Photo from Vietnam



John Bartusevics writes: 1966-67. Moving from Point A to Point B to hook up with Grunts to start an Operation. Doing a Halt-Check with 2nd Platoon, Charlie Co. 1st Tank Bn. 1st Marine Div. South of Da Nang.

MAI LOC AND LZ STUD

BY JAN "TURTLE" WENDLING



In the photo: Jan "Turtle" Wendling – "Snake" and "Ski" at the village of Mai Loc in March 1969

March started off with my brother Jim leaving the C-2 artillery base to go back to the World. He had come up to see me from Hill 55 in Da Nang on Feb 26th and had spent five days with me on my tank A-14. At the time we didn't have a gunner so we showed him what to do as the gunner. He didn't like it at all, being the grunt that he was.

As he jumped up onto the 6 by truck to say good-bye, I had a real bad feeling that I wasn't going to see him again. I was the fourth and last brother in Vietnam. My brothers had gone through more horrors than I wanted to know about. As the truck pulled out of C-2, I never felt more alone. I had told him before he left that I would always be with him no matter what. He told me to shut up and not talk like that. I really thought that I would never make it home. On numerous occasions I almost didn't.

We made a sweep around C-2 and found an enemy anti-aircraft position with fighting positions around it. There were empty shell casings laying everywhere. We destroyed all of the positions.

We also found an enemy reinforced bunker outside of Cam Lo that had recently been occupied and we blew it up.

Shortly thereafter we were told to pack up all of our gear because we were leaving C-2 for Mai Loc. We had been a C-2 ever since I'd been in-country and I really did not want to go anywhere else. But we packed and headed south on the MSR, Route 521 toward Cam Lo. We crossed over to Route 9 and headed south through the market place, through the creek and then we went up, up and farther up. The road followed around a mountain with the width just

a few feet wider than the tank. If we ran off of the road, we would fall hundreds of feet straight down into the river below. There were civilians walking right next to the tanks, carrying sticks with baskets on both ends. The baskets were filled with vegetables or small animals that were going to or from the market place in Cam Lo. The road going toward Mai Loc was steep and scary to be in a tank.

We finally made it to the top of the mountain and passed an old Victorian house like you'd see back in the World. It had a wrought iron fence around it and it had large trees lining the entranceway. As we entered the village, all of the kids came out and ran next to the tanks begging for C-rations or candy.

We got through the village and entered a small triangular shaped ARVN base. Interesting enough we had wooden and screen billets. The villagers and kids walked all around the perimeter of the base all day long, which was a little unnerving to me because we didn't have villages up north along the DMZ and we were not used to having civilians around.

During the day we'd string a tarp between the two tanks and sit in the shade and play cards on a box of C-rations. Also almost every day we went to the waterfalls outside of the village to fill our water cans and we'd always get sniper fire. We saw the rooster tails from the enemy bullets hitting the water in the rice paddy but we'd never shoot back. We were afraid that we might kill the sniper and that they would replace him with someone who could really shoot.

There was a little village girl that came to the water point every day with her brother. Mai was eight years old her brother Lee was six. Both kids spoke perfect English and I would give them cigarettes and C-rations. All of the kids smoked. Mai would bring little bananas and rice bread to us.

We were not at Mai Loc very long when one morning Mai told me that we would be leaving and going to Vandergrift Combat Base (LZ Stud). Since we had not heard this, I asked her how she knew and she just smiled. When we got back to the ARVN base we got orders to pack up and move out to Vandergrift. I couldn't believe it!

We did run mine sweeps every morning from Mai Loc to the market place at Cam Lo. I talked to a little boy named Tu Leh when we got to the market place. He got one of his legs shot off by the NVA and his family had all been killed. I gave him cigarettes and C-rations too. To this day, I wonder what ever happened to those kids.

We left for Vandergrift and took Route 9 west. We passed the old Marine base at Camp Carroll and drove into the

mountains. We crossed KG Bridge and got our first look at the Rockpile. The mountains were impressive to say the least. We entered the valley where Vandergrift was located. The mountains ran east to west and to the north was Signal Hill.

Vandergrift was a desolate base. It has a metal air strip for helicopters and that was about it. We slept in tents and it was filthy. We had to make up range cards during the day for what we thought were probable enemy avenues of approach. We would get into our tank slot and put our sights on the draw or the wooded area and mark the hills to the left and right with the quadrant and elevation. We'd then

write it on the range card. We were constantly reminded that we had to hit exactly what was on the range card because there were Montagnard villages all in the mountains. I do admit that there were a few times when we shot into the villages.

On the 20th of March, we were told to pack up and that we were going to sweep the valley west of C-2 as we had a Kit Carson scout who had advised us that there was an enemy hospital complex in the valley. Just as a reminder, a Kit Carson scout was an NVA who came over to our side.

We began getting ready for the "Battle of RPD Valley."

The Battle for RPD Valley

BY JAN "TURTLE" WENDLING

This sweep was going to be conducted by A Co.1st and 2nd Platoons. It was unknown to us just exactly how long we would be gone, or exactly where we were going. We had a Kit Carson scout with us (An NVA soldier who gave himself up to the South Vietnamese Army) He was going to take us into this valley.

We left L.Z. Stud (Vandergrift Combat Base) and headed East on Highway 9, past The Rockpile and across the K.G. Bridge and passed the old Camp Carrol Combat Base to just outside of Cam Lo Village. We went up on top of Hill 37 off of the North side of Highway 9. From on top of Hill 37 you could see all of the Cam Lo district off to the east. To the North East was C-2 Combat Base. To the west, all you could see was Mountains. Hill 37 doesn't sound like a very high hill but it went almost straight up and we spent the night on top of it.

We awoke the next morning to a beautiful day. We watched the villagers from Cam Lo doing their morning rituals as we ate our C rations.

We left Hill 37 and went North from Highway 9. We crossed the Cam Lo River and stayed Northbound. We came to a horse shoe valley North West of Cam Lo and South West of C-2. The valley ran westward and was surrounded by high hills and at the end of the valley the mountains shot straight up. The valley was nothing but high scrub brush and trees. The smaller hills turned into steeper hills as we went westward toward the mountains.

As we got into the valley, our lead element saw North Vietnamese running out in front of us. All of our units went up the highest hill that we could take our Tanks up and set up a perimeter overlooking the valley.

We were advised to take three Tanks and go into the valley to search and see what we could find. The rest of the Tanks would observe us from the hill. A-11, with Sgt. Virgil Melton Jr.'s crew led the way. A-12 Lt. Tanks crew was second in line, and our Tank A-14 commanded by Sgt Eddie Miers brought up the rear. We all had grunts on our tanks also and if I remember correctly, they were Capt. Chap-

mans D 1/9. Capt. Chapman was the Commandant of the Marine Corps General Chapman's son.

We made our way back down the hill and turned right going back toward the way we came in the valley. We then made a left and started looking for bunkers. We found several bunkers and blew them in place. We also found a lot of Spider Holes that the North Vietnamese would shoot out of, and hide in, as they were a maze of tunnels.

We threw a track and it seemed like forever to get it fixed. As we started back up the road toward the perimeter, I looked up from my drivers hatch at Lt. Paul Tank, who was in the middle Tank and I saw him spin his cupola to the right and he started firing the .50 cal. In the cupola to the right. All the grunts jumped off of the Tanks and started firing. Eddie told me to turn right and pull into the bush and then to back up so we would have an open area in front of us. As soon as I stopped backing up an RPG team ran out in front of us and I remember the Tank recoiling as we put a beehive round on them. A beehive, or flechette round fires thousands of little steel darts a couple of inches long and you can set the rounds to open from the tube up to a couple of thousand meters away. All hell was breaking loose.

Sgt Virgil Melton Jr ran over top of one North Vietnamese. When the NVA crawled out, Virgil shot him with an M-14 and killed him. The NVA was carrying a brand new RPD Russian Machine Gun that still had cosmoline, the packing grease, in the barrel. The gun had never been fired.

The grunts were firing and all three Tanks were "going to town". There was one NVA laying just over a bomb crater and it looked like something had just taken a big bite out of his mid-section, and had almost cut him in half. The grunts were throwing grenades in the spider holes

The NVA did not get one round off at us. We got back in line and started to go back up the hill when we were advised that there was an RPG team setting up behind a large tree right where we turned left to come back up the

(Continued on page 38)

Photos from Vietnam



Jim Groeger writes: The 1/9 grunt battalion cameraman was from my home town of Chicago. A buddy from the Naval Gunfire team and I went to the old Navy Yard (Naval Historical site in D.C.) to see the pictures of our combat tour but we found none on file. We finally ran down the photographer and acquired this picture that he took shortly before we loaded it with 1/9's dead. I then gave all of my pictures that I had from my tour to the OIC, so now they are in an archives in DC somewhere. This was the only tank picture that I had.

If you watched the Ken Burns series, when you saw the dead on the tanks, I was three feet from the guy taking the motion picture.

If you buy the book "Operation Buffalo" then you can read about 1/9's fight to survive in July of 1967. My great friend George Blough is mentioned in the book.

Jim added a reply from his foxhole buddy: I hadn't seen this photo before but one of the tanks was on our right flank when an RPG or anti-tank shell or mortar round hit the tank. The wounded tanker[s] were brought / came up through the company CP position. That's all I remember about the tanks on Buffalo. Later on I came across a picture in a periodical that showed a tank with poncho-wrapped bodies tied down on its decking. The buzzards and rats got the NVA!!!



