

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

Vol. XII • No II

2009 • April • June • July

PRSRSTD
U.S. Postage
PAID
Permit #1040
Leesburg, FL
34748

SPONSOR

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*



Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

MAKE YOUR CHARLESTON REUNION RESERVATIONS TODAY!



Featuring

- ◆ Games Tankers Played p.15
- ◆ Part IV of Tanks on the DMZ, Operation Kingfisher p.18
- ◆ Need a Warrior be Clothed? p.26
- ◆ Field Sanitation on a Grand Scale p.27
- ◆ Tankers Recall Hue City p.35
- ◆ Two Contests – Name that Tank & Famous Person p.14 & 43

Official Publication of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association & Historical Foundation

Why We Gather

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

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

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

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

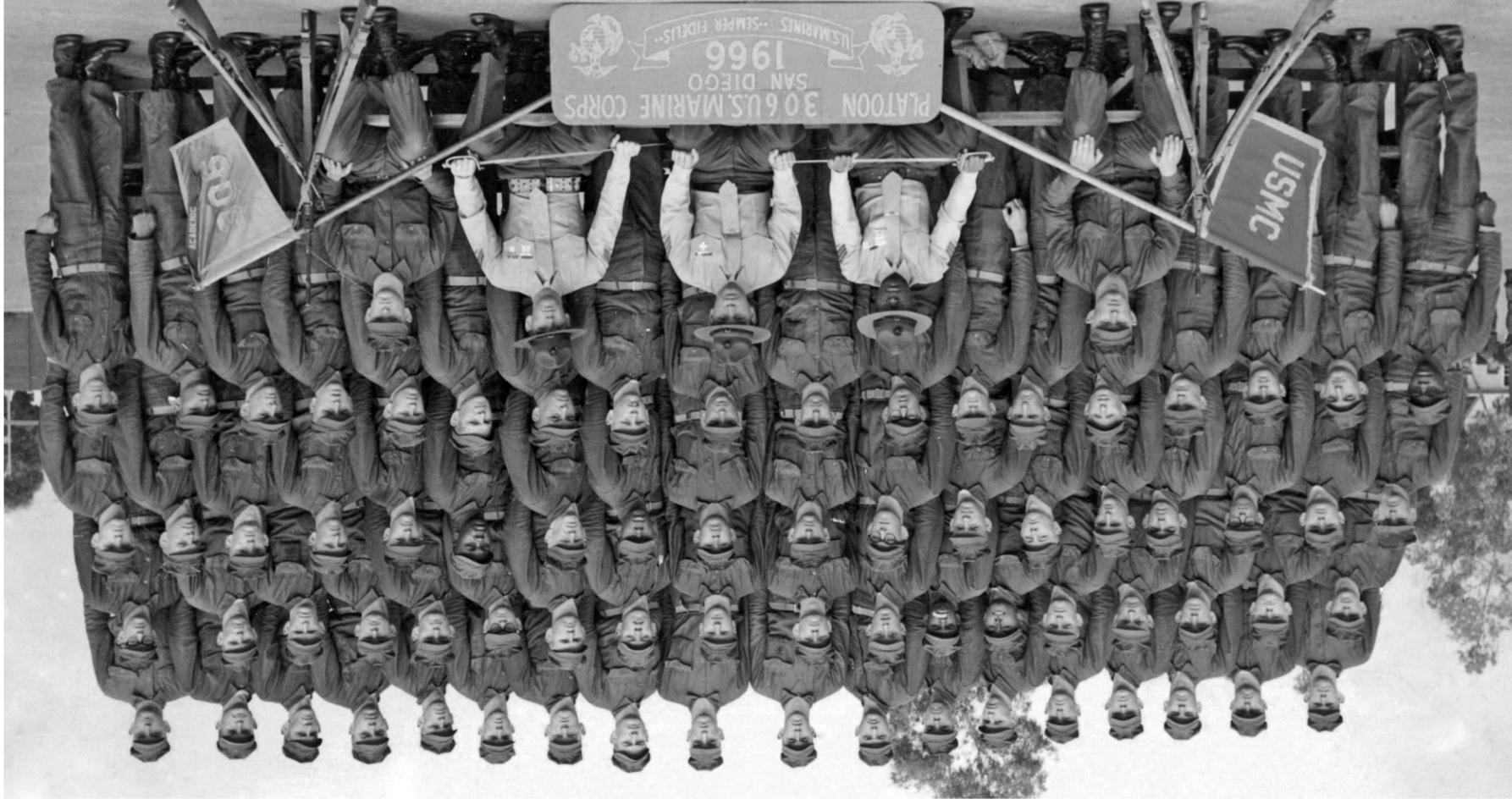
From: These Good Men, by Michael Norman



2007 Las Vegas Reunion

With our Charleston reunion right around the corner, this passage seems more appropriate than ever. It reminds us why reunions such as ours are so important. There will be a time in the near future that we will be physically unable to get together and our chances of getting together will diminish; don't put off attending a reunion any longer.

John Wear, President, USMC Vietnam Tankers Association



Quiz #2 - Can You Find the Face?