Jim Coan writes: (Left to right) Sergeant Rex Davis, Burt Trevail, Ingalls, and Dan McCartney. All four of these tankers had served with me in my Alpha Co, 1st Platoon at one time or another. It looks like they were taking a smoke break after loading 90mm ammo into their tank. Recently Rick Lewis made contact with Rex Davis' daughter. I had written about Rex in my next book that is coming out this summer, "Time in the Barrel." Rick sent me a scrap book that the daughter had put together in memory of her deceased father, Rex. I spotted this photo and I sent it to my book publisher, University of Alabama Press.



The impressive-looking M50 Ontos tank destroyer held a formidable rifle array which had to be reloaded from the outside of the vehicle.

M50 Ontos (Thing) United States (1955)

One of the most unique of the fighting vehicles to emerge from the Vietnam War-era (1955-1975) was the M50 "Ontos". Its name translated in the Greek to mean "thing" which was an appropriate title for the diminutive machine which was unlike any combat vehicle seen to that point. The vehicle utilized a three-man crew in a compact, angled hull superstructure which sported 6 x 106mm recoilless rifles overhead. The type was devised as an air-transportable tank destroyer but found better use in the anti-infantry role during the Vietnam conflict. The United States Marine Corps became its primary user and Allis Chalmers manufactured it from 1955 to 1957 to the tune of 297 units.

The M50 was initially born through five T156 pilot vehicles that each fitted recoilless rifles of different calibers for testing purposes. Twenty-four more vehicles followed for additional trials and these took on the standardized 106mm rifles. The program then graduated to produce the

T156E2 pilot model which became the production-quality M50. The USMC initially fielded their Ontos vehicles in October of 1956.

Engineers attempted to create the most compact form possible for the combat vehicle while also preserving crew survivability. This included use of heavily-sloped sides where armor could be thinner but still provide the necessary ballistics protection. This did, however, reduce the internal cabin space which made conditions for the three crewmembers rather tight. The armor was only ever suitable against small arms fire and perhaps artillery spray and little else. The driver sat front-left with the engine to his right.

The weapon of choice for the M50 became the M40 Recoilless Rifle. This weapon appeared during the mid-1950s and saw extensive service in the Vietnam War and beyond. It fired several types of 106x607mmR >>

projectiles that included HEAT and HEAP (“High-Explosive, Anti-Tank” and “High-Explosive, Armor-Piercing” respectively). Its design was such that recoil could be reduced by skillful expelling of propellant gasses during the moment of ignition. This produced a forward motion to counteract the rearward force of the gun – thusly reducing recoil. No complex recoil mechanism was therefore needed and the weapon could remain light in its construction. The M40 was specially designed for anti-tank warfare and initially utilized as a ground-based, crew-served system with a maximum range of 6,850 meters. HE and other anti-personnel rounds broadened its tactical capabilities beyond just tank warfare.

For the M50, six 106mm rifles were installed in groups of three onto a shallow-profile turret to either upper hull side. The two top rifle installations were fitted side-by-side with the third in a lower setting. Coupled to some of the rifles were Remington M8C 0.50 caliber spotting rifles used for training the recoilless weapons. The machine guns were fitted to the two outermost rifles (numbered “2” and “5” if counting the collection from left-to-right from the rear of the vehicle) and the two innermost rifles. These guns were afforded 80 rounds of 0.50 caliber ammunition. The turret held limited side-to-side traversal and elevation value. The spotting rifles were used after optical targeting was accomplished by the gunner. Coupled together, this provided some degree of accuracy for the rifles when fired. Self-defense was through a single 0.30 caliber Browning M1919A4 air-cooled machine gun.

The high placement of the weapons allowed for the M50 crew to press up behind a fortified or earthen wall for protection and still fire its weapons overhead. Additionally, the recoilless rifles retained their crew-serve capabilities and could be quickly detached from the vehicle and operated as normal – perfect for arranging an ambush or supporting infantry in other ways. 18 x 106mm projectiles were carried aboard for reload fire.

The little vehicle was initially given a General Motors GM SL12340 series 6-cylinder gasoline power plant of 127 horsepower output at 1,800rpm. The power pack resided in a forward-right hull placement which allowed for a split-door arrangement to be fitted at the rear hull face for the crew exiting and entering the vehicle. Road speeds reached 30 miles per hour with operational ranges at 150 miles though only 47 gallons were held in the internal fuel tank. The engine was mated to an Allison XT-90-2 transmission system and drove the vehicle through a front-mounted drive sprocket. Three road wheels were also in play as was a ground-level track idler at rear of the track system.

The M50A1 variant followed original M50 production marks and these introduced the Chrysler HT-361-318 V-8 gasoline engines which were now coupled to Allison XT-90-5 transmissions. Further differentiating details included louvers added over the hull engine for air intake purposes.

Access panels were added at the transmission compartment for ease of maintenance. The new engine increased output power to 180 horsepower. The designation served as the new M50 standard though only 176 of the original stock were upgraded to this from the period spanning 1963 to 1965.

Despite its design as a tank destroyer, the Ontos served a better role as an anti-personnel weapon delivering, HE projectiles at range. The North Vietnamese Army did not field a large number of tanks so that limited use of the M50 as a dedicated tank destroyer but excelled its service career as a fire support system. It was not long before the anti-infantry approach was undertaken as a result.

In practice, the Ontos proved that it could be a ferocious weapon under certain battlefield circumstances though it held several major deficiencies as combat vehicles go. Cramped conditions aside, the hull was only marginally armored and its sloped nature only proved effective up to a point, offering little to no protection against hidden mines or rocket grenades. Additionally, the recoilless rifles had to be reloaded by a crewmember from outside of the confines of the vehicle which exposed him to unnecessary dangers both environmentally – and battlefield-related. The internal fuel tank severely limited operating ranges, particularly off road when on uneven terrain.

Despite these limitations, its users certainly seemed to have enjoyed their little “Things”. The compact size of the vehicle made them truly portable by several measures including helicopter and rail car. They could traverse softer terrains and confined roads where heavier tanks could not tread. It also held exceptional mobility thanks to its small size and lightweight stature and showcased a relatively low profile for a combat vehicle – difficult to train in on at range by the enemy. In The fire support role, the impressive six rifle collection became a Godsend against enemy infantry under cover to the point that the NVA and Viet Cong forces feared and respected the little American machine.

As with all military vehicles, the end of the line for the Ontos came in 1969 when the active fleet was stood down. From 1970 onwards, the M50s were delivered back stateside and scrapped while a few managed extended lives as museum showpieces.

- ✪ Origin: United States
- ✪ Year: 1955
- ✪ Manufacturer(s): Allis Chalmers – USA
- ✪ Production: 297
- ✪ Operational Crew: 3
- ✪ Dimension Length: 12.53 feet
- ✪ Dimension Width: 8.53 feet
- ✪ Dimension Height: 6.99 feet
- ✪ Operating Weight: 9 tons
- ✪ General Motors Corporation Model 302 gasoline engine developing 145 horsepower.
- ✪ Performance Speed: 30 mph ■

ANSWERING THE NARRATIVES

STAFF SERGEANT JOSEPH P KEELY

VIETNAM 1965, 66, 67

A few issues ago, I wrote a story in the Sponson Box that featured a section about Marine veterans becoming police officers. My story was titled “From Murderer and Baby Bomber to Pig in Less Than a Year.” Then I recently read an article in another issue of our magazine that was titled WHY WE STILL FIGHT TODAY. In that second article, the guest author inserted eight narratives that he calls “talking points.” He further stated that all of the narratives were false. I absolutely agree with him that they are false. Like the writer, I too am a self-taught historian regarding our war. Much of which is laid out in my book, *Wounds of the Heart*. In the other article the writer does not expound on why those narratives are false.

It is my hope that in future publications that I will write a series of articles in answer to those false narratives. I would also like to add a couple of narratives of my own that were not mentioned in the guest article. Starting with this one:

Ho Chi Minh petitioned for equal rights in French Indochina on behalf of the Group of Vietnamese Patriots to the Western powers at the Versailles peace talks but was ignored. He also asked a sitting President of the United States Woodrow Wilson for help to remove the French from Vietnam and replace it with a new nationalist government. Again, he was ignored.

When I was researching my book, this is one of the narratives that I found. Since it is documented history, I don’t deny that it happened. However, let’s examine these narratives from an investigative standpoint. I was a detective in the state police for 26 years, I did a lot of investigations. I also testified in many courts of law.

Keep in mind, this narrative was used by the antiwar movement in the 60s and 70s, including present day. I have found communist left-wing people in this country to be very smart. I believe this narrative was put out there by them, in hopes that the American public would take that narrative at face value indicating, that if Woodrow Wilson and the rest of the Western powers listened to Ho Chi Minh, America would not have had to fight in the Vietnam War.

I heard a phrase in a song one time, I believe to be very true. “Part of knowing where you’re going, is knowing where you’re from.” It also is my belief, the American public that believes that the Western powers of 1919 and the sitting president of the United States could have prevented the war that took place in 1965, should be forced to have their piss tested, here is why I believe that.

Being a cop for 26 years, I have come to realize one thing, trouble never brings a warning. I think I can safely say that no one in this country on September 10, 2001 could fore-

see the attack on the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 except for the 19 individuals that conducted the attack. Therefore, I think I can safely say that the Western powers at the Versailles peace talks, and Woodrow Wilson including Ho Chi Minh could not foresee fighting the war in Vietnam in 1965.

Besides being propaganda, these narratives used by the antiwar movement, I believe would be considered conjecture in a court of law. “Conjecture: Is defined as, the formation of judgments or opinions on the basis of incomplete or inconclusive information.”

So, let’s add the incomplete and inconclusive information to these narratives. Starting with the players in this narrative. The individual known to you and me as Ho Chi Minh, was born, Nguyễn Sinh Cung, in 1890; this is three years after France annexed his country in 1887. Basically, the area of Southeast Asia that was known as French Indochina from 1887 consisted of Vietnam, Laos and Cambodia. He was born in Hoàng Trù Village which was his mother’s hometown.

I think a fact a lot of people forget is that England, France, Spain, Portugal, as well as some other countries, were still in the business of colonizing other countries. Some of these countries continued this process well into the 60s. I think we can also accuse Russia of doing the same thing, colonizing all those countries they took over during World War II, and that lasted, well into the 80s.

Historical fact has it, that in 1911, Ho supposedly left Vietnam on a French steamer, the Admiral Latouche – Tréville, working as a kitchen helper. It is said that he traveled to the United States. Where, from 1912 to 1913 he lived in New York and Boston. He was 21 years old.

He claimed to have arrived in Paris from London in 1917 but French police only had documents of his arrival in June 1919. To familiarize himself with Western society and politics, he was also reported to be spending most of his free time in public libraries reading history books and newspapers. From 1919-1923, while living in France, it is here, that he embraced communism. I did not find out where he was from 1913 to 1917 that’s a four-year period which we don’t know where he was or what he was doing.

However, I did find out that Nguyễn Sinh Cung, just changed his name to Nguyễn Ái Quốc just prior to petitioning the Western powers and President Wilson. It was shortly after this, or around the same time, that he changed his name to Ho Chi Minh, meaning, the enlightened one. This ass wipe, had more aliases than some of the morons I locked up. When he approached these people he was not known is Ho Chi Minh, however, he was a Commu- >>

nist well on his way with the process of forming the French Communist Party.

I would like to point out at this time, some historical facts that may have influenced President Wilson's decision to ignore the man known as Nguyễn Ái Quốc. The facts that I am about to mention, I believe, have been overlooked by the American public when they are deciding how they feel about this narrative.

No matter what the individual opinions of the American public is about the different nationalities of the world, as a nation, we cannot ignore the following simple facts. A very young Frenchman by the name of the Marquis de Lafayette traveled to the colonies offered his assistance with the American revolution. Not only did he fight many of our battles, he also returned to France, petitioned the government to give us aid in our quest. That aid not only came in his return to the fight but came with not only monetary assistance but also the French fleet, which gave us the advantage at Yorktown, the last battle of the American Revolution. In 1865, Edouard de Laboulaye (a French political thinker, U.S. Constitution expert, and abolitionist) proposed that a monument be built as a gift from France to the United States in order to commemorate the perseverance of freedom and democracy in the United States and to honor the work of the late president Abraham Lincoln. That monument is none other than the Statue of Liberty which arrived in the United States in 1886 from the French government.

Besides these significant events, we had just come out of the First World War with France and England as our ally. Besides, I don't believe that at this time in history it was the policy of the United States to be telling other nations what to do. That along with the man that would become known as Ho Chi Minh and his associates not representing an established government, I don't think would be paid attention to by anyone at that time.

However, for those who think that Wilson should've done something, do you think that France would have given up Vietnam, Laos, and Cambodia, the area known as French Indochina without a fight? I think not. The Indochina War began in Vietnam on December 19, 1946 and lasted until July 20, 1954. A Grand total of eight years.

Not only would we have been fighting an ally in 1919, but we would have been fighting a nation that helped us tremendously in our own independence from colonialism.

To say the narrative being used is the reason the United States went to war in 1965, is total horse shit, okay I'll be nice, it is nothing more than conjecture, based on incomplete and inconclusive information.

In the next Issue, I would like to address the narrative: "...the conflict in Vietnam was between the true liberators from the French and the corrupt southern part of the country, which were by an unelected power elite who were resisting unification of the nation out of various selfish motives. ■

Photo from Vietnam



1968 - Listening for NVA digging tunnels under Khe Sanh

WORKING WITH THE DOGGIES

BY BR MCDONALD

This incident occurred, I believe, in September of 1968 to the Heavy Section of 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks. We were at Con Thien and I was TC of B-32. Gunny Kent Baldwin had B-31 and SSgt Jim Jewell had B-33. A US Army armor unit was going to take over our position on Con Thien so that we would be able to move on to bigger and better things for us to do rather than to man the perimeter on the firebase. We were told that the doggies would be arriving in the morning and that we were going to take them on an operation to get them used to the area. And so I thought nothing of it.

The doggies arrived that morning with about twenty tanks. I was surprised that they were M-48A2's.

They had a full bird colonel on the lead tank and all the other TCs were majors, captains and lieutenants. Their tanks also had "sky-mounted" .50 caliber machineguns.

Gunny Baldwin briefed the doggie ranking officers of what we were going to do: We were to meet up with a grunt battalion about 1000 meters north of the fire break (the "Trace") and we were to escort them back to Con Thien. Everyone was told to keep their tank interval of 50 yards apart; to stay inside of the tank tracks of the tank in front to avoid mines; to expect some NVA artillery fire; to make a perimeter when we got to the rendezvous point until the grunts arrived ... and to keep everyone's heads down.

We left Con Thien with our three Bravo tanks leading the group and I was the point (lead) tank. Gunny Baldwin was monitoring the doggie's radio frequency as well as our own tank platoon freq. We looked good crossing the trace. Our tanks were 50 yards apart and tracking the vehicle in front. When the doggies tanks moved out they were about five yards apart and each tank was making its own tracks as it crossed the trace. We got lucky that we did not receive any incoming NVA artillery while crossing especially since we knew that the gooks had every inch of the trace zeroed in with their artillery. We also got lucky not hitting any mines.

When we got to our rendezvous hill where we were to wait for the grunts to arrive, Gunny Baldwin was trying to get the doggie commander to form up into the perimeter with all of his tanks. He did not have any success com-

municating with them. When we were crossing the trace he had tried to get them to spread out to 50 yards between each tank and to track the tank in front ... but they would not listen. And of course, now we had a major traffic jam on top of the small hill in the middle of the DMZ. Gunny Baldwin gave up and our three tanks formed a semi-circle on the west side and we let the doggies do whatever they wanted to do. And of course, they never got into a decent formation.

As we were sitting there, I could see the NVA artillery smoke coming out of their guns as they started shooting at Gia Linh. I requested permission to shoot at the enemy but command denied my request because the grunts that we were waiting for were



between us and the NVA artillery. I then turned my attention back to the western area in front of our tanks. I was scanning the area about 200 yards out from our position and I saw enemy soldiers moving toward the south. I told my gunner to see if he could get the enemy soldiers in his sights. A couple of seconds later, he said, "Yes! I see them!"

I called Gunny Baldwin and reported that we had gooks moving north to south about 200 yards out. He replied, "Kill them!"

We put two rounds of HE right on top of them and it appeared as if we killed six of them. We continued watching that area and more enemy soldiers kept trying to cross the trace at the same location. This time we opened up with the .30 and the .50. This went on for about an hour, then we began receiving incoming mortar fire from a gully in the front of our position. We could hear the enemy soldiers fire the mortar but we could not see their firing position. Gunny Baldwin was on my right and Sgt Jewell was on my left about 50 yards apart. The incoming mortar rounds were walking in between Gunny Baldwin's tank and mine. Then a round hit right next to the gunny's tank and I saw him slump over hanging out of the TC cupola. I called over to his tank and told his crew to get him inside of the turret. Sgt Jewell called me and asked how bad the gunny was hit. I replied that it did not look good so Sgt Jewell called in a medevac. When the chopper arrived, they loaded the gunny on and that was the last time that we saw him. >>

The grunts finally showed up and we started an orderly march back to Con Thien. As we moved out, I was still the lead tank. I did see three of the doggie's tanks break off from the rear and head toward the gully where the mortar fire had come from. The tanks went down a slope and out of sight. As the doggie tanks moved, the tank commanders were holding on to his sky-mounted .50 and I do have to admit that they looked pretty good. About 30 seconds after they went out of sight, there was lots of gun fire but no cannon fire. Then about ten seconds later, all

three tanks came out of the gully, with their tank engines running wide open. Two of the doggie tank commanders were slumped over, hanging out of the TC hatch and the third was not in the cupola so I surmised that he was most likely inside of the turret. The doggie drivers never slowed down until they reached the perimeter of Con Thien. When our three Marine tanks got back with our grunts, we found out that all three doggie tank commanders had been killed. I was on my second tour and I never wanted a sky mounted .50.

The Boot LT

BY BR MCDONALD

I believe it to be around April 1967 when my tank was assigned to perimeter security at Cam Lo. I was the light section leader of 1st Platoon, A Co, 3rd Tanks which also ran road sweeps every morning. One afternoon Capt. Burns brought our new platoon leader out to us. He was a brand new 2nd LT. The skipper introduced the LT to the crews and recommended that because I had been in-country for a year that the LT listen to my advice. The LT was, "Yes Sir" to everything that the skipper said. The LT had me show him our living quarters and then instructed me to have the TCs move in with him in one bunker and move the crewmen into the other bunkers. I told him that the crews needed to stay together and he cut me short saying, "Do what I told you to do."