This graduation photo was taken in 1966 and sent in by Ron Davidson. Ron is the good looking guy in the top row, third from left, but also included in the group photo is a very famous person. Can you pick him out? The first phone call or e-mail Bob Peavey receives with the right name and location within the photo wins a priceless 10" inch embroidered patch of the VTA logo. (Bob's contact info is listed in the Board of Directors list on page 4).



Official Registration Form for the
Charleston 6th Biennial Reunion
August 19 – 23, 2009

REUNION DEADLINE IS JULY 20th

Name _____

Guest Name (s): _____ / _____

Address: _____ City: _____

State: _____ Zip: _____

Day Phone: _____ Evening Phone _____

E-mail Address: _____

Information for your nametag:
 Tank or AT Bn: _____ Co: _____ In-Country Years: _____

You must be a current 2009 USMC Vietnam Tankers Association member to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent dues will be collected at the sign-in desk. No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions, transportation for Parris Island tour & lunch and Patriots Point tour & lunch, meeting facilities, hospitality and other expenses associated with the cost of hosting the reunion. Fee does not include room and taxes. Additional fees are optional for two add-on events.

My Registration Fee: \$140.00

Guest:
 Guest:

Please check of the activities you intend to participate in so we have a head count:

- Tour Patriots Point
- Pizza Dinner and Auction
- Tour Parris Island
- Farewell Dinner

Optional Reunion Fund Donation

TOTAL ENCLOSED:

Make checks or
 Money Orders by
 July 20th to:

"USMCMVTA"

Send this form and
 your check or
 money order to:

USMCMVTA
c/o Jim Coan
5374 E. Lantana Dr.
Sierra Vista, AZ 85650

You must make your own hotel reservations by July 20th to get the low room rate!

Call Direct: 1-843-747-1900

Mention the "2009 USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion" for the special room rate of \$99.

Letter from the President

It will only be a couple of short months until we convene in Charleston for our sixth biennial reunion. I hope that all of the first timers are as psyched as the "old salts" seem to be. I for one have not missed a reunion so far... and the good Lord willing, I do not plan to ever miss one. Reuniting with old comrades at arms and meeting new buddies is what it's all about. For many of us, our reunions help us keep going until the next get together. It is my understanding that the best airfares show up 90 days prior to the flight date. Book your flights NOW!

Speaking of getting together, if any of you have a mini-reunion during non-reunion times please make sure to take a few photos and either let me, Bob Peavey or any of the board members know that it happened. We would like to publish that sort of happening here in the Sponson Box. Also any family member who is making a difference in your community or in service to our nation, we'd love to salute them in here. Send a photo image and a short story so we can get the word out.

I want to thank again all of those who contributed above and beyond the normal membership dues to help build our organization and to allow us to keep expanding the Sponson Box among other things. A number of less fortunate members have been able to join the brotherhood that were unable to afford the membership fee thanks to several people sponsoring them. If you know a worthy qualified Vietnam Marine tanker or Ontos crewman, please give his name and contact information to any of the board members so that we can get him onboard and being a part of our brotherhood. The more the better and the stronger we will be.

I also want to send out our sincere appreciation and thanks to a large group of Life Members who rose to "Doc" Forsyth's challenge to further financially support the organization. It is fine men like you who are the lifeblood of the association. You answered our call early on when we were a fledgling organization and we desperately needed seed money to get started. You again have "bellied up to the bar" with additional funding. Thank you.

One of the items that the Board of Directors voted on and passed at our meeting last October was to have a recruiting contest with the winner (the most qualified new VTA members) having their reunion registration fee paid by the VTA. We have two more months for the contest (the cut off is July 1st). We have 30+ "newbies" so far this year. Please beat the bushes to find them, our goal is to have 100 new members by the end of the year

Semper Fi

John

"Every child in America should be acquainted with his own country.

He should read books that furnish him with ideas that will be useful to him in life and practice.

As soon as he opens his lips, he should rehearse the history of his own country."

Noah Webster



Ensuring our Legacy through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance

6th Biennial Reunion August 19 – 23, 2009

Sheraton North Charleston
Charleston, SC 29406

Note: Casual attire for all events except the Farewell Dinner.

Schedule of Events

Wednesday	August 19	0900 – 2330	Arrival Day - Sheraton Hotel
			Pick up reunion welcome packet at the Hotel Front Desk when you check into your room.
		1300 – 1600	The "Company Office" will be open in "The Slopchute" Hospitality Room for problem resolution and questions answered.
		0900 – 2330	"The Slopchute" Hospitality Room Open Lunch & Dinner on your own <i>Oral Histories All Day – must sign up to schedule</i> <i>Grit's PX All Day</i>
Thursday	August 20	0800 – 1100	Reunion Kick-off Meeting and VTA Business Meeting - Win a FREE stay! See details at bottom of next page
		0800 – 1100	Ladies Coffee (Hospitality Room)
		1100 – 1230	Lunch on your own
		1300 – 1315	Board buses for Patriots' Point
		1330 – 1600	Group Photo then tour USS Yorktown
		1600 – 1615	Board buses for return to hotel
		1700 – 2330	"The Slopchute" Hospitality Room Open
		1800 – 2000	Pizza dinner (Bite 'n Bid) and Auction <i>Oral Histories All Day – must sign up to schedule</i> <i>Sgt Grit's PX All Day</i>
Friday	August 21	0600 – 0615	Board Buses for MCRD Parris Island
		0800 – 0815	Arrive - MCRD Parris Island
		0900 – 1000	Recruit Graduation
		1030 – 1200	Guided Tour MCRD
		1215 – 1330	Noon Chow – MCRD Mess Hall
		1530 – 1545	Board bussed for Charleston
		1700 – 1715	Arrive - Sheraton Hotel
			Dinner on your own
		1900 – 2330	"The Slopchute" Hospitality Room Open <i>Oral Histories All Day – must sign up to schedule</i> <i>Sgt Grit's PX All Day</i>