In the next couple of days, the LT let everyone know that he was in charge and not to question his instructions or authority. Then in the next few days, I told him that the tanks needed to be refueled. I said, "LT we need to get a fuel truck out here." Where upon he replied, "Do what I told you. Take the tanks to Dong Ha and refuel them."

I said, "Yes, Sir."

When we got back from Dong Ha, I reported to the LT, informing him that the tanks needed to be refueled again. When the LT asked "Why?" I replied that the trip to Dong Ha takes half of a tank of diesel fuel."

He asked, "What do you normally do?"

I replied, "We call company HQ and have them send out a fuel truck."

He asked, "Why didn't you tell me that?"

I replied, "I tried to."

The LT was also very demanding about uniforms and continuously on us about PM-ing the tanks. About two weeks into his command, the grunts wanted to sweep the northeast area around Cam Lo because there were reports of enemy troop movements. We left early one morning with about a company of grunts, sweeping west to east about a quarter of a mile north of Cam Lo. The LT told me that the grunt captain was going to make it a two day sweep. After we set up our perimeter for the night, the LT came over to my tank and said that the grunt captain wanted us to move

our tanks to a different location. It was about 10:30 PM and so I told the LT, "We don't move our tanks at night when we are in the bush."

The LT replied, "I told the grunt captain that we would move so we are going to move. Now!"

I replied that it was extremely dangerous for all of us. But the LT said, "Mount up!" We moved about a mile before setting up our perimeter again. Both crews were ready to get rid of him after that. The sweep ended without incident.

About a week later the LT came to me and said, "We are going on a recon." I asked him what he meant by recon and he replied that the grunts wanted to have another sweep operation so we were going to take the tanks and a squad of grunts and take a look in the area before the sweep. I advised the LT that we had never done this sort of recon with our tanks before. He replied, "Well, then this would be our first."

The next morning we left Cam Lo going west on Highway 9 for a couple of miles. The bush had been cleared for about 100 meters on both sides of the highway for security. The LT then turns off the road, onto a cleared area and into the tree line. I called him on the radio and warned him that the gooks had mined most of this area. He did not respond. I had half of the grunt squad on my tank and the LT had the other half along with the squad leader.

About half way across the empty area the LT hit a mine. The squad leader and most of his half of the squad were on the right side of the LT's tank when the tank hit the mine. All of the grunts were blown into the air about five or six feet and they all landed a few meters from the tank. The LT came running back to my tank. He was white as a ghost and wild eyed. He said, "You stay here. I'm going to company and get help." He then ran back out to the road, where a Jeep had stopped. He got into the Jeep and left.

With the LT gone, I was back in charge. I had the grunts on my tank go and help their buddies. I went over to the LT's tank and saw that two sets of road wheels were gone. I got the crew off and we buttoned up the track and drove it back to Cam Lo. Luckily none of the grunts were hurt bad and they were taken to sickbay.

(Continued on page 38)

My Journey with Cancer and the VA

BY JOHN WEAR

Written in December 2019

My motivation for writing this story is to illustrate my own personal experience and to also try to shed a bit of light on how the VA health care system, as flawed, under-funded and mismanaged as it is, may actually be of some useful service to some, if not all of us. The one thing that we cannot do is to rely on the system to work effectively without each of our own very deep and proactive involvement.

Let me start at the beginning of my recent journey. For my entire life, I have been blessed with excellent health. Other than a strabismus (eye) operation at age 3; a tonsillectomy at age 5 and the need to wear eye glasses, I have had no major medical issues in my 73 years on God's green Earth. As one friend told me, "You picked the right parents."

About 30 years ago, I was in my civilian primary doctor's office in Pennsylvania having an annual physical. Getting an annual check-up is something that I decided that I needed to do around the time that I turned 40 years old. At the time of this particular exam, I was around 45 or 46 years and working full-time so my employer-paid medical insurance coverage was pretty good. That day the doctor was looking me over and asked, "How long has that right breast been swollen?" I looked down, never noticing anything untoward in the past and replied, "I never noticed it before." She said, "We probably ought to have it checked out by having a needle biopsy done." A week or two later the quite painful biopsy was performed at the oncologist's office at Lankenau Hospital in suburban Philadelphia. In a week or so I was back in my primary doctor's office discussing the results. She said, "Mr Wear, there does not seem to be anything critical going on but I have to ask, do you eat a lot of chicken? And if so, it is Perdue chicken?" I said, "Yeah, I guess that I do." She came back with, "I suggest that you change your brand of chicken to a less processed brand. Maybe even an organic brand." She went on to say, "Perdue injects a lot of female grown hormones (estrogen) in their chickens in order to make the breast meat really plump. As far as I can tell, you have gynecomastia." She further explained that the malady that I have is simply an enlargement of the (male) breast and that if I stop eating the Perdue brand of chicken that it should go away in time.

Fast forward 20 years. I have been eating organic chicken all along and I am now in a different primary care doctor's office in another part of Pennsylvania, having yet another annual physical. Virtually the same question is raised by the doctor, "How long as your breast been swollen?" I told her about the process that I went through twenty years before and she said, "Let's send you to Doylestown Hospital for a mammogram." I was a little bit confused since my understanding that a mammogram is an x-ray exam that they do

for women with suspected breast cancer. The doctor went on to explain that men also get breast cancer, not very often but they do in fact contract it. A week later I went to the local hospital and after the mammogram was done, the nice young radiologist said, "Mr Wear, don't worry. There really is nothing here but a non-specific mass." My primary echoed the pronouncement and added, "Let's just keep an eye on it."

Fast forward to 2019, about six months ago, I was leaning into my large pottery kiln (one of my hobbies for the past 40+ years is making and teaching pottery). As I leaned over and pressed into the edge of the kiln to grab a pot that was way down at the bottom, I felt a very sharp pain in my right breast. The pain was so intense that I almost saw stars. When I recoiled, I put my hand on my breast and... Son of a gun! There was a lump about the size of a small wooden match stick!!!

By this time, I had a 100% service-connected disability rating with the VA and I was using the VA's health care system as my primary health care provider. Besides since moving to Colorado a few years prior; due to continued good health and being retired from the working world, I had not bothered to find a civilian primary doctor ... even though I have Medicare available to me.

As I felt the lump in my right breast, I thought to myself, my next VA check-up was a month away, so I will just wait for my regular check-up appointment to have the lump examined. Besides it's been a non-issue for what? 30 years.

The following month, during my regular check-up exam, my VA Physician's Assistant felt the lump and said, "Mr Wear, I am going to put in a request in to the Community Care system that you have a mammogram and a sonogram done right away. I don't like the looks of this so I am marking the request URGENT." About two weeks later I am at the Pen-Rad Diagnostic Clinic in Colorado Springs and after the mammogram and ultrasound procedures were done, the young technician said, "Mr Wear, I am going to show your pictures to the radiologist and if I come back alone, all is well. But if I come back with the doctor, we will have something more to talk about."

Of course, wouldn't you know it? About fifteen minutes later, the doctors walks in with the tech and he says, "Mr Wear, we need to schedule you right away for a biopsy on that lump. While it appears to be solid and even though it moves easily, I still don't like the looks of it."

Three days later, I am lying on the examination table with the same radiologist stabbing me 12 times taking a biopsy. And three days later, I call the number that they gave me and the report is that I have "Invasive Ductal Carcino- >>

ma.” If you look up that specific diagnosis on the internet, the layman’s term for my malady is “Breast Cancer.” It was Friday afternoon and there was virtually nothing to be done until the following Monday. Yes, I was sweating bullets for the weekend.

Interesting enough, my VA primary care person calls me from her home on Saturday and says, “Mr Wear, this is my cell phone and I want you to write it down and keep me posted as to what is happening with this entire cancer process.” She added, “I am going to put in an URGENT request to Community Care ... unless you want to go up to the Denver VA Hospital to see a surgeon and an oncologist.” I told her that I did not want to “go under the knife” with a VA surgeon. She said, “I understand. We’ll go through the Community Care program. It may take a while but again, I will mark the request URGENT. If you don’t hear anything in two days, please call me.”

Monday the Cancer Center at the brand new VA hospital in Denver calls and asks to set up an appointment with the VA surgeon. I deferred to the young lady on the other end of the phone and she agrees that since Colorado Springs is over the “40 mile limit” that the local VA Community Care system should be fine. The young lady at the Denver VA also suggested that I use the Rocky Mountain Cancer Center at Penrose Hospital in Colorado Springs. She gave me several options but recommended a specific person and a phone number for me to contact as being the best option. The very next day (Tuesday), the VA Community Care office (I think it is located in Kansas City) calls and says that they are working on my URGENT request and that I should hear from “Tri – West” soon. The caller went on to explain that “Tri – West” which is based out of Texas, was the civilian doctor locating and scheduling service for all VA Community Care programs. When I asked what I could do to expedite the issue, the nice lady said, “I am walking your request over to our person who makes the contact with Tri-West right now. You should hear from Tri-West in a day or two.”

By midday the next day (Wednesday), I had not heard a peep from anyone so I called the VA Community Care office again. The different lady that I spoke to this time said that my computer report indicated that only one request had been processed by Tri-West and that was for the oncologist. She also said that she did not know why the breast surgeon had not been requested. She told me that she’d make sure that both requests were conveyed to Tri-West. At that point I recommended the surgeon’s office (again).