Meet Your Board of Directors

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



Ron Knight, Secretary

they signed up for the Navy because one brought his golf clubs and the other his musical instrument. So while the rest of us were lined up for our gear and haircuts, the one "shitbird" marched around the parade deck with his golf clubs at "sling arms", while John Phillip Sousa played the Marine Corps Hymn on his violin!

Survived the first 6-weeks, but by the summer of 1967 when I went back for the second 6-weeks, we all knew where we were headed after college.

Arrived at TBS (The Basic School) in March of 1968. This was a 21-week course where 2nd Lts were taught to be grunt platoon leaders. Tet was fresh on everyone's mind, so there wasn't a lot of grab ass – training was deadly serious. All the instructors were Vietnam Veterans, Captains and Majors.

Towards the end of TBS we submitted our three choices for MOS assignment. Fortunately I got my first choice and upon graduation headed to Delmar for Track Vehicle School. Once there, they divided us up, some going to Amtracs and some to tanks. We spent approximately 6-weeks learning about gunnery, tactics, and maintenance. By late October, 1968 I was in Danang at 1st MarDiv with orders to 1st Tanks. Several days later, I was sent to An Hoa as Platoon Leader of B Co, 2nd Plt. After 39 weeks of training, I finally had my 5 tanks and 20 hard charging Marines!

Unfortunately the terrain around An Hoa was not like Camp Pendleton, so the infantry tactics we practiced in Del Mar were of little use. Mostly we were pillboxes at night and security for the morning road sweep up to Liberty Bridge.

In December, the Co First Sergeant called down to see if I wanted to attend Embarkation School in Okinawa. I had no idea what embarkation was, but 30 days in Okinawa sounded pretty good. I remember getting up the first morning

for breakfast in the Officers mess hall; scrambled eggs, grits, bacon, hot coffee. Those of us fresh from the jungle were in hog heaven. However, one 2nd Lt from Iwikuna Air Base, Japan was complaining about the lack of "eggs Benedict". That was the last time we sat with him and the first time I realized there were two Marine Corps – there was the ground Corps and then there was air wing!

After 6 months of An Hoa, was rotated back to 1st Tanks as Assistant S-4. The beer in the O Club was cold, and the pay was great. After 12 months received orders to Camp Lejeune. Really wanted to go back to the beaches of California so I extended for 3 months. At the end of the extension, got orders to Camp Lejeune again; thought about another extension, but the rumor mill had it that 1st tanks were headed home and not aboard a 707.

Reported to 2nd Tanks in January 1970 as XO of H&S Company. Spent the next 9 months processing undesirables out of the Marine Corps. Commandant offered an early release to officers with less than 6 months of active duty left and with Vietnam experience. I already had one interview with Eastman Kodak with a call back for another so I paid my respects to the CO and headed back to Chattanooga. Joined Kodak in January 1971 and 38 years later I'm still at it.

Married to Chris, her father was a Marine, so he and I got along great. We have a 16-year-old daughter, Mary Elizabeth. ♦

Letter to the Editor

One of the three enemy rounds fired that night landed on a truck in a 1st Cav Division motor pool, loaded with pyrotechnics. Several flares in the bed of the truck ignited and sailed across the compound, landing in an artillery ammunition dump. The subsequent explosions lasted for more than eight hours and wasted over 3 tons of 105 mm rounds. We watched the fires and applauded several especially spectacular blasts. (There were no casualties). When I visited one of the Infantry companies that had spent the night "outside" of Camp Evans, the Commander said, "We took bets on whether anyone had survived". The explosions lit the night sky for more than 10 miles away.

Don Munson
LTC, US Army (Retired)
1st Cavalry Division (66-67 and 67-68)

Hi John,

Clyde Hoch and I have been talking to each other about Frank Carr over the past couple of years. Clyde wondered if I remembered him or new where he lived. Now through the VTA and the new Sponson Box, we've been able to contact him via the letter from him that was published in the No.1, 09 Sponson Box. Thanks again.

And by the way I was the only one on the tank he didn't mention, Holly, Littman and Lyons were. I guess since I was the only one who was not wounded, he forgot me. Sometimes it's good to be a gunner. By the way, the rat patrol he talked about happened on 3/24/69

Todd Phillips
C Co, 1st Tanks
toddakabubby@wi.rr.com

John,

Concerning the newsletter, the articles on "Tanks on the DMZ" have been especially good. I've sent them to a Grunt buddy of mine who was a platoon leader on Op. Buffalo and he really has found them interesting. The tanks going out to get the dead from Bravo 1/9 was moving.

Thanks again for all your work.

SF - Phillip McMath

I got a call from Tom Kelly this afternoon about paying his annual dues and he thanked

me for the reunion information, the roster, etc that we mailed to him. He said that had not made a reunion since joining but the reunion mailing made him decide to come to Charleston. Good for us!!!

Up until now we did not have an email address for him but we do now.

kellyt32@gmail.com
S/F

John

I was rested yesterday morning and was confirmed Type II Diabetes caused by exposed to Agent Orange. All of our members need to have their blood checked often. One day your borderline and the next you have diabetes.

Just letting you know.

Semper Fi

Harvey "Robbie" Robinson
Editor's Note: The last three issues of the S-Box have had several warnings and alerts about diabetes and prostate cancer, both of which can be checked with a simple blood test. Please get them checked if you haven't recently.

Talked to Margie Dial on the phone Monday evening 3/2 and learned that MGySgt E.D. Dial, USMC, Ret. had his leg amputated below the knee. Recovery will be "painstakingly" slow due to his 3 days a week regimen with dialysis, diabetes, physical therapy, and with the always threat of infection lurking at every turn. Please cards and letters: 905 Pricilla Lane, Chesapeake, VA 23322-3744 Phone: 757-482-1778

SEMPER FI

Roger "The Loader" Chaput

John,

If anyone has service connected tinnitus, the VA will give you hearing aids to help you hear. I got mine yesterday and I can hear a flea fart 20ft away.

I'm hearing sounds that I haven't heard in a long time. They have inside-the-ear type and outside-the-ear, which every you want.

They are not cheap but it's no cost to the Vet. If you want to hear better, go to your Vet Doctor and ask for the hearing aids.

Semper Fi

Harvey "Robbie" Robinson

He didn't come up to Hue until the party was almost over. He must have gotten orders to Vietnam right after we graduated from Bootcamp. We graduated in late October or early November of 1967. The Tet offensive started on 28 Jan 68 and his arrival was middle February.

Biographies:

John F. Wear, II

Served in the Marine Corps as a tank crewman (1811) on M48A3 gun tanks and M67A3 flame-thrower tanks from 1966 to 1969. Mr. Wear initially enlisted for a two-year hitch but "shipped over" for one additional year at the end of boot camp in order to be assured of becoming a tanker.

His first year, he served as a tank crewman with Alfa Co, 5th Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton and was subsequently promoted to corporal. Corporal Wear then served in Vietnam as a tank commander with H&S, Alfa and then Charlie Companies, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division from January 1968 to February 1969. While serving in Vietnam, Corporal Wear participated in the liberation of Hue City during Tet 1968 as well as in numerous operations in and around "Leatherneck Square" along the DMZ in Northern I Corps. He was promoted to Sergeant (E-5) and was awarded the Navy Commendation medal with combat "V" upon his return to Camp Pendleton prior to his separation from the service on June 4, 1969. He is also earned the Combat Action Ribbon, Good Conduct Medal, two Presidential Unit Citations, a Marine Corps Unit Citation, a Navy Unit Citation, Vietnam Campaign Medal, Vietnam Cross of Gallantry with Palm device, Vietnam Presidential Unit and Vietnam Service ribbon.

Mr. Wear earned a BSBA degree in Marketing from The University of Denver, Denver, Colorado in 1971. He is presently an independent manufacturers' sales representative for many different housewares manufacturers. He is a Life Member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association and currently serves as President. He is also a Life Member of the Veterans of the Vietnam War, Inc, the Vietnam Veterans of America and the Third Marine Division Association. He is a contributing writer for the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association publication,

the Sponson Box. John resides in New Hope, PA, with his wife, Dr. Jeanne M. Sharpe. His three married daughters live and work in Denver, CO and his married son is a 1st Sergeant with the United States Army Rangers, Ft Lewis, WA

Bradford B. Goodin

Born in Louisiana, Mo. on November 15, 1949, he graduated from Divernon (Illinois) High School in May of 1967 and enlisted into the United States Marine Corps on August 10, 1967. After boot camp and basic tank school, Brad was sent to Viet Nam in January, 1968 as a tank crewman with 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. "Goodie" as he was affectionately called, moved up in the ranks from Private First Class to Corporal and from tank driver to tank commander while in Vietnam. Brad returned to the United States in February 1969 and was retrained in Marine Corps Aviation Maintenance in August 1969. He was assigned to many military posts all over the world. He retired as a Master Gunnery Sergeant after 26 years and 20 days in the USMC in August 1996. He is currently employed with Northrop-Grumman Corporation's Av Combat Sector, as an Aerospace Engineer in El Segundo, Ca. Brad's son, Aaron, is a sergeant serving as a US Marine Corps combat engineer and is currently serving in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. His daughter, Sasha, is a Specialist 4 in the United States Army working in the Computer Science Field. She is currently assigned to The 516th Signal Brigade in Fort Shafter, Honolulu, Hawaii. Brad's wife, Wanda, is a self-employed artist. They just celebrated their 31st wedding anniversary in March 2000 and they have 3 grandchildren.