That afternoon, someone from Tri-West called and in a very monotone and totally disinterested voice asked me what my preferences were for a cancer clinic and a surgeon. I told that person my preferences and the reply was, “You should hear from us within two weeks.” I did not like that reply so I called the Rocky Mountain Cancer Center and after a few connections and holds, I spoke to the young lady

who was in charge of scheduling all of the breast surgeons at her location. She was truly wonderful and she said that she has to receive an authorization from Tri-West before she can schedule a doctor to see me. She also promised that she would get the best doctor to see me virtually immediately after Tri-West contacts her. She gave me her fax number since that is how Tri-West communicates. She suggested that I call the main facilitator at the VA Hospital in Denver for more guidance. So I called and spoke to a wonderful young lady who gave me a bunch of pointers and a few contact people’s names and phone numbers. The first thing that I needed to do was to call Tri-West. The Denver VA lady had warned me that the people that I speak to at Tri-West are entry level “clerks” who are overworked and underpaid. She also added that unfortunately they also seemed totally disinterested with the plight of the veterans seeking medical help. That was good advice.

I place a call to Tri-West and the clerk indicated that they did not have either of my preferences on file for the breast surgeon or the oncologist and that they were waiting for those preferences in order to make contact. I counted to 10 and then gave them my preferences (again). I tried to be calm and tried to explain my current health emergency. I also asked them if they could contact the clinics that same day. The reply, “We will try.” Now remember that the oncologist office had already been contacted so the information that Tri-West gave me this time was bogus.

That evening there was a phone message on my home phone from the oncologist’s office at the Rocky Mountain Cancer Center saying that Tri-West had sent them a request and as soon as I call the oncologist’s office, she will set up an appointment with the doctor. My immediate concern was that I needed to see the surgeon before the oncologist so (again) where was the Tri-West surgeon’s authorization?

Thursday morning, I called the Rocky Mountain Cancer Center oncologist’s office and left a message for the scheduler to call me. And then at midday, I called and spoke to the RM CC surgeon’s scheduler and she indicated that she had not heard from Tri-West. Of course, I called Tri-West again and I think that it was the fourth or fifth person at Tri-West that I have had the misfortune (so far) to speak with, said, “According to your records, the surgeon was contacted but we are waiting to contact the oncologist.” You may not realize that this reply is exactly the opposite of what has happened thus far. Again, I counted to 10 and then spoke very slowly, “The oncologist office contacted me and we are moving forward with them. I need you to contact the surgeon’s office. Here is the fax number.”

That afternoon we had a pretty heavy snowstorm and most local offices closed early.

The next morning (Friday), I called Tri-West and spoke to, yet again to another clerk who had me hold for about three minutes while his “computer warmed up” ... or whatever it needed to do (which was most likely he needed to

finish his morning coffee). Then this person told me that it looked like all that they were waiting for was the surgeon’s office to contact them. Of course, that made no sense to me but I said, “Thank you” and called the surgeon’s office. The surgeon’s scheduler lady did not answer so I left a message asking her to either call me or to call Tri-West so we could proceed. Later I found out that all Tri-West had to do was fax the authorization to the surgeon’s office fax number that I had given to them a week earlier.

It was now Friday and that afternoon I had a pottery teaching appointment at the local community art center and so had to leave my cell phone off for about three hours. When the class ended and I was free again, I picked up a phone message from the surgeon’s scheduler who said, “Mr Wear, it is now 1 PM and I leave at 3. If you can get Tri-West to contact me within the next two hours, I will have you see the surgeon on Monday morning.”

I called Tri-West and, of course, after verifying who I was and what I wanted, the Tri-West clerk then proceeded to tell me that according to their records both doctors at the Rocky Mountain Cancer Center refused to take on a new VA Community Care patient so Tri-West had to tear up all of the paperwork and start over.

I was livid. I wanted to reach into the phone and strangle this turd. I could not count to 10. I was fuming. I told this person that he was wrong. I told him that the oncologist’s office was all set and that surgeon’s offices were patiently waiting for Tri-West to fax verification that I could be a patient. I then told him that I needed to talk to a Tri-West scheduling supervisor or a nurse. He said that he would put me on hold for about two minutes and that he would make an attempt to connect me with someone who might be able to actually help. Two minutes later the phone went dead. I saw red. But I had enough composure to again dial the Tri-West number. This time a young lady answered. I asked her if she could stand up in her cubicle and ask around who was speaking to “John Wear” because I did not have the time or the patience to “reinvent the wheel” with her by having to explain everything again. She insisted that she could help me. I tried to tell her that I was not upset with her but that she was being beyond reasonable. The phone went dead in my hand. Yes, she hung up on me. Then miracle of miracles, my phone rang and a nice voice came on and said, “Mr Wear, this is Beatty, the Tri-West supervisor nurse scheduler. I understand that there has been a mix up. I am going to try my best to fix this.” I went through most of the litany of my plight and I could tell that she was embarrassed that so many of the Tri-West clerks were so incompetent and inconsiderate. She kept replying “No. Really? I am so sorry.” Etc. etc. etc.

I then explained how important that it was for her to contact the surgeon’s office in the next hour. She said, “I will call right now. What is the number?” I gave her the phone number; thanked her and hung up. I then called the

surgeon’s office but the voice mail came on so I said, “Ellie, this is John Wear. I hope that you are on the line with Tri-West right now. I also hope to see you on Monday.” Five minutes later, Ellie called me back. She confirmed that Tri-West had confirmed me as a new patient and so we made a game plan for Monday.

Three days later I saw the breast surgeon who recommended a complete mastectomy on my right breast. To me this was pretty radical since I thought that my small lump was not that big of a deal but the surgeon was pretty insistent that taking all of the breast material out would just about 100% guarantee that the cancer would never return ... at least on the right side. After meeting with the surgeon, I met with one of the nurses who began telling me about the surgery and the recovery process. After about five minutes, I asked the nurse if we could reschedule later since my mind was swimming trying to deal with the issue of a mastectomy...versus a simple lumpectomy.

A week later I saw the oncologist. This doctor was quite positive that based on the pathology of the needle biopsy, there was an 80%+ chance that there should be no chemotherapy or radiation necessary. Whew!!! As many of you might already know that the effects of chemo therapy tends to be far worse than the disease that it is supposed to cure. I surely did not want to go through chemo.

The next step was to go to the hospital and have a pre-surgery screening. That means blood work, an EKG and some pretty extensive pre-op instructions. I also had to go back to the surgeon’s office to get more post-surgery instructions. Unfortunately, after the EKG was performed, it indicated that I had an “infarction” (damage to my heart) and that I needed a cardiologist to exam me before I was cleared for surgery. This was on a Tuesday (less than two weeks before my surgery). More delays: The cardiologist could not see me for a week. That would mean that I would have less than a week before the surgery ... or worse that the surgery would have to be moved. Since Christmas was coming soon, the surgery could also be delayed several weeks or even a month.

I spent the mornings of the next five days calling the cardiologist scheduling person seeing if there was a patient cancellation where I might get in to see the heart doctor earlier. No deal. When I finally saw the cardiologist, he told me that I would have to do a stress test and that the stress test lab was backed up. How long? Two weeks!!! I then begged him to see what he could do, so he walked down to the lab and came back and said, “Can you come in tomorrow afternoon?” YES!!! It was Friday and the surgery was scheduled for the following Tuesday. I did the stress test (it took two hours) and I passed with flying colors. But we had to have the cardiologist “read” the test results and clear me for surgery.

In the meantime, the cardiologist took the weekend off and was not due back in his office until mid-day on Monday...a half day before the surgery. On Monday morn- >>

ing I had go to the Nuclear Medicine Lab to have radioactive dye injected into my breast to help the surgeon find the primary (gateway) lymph nodes that had to be remove and to be “read” during the mastectomy operation. Boy! Did those two injections hurt!!!

The next day I got to the hospital at 5:30 AM and got prepped for surgery. The surgeon came in literally five minutes before the scheduled time for surgery and we had a short chat. She explained that she went ahead with the dye procedure the day before even though the cardiologist had not cleared me because she had looked at the stress test film and it looked fine to her. I thanked her profusely. She also said that about 30 minutes earlier the cardiologist did in fact clear me for the surgery. That was 30 minutes before surgery was scheduled!!!

I was wheeled into the operating room at 7:30 AM and about five minutes later I was out like a light. Two and a half hours later, I am in the recovery room, bleary eyed and semi-conscious. I then realize that my surgeon is at the foot of my bed, talking to me. She smiled a huge smile and said, “Mr Wear. The lymph nodes were clean! All of the breast material is out. You should be good to go.”

I had a post-surgery appointment with the surgeon two weeks later that went really well. I also had a follow up with the oncologist two weeks after that and he said, “No chemo or radiation but you’ll need to take estrogen blockers for about five years.” Lastly the Genomic Testing Department called and said, “Mr Wear, you are not carrying any of the DNA indicators that predispose you to cancer.”

Conclusion: I am pretty sure that no one will back me up on this but since this potentially deadly disease had been trying to get a hold on me for over 30 years and based on the fact that there is absolutely no predisposition to cancer anywhere in my family DNA, I am fairly convinced that after being regularly sprayed with Agent Orange during my tour along the DMZ in-country Vietnam, there has got to be a connection. But since I am already on the VA health care system and they are taking care of me, there is absolutely no reason for me to push the VA for adding cancer to my existing disability rating. Besides, I know for a fact that when a veteran has cancer and the tumor is removed, the VA considers you “cured” so the claim and the additional rating is reduced to zero anyway. ■

The Battle for RPD Valley

(Continued from page 27)

hill. All three Tanks got on line and fired a HE round into the base of the tree, obliterating the NVA.