Carl H. Fleischmann

Carl was born in Brooklyn, NY on March 10, 1949. He enlisted in the Marine Corps in March 1967. After boot camp at Paris Island and basic tank school at Camp Pendleton, he was sent to Vietnam in September 1967. Carl was assigned as a tank crewman with H&S Company, Third Tank Battalion. "Flash" as he was affectionately known, went to Vietnam as a Private First Class and was soon promoted up the ranks to Corporal. He received three Purple Heart medals while serving as a tank crewman and as a Marine infantryman during his tour. Due to his combat wounds,

Carl was medically discharged from the Marine Corps before his four-year enlistment was completed. Carl served as a guard at the Conn. State Correctional Institute for one year and then worked for Electric Boat (the submarine manufacturer) in New Haven, CT for four years. He then attended college at Olympic College of Washington where he earned a degree in mechanical engineering. He began a long career as a Weapons Systems Engineer with the Department of Defense in Washington State and retired in 1996. Carl has been married for 31 years to the former Gayle Couture. They have a married daughter, Christa Baester, who lives in nearby Auburn, WA and a son, Carl G. Fleischmann, who is a student. ♦

Jokes

I took my Marine dad to the mall the other day to buy some new shoes. We decided to grab a bite at the food court. Dad kept staring at a teenager at the next table. The teenager had spiked hair in all different colors: green, red, orange, and blue. The teenager would look over and find my dad staring at him every time.

The teenager finally had enough and asked: "What's the matter old man, never done anything wild in your life?" Knowing my Dad, I quickly swallowed my food so I wouldn't choke on the response I knew was coming.

In his classic style, he did not bat an eye as he responded: "I got drunk once and had sex with a peacock. I was just wondering if you were my son."

Submitted by Jim Goan

Two retired Marines are sitting having a sandwich when one turns to the other and says, "Did you know that a moose has sex 10 to 15 times a day?"

The other Marine turns and says, "Ah Shit! And I just joined the Elks!"

Submitted by Bob Peavey

place. All of a sudden the whole area around the gooks explodes as the gun tank next to us opens up with his 90-mm cannon. The grunts behind us open up with their M-16 rifles and M-60 machine guns as well. The gooks vaporize into pink mist in a split-second. The expression "teeth, eyes and hair" comes to my mind!

All of a sudden it is dead silence.

That was it? It was not like the movies at all. No one died heroically. No one gave us his final good bye speech. No one stopped in mid-stride, grabbed his chest and gasped. It had been a group of enemy soldiers running & hiding and then it was just "teeth, eyes and hair" sprayed on the wall.

Goodie comes over the intercom, "Get some!"

We did.

When things calm down and we are finally able to take a break, I crawl out of the turret of the tank and grab a canteen to take a drink. I drink deeply but I cannot seem to wash the fear out of my mouth. It sits there like bitter bile. I'm a combat Marine!

Carl Fleischman:

My good friend, Corporal Robert Hall was Tank Commander of the gun tank Hotel 52. I was that tank's driver. On the first few days of fighting we were a few blocks outside of the MAC-V compound taking on small arms fire when an RPG penetrated the TC's cupola and hit Hall square in the face. The gooks abruptly ended the attack and ran off so there would be no additional small arms or RPG fire affecting our rescue of our TC. The gunner of our tank (I cannot recall his name) yelled that Hall was hit and the turret filled with smoke. I threw the tank into reverse and backed down the street for a block. I then stopped the tank and got out to help pull Hall out of the turret. I grabbed him from the gunner and lowered him down to a few grunts that were on the ground. When I jumped down, I grabbed him again. He would not let go of me. His face was all bloodied and he appeared as if he was trying to say something to me. We put him on to a "mechanical mule" for medevac when a grunt corpsman came to help. Robert was holding on to my arm with a very tight grip and he continued to attempt to say something to me but he was completely covered in his own blood and had

City without being wounded. Joe Rochloew (Sp), Alfred "Marty" Martinez, and me.

John Wear:

Do you recall the prisoners who were in a cage near our ammo dump in the MAC-V compound? Someone threw gasoline on them and torched them. Here is that story: That afternoon when there is a lull in the fighting on our side of the Perfume River, we are sitting inside of the MAC-V compound when all of a sudden someone shouts, "Fire!" We all looked over toward where our tank's ammo is stored. Sure as shootin', there is thick black smoke and flames shooting up the side of a school building all the way to the third floor windows. The fire was next to our ammo dump so like super humans, each one of us picks up full boxes of 90-mm ammo (normally a two-man job) and we move these out of harms way. It was funny to see groups of four ARVN's attempting to pick up one single crate of ammo...they struggle to no avail. At least they tried. When the fire has burned itself out, we see two charred bodies in the wreckage of the shack. As it turns out, these bodies are what's left of two Chinese military advisors who had been captured during that day's fighting. They were being held in the MACV compound for interrogation right next to where our tanks were bivouacked. We understand that a disenfranchised ARVN soldier who lost his entire family during the fighting had thrown a can of gasoline on them and tossed in a match. Who knows for sure?