Once we were back up on top of the hill, we called in Air Strikes. We could see the jets, Crusaders, coming down the valley and we were eye to eye with the pilot when he pickled his bombs. He was dropping high drag bombs and they looked like they were falling in slow motion. When the bombs went off, we were getting hit with some of the shrapnel, it knocked one of our antennas off. Once they dropped their bombs, they had to pull straight up before they hit the mountains and once, they made their turn, the next one made his run. I would have given anything to have had a movie camera to take movies

of them making their runs. That was one of the neatest things I ever witnessed. Lt. Jack Fuller took some still pictures of the action.

The Army’s 5TH Mechanized unit came out and took over the valley from us and we left it to them.

We were only credited with three NVA killed but we captured an AK47 rifle, an SKS rifle an RPG with 7 rounds, The RPD Machine Gun and a lot of 782 gear.

We were really lucky that day. It could have turned out a lot worse than what it did. We had no casualties but the NVA paid a price. Any time we had to go out in the area of that valley we always caught hell. It was the first combat I saw in country but it would not be my last. ■

The Boot LT

(Continued from page 34)

A few hours later a convoy came driving up with two tanks, a six by, retrieve and a Jeep. The LT, the skipper and the Maintenance Capt were in the Jeep leading the pack. The LT jumped out of the Jeep and yelled at me, “I told you to stay with my tank.”

The skipper came over and told the LT to stop yelling and then asked me if we had brought the tank back to the com-

pany CP. I reported that both tanks were in their slots. The maintenance skipper was the happiest person I had ever seen in Vietnam. Capt Burns knew something was wrong and so he pulled me aside and asked, “What is going on?” And believe me, I spared the LT no slack. The skipper left his tank with us until we got A-1-5 back from battalion maintenance. The skipper also took the LT with him. Thank God. ■

Finding the Top

BY JAY MILLER



To Laura Riensche: Above is the photo taken last Thursday with Top as you requested. Our daughter, Kris, was fifteen months when I went to Vietnam and I asked Top Naquin, Harold or Gunny Hall to have my daughter’s name on my tank.

Anyway, our daughter’s family lives in Tampa and I was there last week to watch my twin granddaughters’ soccer games and to help my son-in-law with a business issue. I was pretty sure Top Godfrey Naquin lives in or around Brooksville, Florida which was about 50 miles north, so I decided to drive up there and try to find him.

While driving up, I had my friend Gunnar ... (he’s Navy but I forgive him) ... try find an address for Top. Gunnar was able to do so but upon entering the area, I drove by a Marine Corps League building. It was about 5:00 PM and the parking lot was packed with cars. So instead of going directly to Top’s house, I decided to go into the lodge. Before going in, I talked to another old fart Marine who appeared to be my age. He confirmed that Top was a member and that he is known there as “Pup.”

I went into the bar area which must of had close to 150 people present and I began to look around. Immediately I saw that little Cajun sitting at a table and I then had a barmaid confirm it was Top. I went over and put my hand on his shoulder and he looked up and he immediately recognized me. Then he jumped up in there air and we had a great embrace.

Top then yelled out. The DI in him got everyone’s atten-

tion and he announced that I was his CO in Vietnam and “The best man that he ever knew.”

We got a heck of an applause. And for me, knowing that it was partially true, I was the CO, so I told the audience. “I may have been the CO but he was the boss.” Further, I corrected him and let those folks know he says that “best man” line about everybody ... even when they are women.

When he hugged me we were both so excited that I guess that I forgot I had my two back surgeries and I just lifted him in the air with joy. Top said we had to have a drinking contest and reminded me of the fact that we did so in VN and that we always tried to keep the Company supplied with beer. When we had met many of the folks in that room Top told me to follow him and he lead me to a second adjacent room with another 100 plus people and upon entering he did the same damn thing and called the room to order followed by similar announcements.

Well we talked about old times and it was great. Top is doing very well. He’s a fit 84 year old Marine who has more spunk than you can imagine. He has a new wife and says she is wonderful. After getting out of the Corps Top had a fleet of shrimp boats and then a trucking company prior to moving to Florida. We talked about many of the men in the Company. I truly thanked him for his guidance and support while I was VN.

I also apologized to him for one instance, but it was the biggest, screw up I made as CO. It involved flares being shot off at Vihn Di on either Christmas or New Years of 1968 ... and my failure to listen to him as to how I handled the situation. I handled it wrong.

Sometime thereafter, he was with me in my Jeep driving through the bush to get to Lt Ritch’s platoon who had a successful VC contact. We were alone and I think we had a couple mortars land nearby and we both jumped under the Jeep which I had driven into the high grass. As we were laying there face-to-face, I saw tears running down Top’s face. Thinking he was crying I told him not to worry and that we would get out of there OK which we did and we made it to Pete’s location a Mia Loc. When I said that, he responded something to the effect that he wasn’t scared but was upset about me “doubting him” about the flare situation. Right there and then he got an apology and I learned a valuable life lesson. He got another apology Thursday night. He wanted me to spend the night with him and meet his new wife but I had to get back to Tampa. After only two beers, yes two, I left after telling him I’d be back and I will.

Anyway, Top is still a gung ho Marine and it was great to see another one of the wonderful Marines who made >>

my 13 months in Vietnam both the best and worst job I have ever had. I thank you all. Tops phone numbers are:

Home: 352-293-4263

Cell: 985-688-8824

David Ralston, I hope this gets to you.

VETERANS DAY 2019 REUNITES MEMBERS OF BRAVO COMPANY, 3RD TANKS, VIETNAM 1968-1969

BY PETE RITCH



L to R: Jay Miller, Top Naquin and Pete Ritch

States Marine Corps, three members of B Company, 3rd Tanks, who were together in Vietnam in 1968-1969, made a frontal assault on the U.S. Navy Seal Museum in Fort Pierce. At the 2019 weekend celebration of Veterans Day and the 244th Birthday of the United Florida.

Jay Miller (Bravo 6), B Company, 3rd Tanks, Skipper, 1st Sgt Godfrey Naquin (Bravo 7), B Company, First Sergeant and Pete Ritch (Bravo 3), B Company, 3rd Platoon Commander, were outnumbered by Squids and kids, but held their own. The last time that Miller, Naquin and Ritch were together was in Vietnam in 1969.

On Saturday, 11/9/2019, a Seal Team staged a hostage rescue situation on the grounds of the Seal Museum in Fort Pierce. Complete with attack dogs, Seals repelling from a chopper with their dogs strapped to them, explosions, small arms fire and Humvees full of good guys. The bad guys never had a chance. Both hostages were saved and flew off into the clear blue Florida sky in the chopper, while the Seals rounded up the bad guys. The dog handlers then gave a demonstration on how the well-trained attack dogs can take down a non-cooperative suspect.

On Sunday, Jay and his band of merry Marines and a couple of Swabbies, assembled for a USMC Birthday Celebration, filled with "War Stories" and a cake decorated with the Eagle, Globe and Anchor. Top Naquin was the oldest Marine on deck and after a brief speech, in which he challenged all of us to remember and cherish the good days, forget the bad days and always be nice to the ladies, he cut the cake, using Jay's Mameluke Sword. Great Veterans, having a great time, on a great day.

Jay set up "Company Headquarters" at his beautiful home in Fort Pierce. Top and his wife, Betty came over from the Tampa area while Pete and his wife, Joyce came down from the "Forgotten Coast" and joined the party. Hopefully, Top will join us at Fort Benning, next year. ■

Photo from Vietnam



Jesse Salinas and his truck "The Bean Burner" 1st Tanks, Chu Lai 1965

The Skipper's Jeep

BY TED HILDABRAND



In November 1967, I was transferred from H&S Co, 1st Tank Battalion to Bravo Company that was located on Hill 55, as the Motor Transport Chief for the company. My best recollection was that we had four – 5 Five Ton trucks and two Deuce and Half tankers, two Jeeps and a trailer. The company CO was Captain Remer, the XO was Lt. Swanson, with Top Gibbons and Gunny Dempsey, the "Chief" as the company leadership staff. We were located on the west side of the hill near the bridge. If you served there with Bravo you probably remember it well.

There was a jeep assigned to each officer. The captain's jeep was a little unique as it was a new vintage Ford product. The XO's jeep was just a typical jeep from that period of service in the Corps. A lot of the older MT NCOs told me several times that they used and worked several of our 5 tons when they were in Korea. They could remember the truck number. The Corps was distinctly old fashion / conservative during that period, in my opinion it was a good thing. They knew how to maintain and operate the equipment that served them well.

The Skipper's Ford jeep was unique. It had a wide wheelbase and a 5-speed stick "tranny" and that puppy could fly. I recall a previous article in "Sponson Box" about somebody running this jeep into a paddy when they lost control. My guess it may have been the same Bravo Company jeep as I had. Maybe some of you remember that previous article? The Skipper had his radio equipment in the jeep to help him maintain support and stay in contact with several tank platoons positioned near Hill 55 when traveling.

My first day on the job the Top asked me to hitch the trailer to the XO's jeep. He then had me drive and he took

me on a tour of the Da Nang area. We visited every Marine outfit. The Top knew all the cooks and other key NCOs in our operating area. The Top was going to throw a party and he was making the rounds to collect goodies from all of his buddies. I guess the term is called a "scrounge run." And it was a real education for me. The Top also pointed out the

Navy Sea Bee and Air Force bases but especially their mess halls. I soon learned that if you were in the area, Marines were always welcome at their mess. They always ate top shelf; prime rib, king crab legs and, yes, even lobster. The Navy and the AF transport all of the food to all over the countryside so they get first dibs! I suppose that it was an education only a Top can provide.