John Wear:

That other black Marine with us was that big SSGT who was a Korean War tanker. I vaguely recall sitting around after a day of shooting and scooting around the city and hearing him telling us about fighting Russian-made North Korean tanks in the city of Seoul, Korea. He said that they'd spot a North Korean tank ahead of them so they'd pull into an alley and wait until the tank passed them. They would then pull out and shoot up its rear end, killing it.

Brad Goodin:

The black SSGT that was in Korea was one of my drill instructors in Bootcamp. He was SSGT Fred "Pete" Staten. My buddy, Turtle and I were in the same platoon with him.

honor Jared, my son, and the other members of Morphine 1-2 in September and there will be continual preparations until the day of the event. Perhaps if the reunion is closer to the west coast next year I might be able to attend.

Again, thank you and I'm proud to a member in the association.

Joe Landaker
Proud father of 1st LT. Jared M.-V.
Landaker, USMC (Deceased)

Dear John,

I received the flyer on the reunion to be

held in Charleston, SC in August. I have never been to any of the reunions because of health issues but I am going to do my best to attend this one. I spoke to RB English the other day and he told me that we would be the oldest one there. But what the hell, I would really like to see some of the men I served with and some of the others that I know.

So the good Lord willing and the creek don't rise I will be there.

Gary Cummings
15018 Radstock Drive
Houston, TX 77065

Best Regards,

Lorraine Jarnot
Wife of Lt Col Fidelas"fid" Jarnot, USMC (ret)

Membership Information Changes

Arthur Allen
Phone: (714) 227-4734
Email: atankman1965@aol.com

B Co, 1st Tank Bn
A Co, 5th Tank Bn

William (Bill) Bisbee
157 County Road
Marion, MA 02738
Phone: (508) 523-6681

Richard "Rick" Beirne
Phone: (251) 661-8080
H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn - 66

Howard Blum
Search4Things@verizon.net

Dick Carey
(508) 888-1129

Charles "Chris" Christy
Chris.christy@quinetiQ-NA.com

Rene Cerda
890 Aspen Ave NE
Email: renecerda@comcast.net

Louis E Cherico
Phone: (914) 948-2299
Email: atilla006@aim.com
CO, 1st Tank Bn - 66 - 67

Jim Crooke
Phone: (954) 916-3444
Cell: (954) 661-0516
Sarge5usmc@bellsouth.net

Fred Cruz
Devildog1964@hotmail.com

Charles "Corky" Cummings
Email: Splitfin@verizon.net

Mark Damschen
mdamschen@msn.com

Hue Davis
Hdavis13@hotmail.com

Frank Gary Demes
gdemes@bluemarble.net

Ron Durham
Email: ron@durhamdsen.com

Mario Fuentes
DOB: 5/3/49

Rhea Hambright
Email: bettyrhea@cvctx.com

Harris Himes
Phone: (406) 363-5000
David Helfrich (corrected spelling)

Roger Hogue
Phone: (818) 715-0466
Email: hoguero@att.net

H&S Co, 1st Tank Bn - 67 - 68
State: CA (corrected state)

Leroy Kramer
402 Jacksonville Ave
Villas, NJ 08251

Dave T Lennox III
9854 E 2nd Street
Tucson, AZ 85748
Phone: (520) 269-7169

Marshall Jameson
PO Box 40
Seven Springs, NC 28578
Phone: (919) 252-7225

Ron Knight
Email: rckusmcvta@att.net

Terrence Monahan
PO Box 5000
Dudley, MA 01571-5000

James "Jim" Raasch
Alpha Co, 5th Tank Bn - 69

Lloyd "Pappy" Reynolds
1020 Broadborne Ave - Sp 57
Duarte, CA 91010
Phone: (626) 359-1814

Steve Skinner
7334 Wiczer Dr
Whitehall, MI 49461

Phone: (231) 206-7652
Email: semis393@yahoo.com
C Co. 1st Tank Bn - 69 - 70

Fred Tamaela
9650 - 13th Ave SW
Seattle, WA 98106-2918

Joseph R Tiscia, Jr (corrected spelling)
3856 Oak Forest Dr
Bartlett, TN 38135-9450
Phone: (901) 383-2224
H&S Co, 2/5 - 67 - 68
Email: JoeCpl@aol.com

Allen "Bogie" Van De Bogart
Email: Avandebogart@nycap.rr.com

Claude "Chris" Vargo
Email: clvargo@comcast.net

Charles West
15 Old Brantley Luverne Road
Luverne, AL 36049
Phone: (334) 335-5675

Kenneth Whitehead
225 Bonanza Drive
Richlands, NC 28574
Phone: (910) 324-6080
Cell: (910) 545-7306
Wife: Singha

A Saint is Born

BY PETE HAMILL

Sometimes when old Marines die they do fade away into unmarked graves in Potter's Field.

Such might have been the case for Gaspar Musso, USMC 925050, who fought in the Battle of Tinian in the Marianas Islands in 1944 and who died Nov. 15, at age 84 in a Brooklyn nursing home.

Enter Police Officer Susan Porcello, a PBA delegate at the 68th Precinct in Bay Ridge, and one of those big-hearted New Yorkers who still make this the best city on Earth.

"No way was I going to let this brave old Marine who fought for his country in WWII get buried in Potter's Field," she says.