You just can't beat years of experience in the Corps. That's why he is the Top. I wish I could remember his name, but I cannot. I liked him and he had an uncular personality. He left the hill and country shortly after I hit 55. I really appreciated the education during that short period. I knew that I would be able to use that education on similar future scrounge runs. That must be a Corps personality trait as you learned to beg, borrow or steal what was needed to make your unit successful. Let's call it "improvisation." Yes improvise, overcome and adapt.

The Top was a smooth and in-control person that just demanded attention and respect. He didn't need to be a hard ass. It was exactly what you would expect from a combat-experienced NCO in the Corps. He was not a barracks Marine ... but a Marine's Marine! You get the point! I'm sure he could be a hard ass when needed. And just like the Top, our CO, the Skipper, was the same Marine fit to a tee. He was always smooth and in control! He never needed a lot >>

of words to communicate. All of the Skipper's senior NCOs and the XO shared the same hooch. The Skipper could have easily had his own quarters but I think that the shared living arrangement was just his style. And that is what made him a good leader. Someone you respect and would do whatever was needed to make the company and mission successful.

The Skipper used to get whiskey sent from home that came in a purple velvet bag with a gold cord. Crown Royal, I think! It was pretty expensive whiskey! He readily shared taking a drink of his special elixir with us on occasion at the company slop chute. It is not every CO that shares a drink of special whiskey from home with a corporal. However, that was just typical for the Skipper. So that you know full well that he was always looking after his people. However, always in control and in command!

So, yes, the jeep ... as that is the central theme of this writing. As special as that Ford jeep was, it did have one fault. The sensor on the speedometer picked up a mechanical link via the transmission as an indicator. The small brass sensor tended to come loose and drop down into the transmission. The result was disastrous. This is exactly what happened to the Skipper's jeep. So now I was on a scrounge run for a new tranny. All Ford jeeps in theater were having the exact same problem so a tranny was very much like finding hens' teeth. The worst alternative but the recommend bureaucratic option was send the Jeep back to Okinawa for repair. That was a poor option as the jeep would be gone for long period. So we, I, needed a transmission to put the skipper's jeep back in service.

This was where my education via the Top paid off. On several runs into Da Nang, I had noticed at the extreme end of the runway there was a storage area for the base Air Force MT motor pool. There were about 30 – 35 vehicles protected by several strings of constantia wire and one armed Air Force guard with his own little guard shed. In that vehicle storage area were 3 – 4 Ford jeeps.

That had to be the worst duty for an airman in Da Nang. It was desolate and lonely except for the constant landings / takeoffs of combat jet aircraft. Not only was it lonely but it was noisy as hell at the end of the runway. I figured that the guard was either a rookie or a shit bird. If I was going to successfully accomplish my mission, I was hoping for a new in country rookie (FNG).

I discussed a plan with Gunny Gibbons. The Gunny went with me and brought some tools in the XO's jeep. We drove to the guard shack. We asked the young baby-faced pink cheeked AF guard if we could get some spare parts. He was polite and tentative but indicated we needed a chit from the AF MT Chief. So, we went to the AF base, found the motor pool and looked up the Senior AF MT Chief. We were direct and asked if we could have a Ford jeep transmission. He then told us to look at that line of jeeps in the middle of the pool. He said that all those jeeps needed a transmission. He indicated that he would be surprised to find out if some-

body was stealing his jeep transmissions. One of them, he told us had the transmission stolen in downtown Da Nang in broad daylight. I was trying hard to maintain a poker face as he told his story. I was afraid to look at the Gunny. The AF Maint. Chief was very sincere when he indicated he couldn't give us a transmission from those stored vehicles as he needed them for his jeeps. We thanked him and left.

The Gunny and I went right back to the storage area and up to the guard shack at the end of the runway. We told the airman that the sergeant from the motor pool didn't have any more chits but indicated that we could go ahead and take the part we needed. We did not mention a transmission. The young guard just stepped back and we drove in. We found a Ford jeep and went to work. We had a 3/8" drive set which I gave the gunny and asked him to remove the floorplate on top. I crawled underneath and dropped the drive shaft and removed the bolts from the transmission mounting. We were done in 10-15 minutes. We put the tranny in back of the jeep and threw a few flak jackets over it. We were about to leave when the Gunny asked me what part that we were going to show the guard that we were taking. Good question! So, I dropped back under the jeep and removed the other end of the drive shaft. We drove slowly past the guard and the Gunny held up the drive shaft. We smiled and the guard just gave us a blank stare and a nod. We "di-di-ed" back to Hill 55 most riki-tick.

When we were a few miles away from the AF jeep yard, the gunny said that we should come back tomorrow with a case of beer for the guard. Then he laughed! He said that he would not be able to drink beer while he was in the brig. We laughed! I still feel guilty about that laugh. I can't imagine the AF MTC could determine when, if ever, a transmission was taken. We will never know!?

We drove into the middle of the company yard elated. Everybody came out to help as we pushed the Skipper's jeep into position. The transmission was set in place and oil installed in quick fashion. Several people were helping, and it went really fast. In no time the Skipper's jeep was back in service. The Skipper was smiling from ear to ear. It was a great feeling to resolve that problem and make the Skipper happy. The Skipper was so happy that he called for an end to the work day and for us to have a celebration. It was early afternoon. He asked the cooks to go to the mess hall and rustle up some steaks. All work stopped, we cooked steaks and drank beer. The slop chute was opened early that day.

Future Article – Continuing Scrounge Runs and the saga of a new generator to replace the big yellow monster diesel, Air Force, generator that we used for electric service. It had a corresponding aviation wing tank for fuel storage. The Chief had Jim Roach, a tank mechanic, working on it constantly to keep it operational. Electric service was critical to keeping batteries charged so we could stay in communication by radio with the platoons and others ■

1968 Tet Offensive Purple Heart Medal Finally Awarded

BY BRUCE VAN APELDOORN



On March 6, 1968 US Marine PFC Samuel J. Frieson was gravely injured by a booby-trapped grenade and died from his wounds a few days after the incident. The incident took place at a base camp of the Republic of Korea Marine 2nd Brigade in Hoi An. It was witnessed by the author, Bruce Van Apeldoorn and PFC Frieson was attended to by SSgt Dick Lorange. Frieson's family was notified that he died due to "Self-Destruction" (a.k.a. Accidental death) and at the time, due to the circumstances there was no Purple Heart medal awarded.

Just prior to the "accident" PFC Frieson had recently been assigned to a small group of Marines from H&S Co, 1st Tank Battalion to support the tank crews of Charlie Company who were supporting Korean Marine operations. His MOS was a cook. On the day of the incident, the heavy section of the 2nd Platoon, "C" Co. was back at the battalion tank ramp to have a broken torsion bar repaired and they were to then return to the Hoi An airport. PFC Frieson unlocked the platoon's hut to allow Van Apeldoorn and L/Cpl. Lenny Mendes to pick up the platoon's mail. An unexpected explosion occurred after Bruce and Lenny entered the hut and while PFC Frieson was holding the door.

In 2014 Dick Lorange and Bruce were reunited. Not having seen one another since March of 1968, the first discussion was about the Marine who had died as a result of the booby trap. They decided that the problem was that since the Marine was a cook and not assigned as a tank crewman, his identity was unknown. Dick and Bruce decided that they would try to locate the Marine's history. After much discussions and what seemed like unending internet searches, it was finally determined that the Marine was PFC Samuel J. Frieson. (See the USMC VTA website personal interview video "Vietnam Tankers – Bruce VanApeldoorn – Correcting the Record – 2015)

Dick started searches to find PFC Frieson's family

while Bruce started the process to have the Purple Heart medal awarded. Very fortunately "Detective Dick" was able to locate a friend of the Frieson family who then lead Dick to the surviving siblings. Dick reported that the family was very appreciative of our efforts to set history straight and to have the Purple Heart medal awarded.

Bruce followed the requirements of SECNAVINST 1650.1H in the preparation of OPNAV 1650/3 – Personal Award Recommendation. In discussions with the Awards Branch of Headquarters Marine Corps, Bruce was told only the Commanding Officer's signature would be acceptable. So then the hunt was on for the CO of H&S Co, 1st Tank Battalion from March 6, 1968. If it were not for Ma-

rines of the Marine Corps Tanker Association (MCTA), Bruce could have never found the CO. Luckily, the Marine's name was known to several of the members of the MCTA and they gladly provided Bruce with contact information. After a quick phone call, Dick got Major Leo A. Gildersleeve on board. (See USMC VTA website group interview video "Vietnam Tankers – Bruce VanApeldoorn and Richard Lorange – A Purple Heart for PFC Frieson")

In February of 2017 the Purple Heart medal was awarded to PFC Samuel J. Frieson USMC. The presentation of the medal has since been made to PFC Frieson's brother John Frieson, US Army.

PFC Frieson was from Chicago, IL. We found it interesting that different newspapers provided a couple different accounts of his death ... with one in which he fell on the grenade in a bunker to save fellow Marines. Marine Corps Legend had a story in which PFC Frieson's rack was booby-trapped as retaliation of his finding several Korean Marines stealing from the Marines and Frieson kicking their asses. He is interned in Memphis, TN. It was my honor to have known Sam Frieson if only for a couple minutes. Semper Fi Marine. ■

FORGOTTEN TRACKS VOLUME 4 IS NOW AVAILABLE!

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

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

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

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

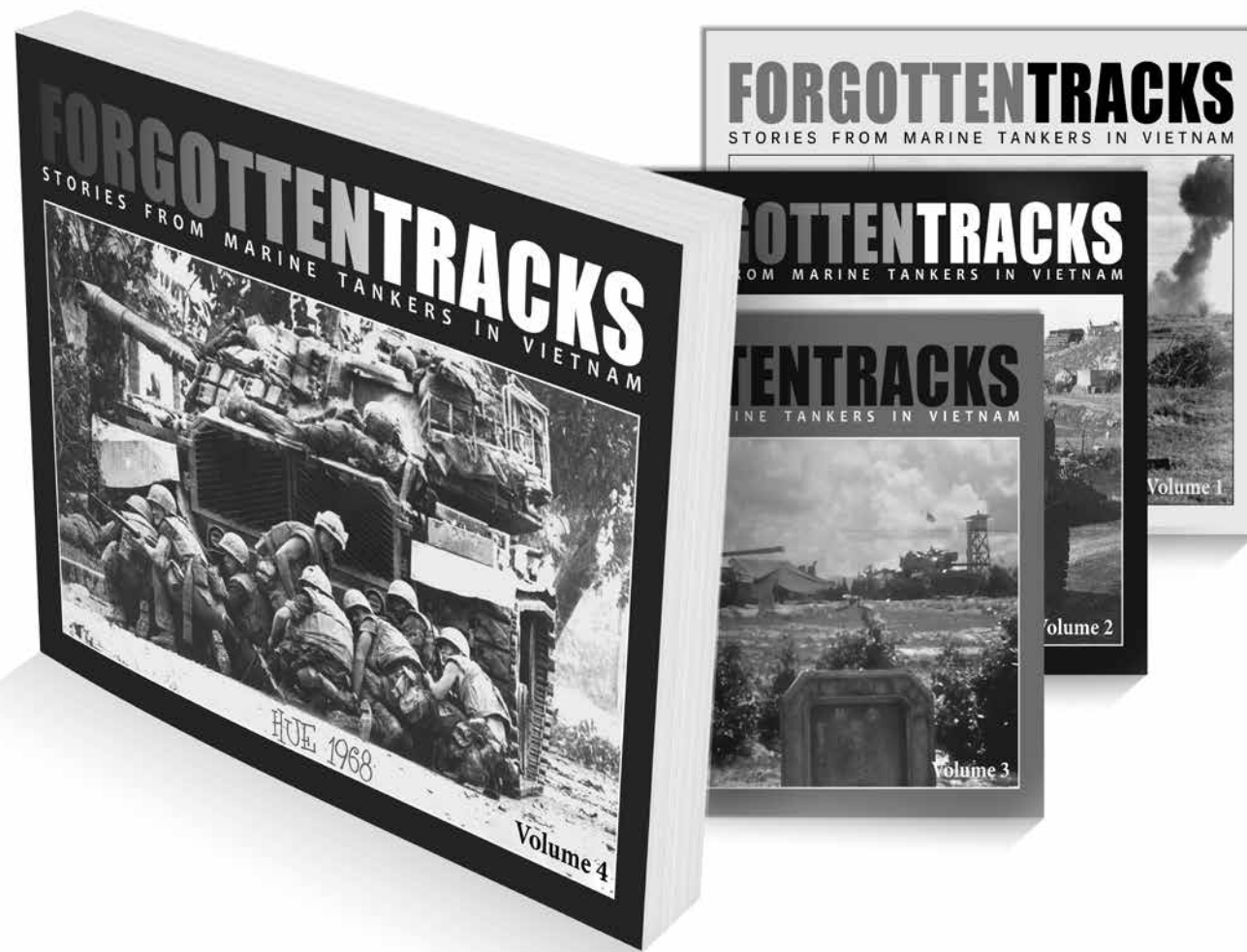
Photo from Vietnam



Mine Damage – 1969



1st Tanks Maintenance Ramp – 1969



VTA Mini-Reunion Ft Benning

Sept 8 – 12, 2020

Revised Schedule of Events

NOTE: Subject to Change

Wednesday, Sept. 8th	Arrival day – Dinner on your own.
Thursday, Sept. 9th	Morning – Tank School Graduation (2 hrs.) Tour Tank School, picnic lunch provided. Meet new tankers and school staff. (3 – 4 hrs.) Evening – Pizza together at Tank School with all of the USMC Tank School staff. (2.5 hours). Plus presentation to tank school from VTA.
Friday, Sept 10h	Morning – Tank School Graduation Tour Tank Restoration Project Later: Working Party to work on tanks. Evening: Dinner on your own. Tour of the Infantry museum on your own.
Saturday, Sept 11th	All Day – Working Party – Work on tanks Lunch and Dinner on your own.
Sunday, Sept 12th	Day of departure

TRAVEL SUGGESTION:

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

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

Groome Transportation

2800 Harley Court
Columbus, GA 31909

Phone: (706) 324-3939

Email: columbusoffice@groometrans.com

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

LODGING:

Hampton Inn – Columbus South – Ft. Benning

2870 South Lumpkin Road

Columbus, GA 31903

(706) 660-5550

Special Room rate: \$125 per night + taxes, etc.

Rate includes:

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

Room reservation cutoff date: 08/05/20

Note: This is not a formal reunion so there is no registration fee

COMMENT: We really need a head count. We also need your t-shirt size.

If you are remotely interested in attending the 2020 event then please call or email:

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

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

PLEASE CALL TODAY!!!

These are some of the BEST ads that I have seen...
At least ever since they first appeared in *Life and Look* magazine!!!

NEW ROAD RUNNER
'69
BEEP-BEEP

Includes: V-8 Eng., 4-Speed Transmission, Heavy Duty Suspension, Hurst Shifter, Heavy Duty Brakes & Full Factory Equipment.

\$2,549

with this ad
\$50 OFF ON ALL PERFORMANCE CARS

KEN BROWN CHRYSLER PLYMOUTH IMPERIAL DODGE TRUCKS
Michigan's largest Plymouth performance dealer!
3350 E. JEFFERSON, LO. 8-0450
CALL US, WE'LL QUOTE ON ALL MODELS



Remember when: You drove into a Gas Station and run over the signal air hose and an attendant would come rushing out, started filling your tank, washing windows and checking your oil. When he was done, the attendant would take your cash or credit card, go inside and return with change or a slip to sign all the while you sat waiting in the vehicle. Some thought life was supposed to get easier?

Swanson TV DINNER
QUICK FROZEN
TURKEY DINNER
WITH BROWN GRAVY, DRESSING, MASHED POTATOES AND PEAS
JUST HEAT AND SERVE!

INSPECTED BY U.S. DEPARTMENT OF AGRICULTURE

Guard Against Throat Scratch
enjoy the smooth smoking of fine tobaccos

...smoke **PALL MALL**
the cigarette whose mildness you can measure

PASTEL SWANN Hats
DIM. 33" "23" — 34" "23" — 35" "23"
ROUND EDGE & LINED

SUNSH GNEY 664 — 23 1/2" 674 — 24 1/2"
SILVER TAN 624 — 23 1/2" 634 — 24 1/2"
TWILIGHT GREY 644 — 23 1/2" 654 — 24 1/2"
LAVA TAN 634 — 23 1/2" 644 — 24 1/2"
LEAD GREY 604 — 23 1/2" 614 — 24 1/2"

HATS THAT *Sell* WITH THE FIRST GLANCE

Isn't it time you gave yourself a Christmas Gift?

While you're making everybody happy... do a good job and include yourself!

Give yourself a present you've probably wanted for years — a fine Colt handgun. Whether you're a target shooter or a plinker, there's a Colt made especially for you, and you'll take a very special pride in owning it. Frills, too, in calling your shot, time after time, with a Colt.

Shows here are three of the most famous handguns ever made. Two are capable of breaking all standing records — the Match Target Woodsmen and the Officers Model Match. The Third — the Sport Model Woodsmen — is the favorite camp and small game weapon. All are superb guns of their type. Choose one before Christmas, wherever sporting goods are sold... or send for a catalog if you still have time!

FREE! MAIL TODAY!
COLT MANUFACTURING COMPANY
1115 Van Dyke Ave., Hartford, Conn.
Please send me free copy of Colt's Handgun Manual and Catalog.

Match Target Woodsmen \$54⁰⁰ Caliber: .33 Long Rifle. A heavy barreled, precision instrument with perfect balance and sights permitting the finest adjustments. Barrel is engraved with "Colt ACCO" four right, elevation and windage slots. Custom eye made with thumb rest, automatic slide stop, magazine safety.

Officers Model Match \$79⁰⁰ Caliber: .38 Smith & Wesson. A smaller but "bling" model! Modified tapered barrel (2") for perfect balance. Four reading wide honor slots, full checkered without check. Colt ACCO four right, only but.

Sport Model Woodsmen \$69⁰⁰ Caliber: .33 Long Rifle. Unique adaptation of the match target model, with round 4 1/2" barrel and quick-throw, hammer-free front sight.

Colt

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

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

**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.**



**NOT EVERYONE WHO
LOST HIS LIFE IN
VIETNAM
DIED THERE
NOT EVERYONE WHO
CAME HOME FROM VIETNAM
EVER LEFT THERE**