Porcello first met Musso back in July when she responded to a 911 ambulance call to the retired insurance broker's one-bedroom apartment on, appropriately, Marine Ave.

"When my partner, Eddie Ennis, and I arrived at his apartment Gaspar seemed a little bit down about himself," Porcello says. "He said he felt alone in the world. We talked to him a bit and as I looked around his tidy apartment I noticed that he had served in the military - the Marines to be exact."

Porcello asked him about family and friends. "Look around you, what do you see?" Musso said. "I have no family or friends."

To which Porcello said, "Well, I'm your friend."

Right there, with those four beautiful words, Gaspar Musso was destined to die with the dignity he'd earned with a rifle in his hands, fighting in a USMC uniform, in a war that saved civilization.

If she didn't already wear a badge, you'd want to pin a star on Susan Porcello.

over the tank when Charlie was medevaced? Wasn't he the one who "Marty" Martinez called "Scooby"? Wasn't that name used because this guy's best friend back in Texas took away his girlfriend and this best friend was nicknamed "Scooby"?

Brad Goodin:

John... OK, I will tell you the story about Charlie West getting shot through the shoulder. As you know he was my tank commander and I was driving. It was a bad day for H&S Co that day. We were on some kind of mission supporting a grunt unit over by the Hue soccer stadium. All four tanks were involved. We were creeping down a street with grunts, taking intermittent small arms fire. The two gun tanks were leading the pack. Our tank only had the .30 and .50 machine guns to fire. We still had not reloaded with napalm due to re-supply problems. We were third in the line. There was a pretty high hedge row to our left, along the side of the street. The street ended in a tee, with another street intersecting it. I was burtoned up in the driver's compartment and Charlie was looking around with the tank commander's cupola half open. All of a sudden over the tank's intercom system Charlie says, "Ouch!"

The gunner (I can't remember that guys name but I do think it was your "Scooby" guy) and I said in unison, "What's the matter?"

Charlie said, "Somebody shot me through the shoulder!"

We kept asking him if it was bad.

He said, "I guess it went all the way through, because I can stick my finger through my shoulder." He also said that it felt like someone threw a rock and hit him. Charlie was medevaced a few minutes later.

Then just a few minutes later the lead gun tank was hit in the turret with what I think was a gook 57mm recoilless rifle. My buddy, PFC Turtle was the hit tank's gunner. The explosion & shrapnel just about took his face off. It was typical chaos with everyone shooting at muzzle flashes coming from the hedgerow and the building windows at the end of the street. They had a good ambush set up for us. The lead gun tank took a few more hits in the turret after they got Turtle out and medevaced. I didn't think he would make it. That was the last I ever saw of him.

The hit tank's 90mm ammo inside the turret started cooking off (exploding from the subsequent fire). I could see sparks & flames shooting out of the loaders hatch & TC cupola. Berthold was still in the driver's compartment. The gooks were shooting everything that they had. I guess he got the hot foot. He came out of the driver's hatch with a .45 automatic pistol (M1911A1) in each hand blazing away. Poor guy was wide open, right in the middle of the street, nowhere to hide. Anyway, he started running back towards us. He took a round in his left thigh that slowed him up a bit. Then he took another round or two in the other leg, he went down but was crawling along the best he could. I saw dust coming off his flak jacket where the rounds were hitting him and little pieces of road flying where the bullets were hitting all around him. Everyone was cheering for him to take cover. He finally reached the back of the second gun tank and a couple of grunts grabbed him and pulled him behind it. That was the last I saw of him. I heard later he was medevaced but I never heard if he made or not. I observed all of this through the periscopes in the drivers hatch. I was spotting for where the gunner (I still can't remember that guy's name) should concentrate the .30 cal machine gun fire. I had a better field of view through the driver's periscopes than he did through the gunner's sight. With Charlie medevaced, it was just the gunner & me. After another few minutes of us shooting up the area, it was all over. The bad guys withdrew to fight another day.

Within an hour of Charlie being shot, Turtle was medevaced to The World (America) and medically discharged. Berthold was shot to pieces and medevaced and we lost an M48A3-90mm gun tank to battle damage. A day or two later, a tank retriever dragged that tank down to the river's edge where we salvaged the track off of one side. That was a very bad day for H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Mar Div.

John Wear:

Do you recall the skinny black buck sergeant who was the TC of one of the gun tanks? He was all jittery and nervous. I recall him shooting HE with his 90mm at gooks behind concrete wall thinking that the plastic delayed fuse would allow him to penetrate the wall. We had to set him

straight by removing the regular fuses and putting on concrete penetrating fuses. That reminds me that they pulled us out of our flame tank (we had no napalm) and had us break out 90 mm HE ammo and change the fuses for several hours one afternoon.

Do you recall Lt. Georgaklis riding around like a crazy man in his open jeep? One of the officers from Task Force Robbie at Cam Lo Hill, (then) Major Bill Marin, recalled this wild man Lt. as well. He once told me that he thought that Georgaklis was probably certifiable crazy for doing some of the stunts that he pulled... riding on the back of a tank during a fire fight, not using his radio but running between tanks telling the tank commanders what to do and where to go, etc. I do recall a story that the other black SSgt told about the Lt's dad or brother had earned the Navy Cross either in WW II or Korea and the Lt. simply had to match that feat. I don't think that he did earn any "big" medals but I do understand that he did get three Purple Hearts.

Here is my first real "taste of combat" story: We are moving up the street with some grunts walking behind us. Our tank is completely burtoned up (all hatches are closed and locked down). As I am sitting in the turret looking out the gunner's periscope, "Goodie" comes over the intercom, "There's gooks at 11 o'clock. Don't ya see 'em?"

The TC (Scooby?) yells to me, "Wear, shoot the .30 at them."

"Where? I can't see \$hit." I am slowly traversing the turret to the left looking out with the small gunner's sight periscope. My stomach starts to get knots in it.

"Are you \$hitting me? They are all over the f'ckin' place! To the left, bring the f'ckin' gun to the left! Quick!"

All of a sudden Scooby takes the TC override control which disabled my ability to move the gun and he quickly moves the turret and the gun to the left of where I was trying to search and traverse the gun.

Then there are the sounds of bullets hitting the outside of the tank. Holy mother of God! I am sweating bullets too! Then I see them! They are dark running figures that are darting between the columns of the building to the front and left of our position. I open up the .30-cal. machine gun. My bullets are tearing up the columns and plaster & cement is flying all over the

the Perfume River. I guess that he wanted to see if he could secure the bridge before the gooks could blow it up. As we pulled up to the bridge head, all hell broke loose from the other side. There was a B-40 rocket team under the bridge on the other side getting ready to shoot at us. Cpl Hall, my TC, had the gunner shoot under the bridge and take out the B-40. He then had me pull our tank right up to the bridge. Just as I was inching on to the bridge, the whole thing blew up in our faces. The span on the far side flew up and settled into the river. Talk about having the shit scared out of you! I actually crapped in my drawers. And boy did it stink! Luckily we went back to the MAC-V compound and I was able to find a clean pair of shorts to put on.

Brad Goodin:

We were able to reach the MAC-V (Military Assistance Vietnam) ARVN (Army of the Republic of Vietnam) compound in the southern part of Hue that afternoon. We felt like a bunch of chickens all cooped

up in that small compound for the next few days. We would simply take incoming small arms or mortars and then we'd return fire. It was like the movies of the Wild West when the Indians attacked the US Army fort and the soldiers would just fire back at the circling Indians. The gooks never made an assault on the MAC-V compound but we knew that they might at any time.

Carl Fleischmann:

One of the things that happened to us the first few days during our "confinement" to the MAC-V compound (January 31 - February 3) was that we had both gun tanks facing out the main gates looking down the alleyway facing east and west. We could see people running past the alleyways about two and three blocks down the way.

When we looked through binoculars and our tank optics, we could see that there were civilians carrying ammunition and other contraband past the openings in the streets. We also were taking on a large amount of small arms and RPG fire from all of the buildings surrounding the compound. We would fire into these buildings as we caught the incoming but other than blowing the building down or burning it to the ground, we just kept shooting and the NVA kept shooting. After a while the gooks stopped shooting into the compound. I guess that our return fire must have killed enough of



Hue being an ancient provincial capital. They didn't want to piss off our host country by leveling it. To make a long story short, common sense finally prevailed and we broke out. As in any street fighting in wars past, it was house-to-house, building-by-building. Not very good terrain for tanks. The tanks are too vulnerable. We burned a city block with the napalm one afternoon. There were a bunch of snipers inside of a building and our .30 and .50 machine guns were not doing the trick

so Charlie West said, "F*ck it. Burn those f*ckers out of there!" And we torched the building. We couldn't get re-supplied with MoGas or napalm powder for a couple of weeks so they used us as an ambulance. We transported wounded & dead grunts back to the ARVN compound from all over the southern part of the city. The bridge across the Perfume River had been destroyed. Also, they used us to support the grunts when they needed heavy machine gun cover fire.

John Wear:

Do you recall Charlie West getting WIA by a sniper? He was hit in the back just below his right shoulder. I only know that because he showed me his scar when he came back and took over the tank when we were at Cam Lo Hill. Who was that LCpl who took

Looking For

DA NANG AMMO DUMP – 1969

David Milne is looking for anyone from 1st Tanks who remembers the "ASP-1" ammo dump blowing up sometime in early 1969 (between January and April). He says that it was an Air Force ammo dump and 500 pound bombs were cooking off for a few days. David was in the Navy guard unit that was next to 1st Tanks. He said it was in Da Nang but it may have been on Hill 55. He has in a jam with the VA and needs some help remembering.

David Milne
2416 Ashland Street
Clto, Michigan 48420
(810) 687-5772
No email address

LT. ROBERT A. BUTZ

I want to have my fraternity brother and Muhlenberg College classmate hero Lt. Robert A. Butz, honored posthumously at our 50th reunion in 6/2011. I want to talk to any survivors regarding the C Company accident on 6/26/1965. In particular I would like to find and hear from Capt. J.B. Donovan, Lt. Bruce Warner, Lt. Phillip Harris Jr., and Sgt. Ralph M. Greenwood.

Lt. Douglas G. MacGeorge USNR
doug1@mackitchens.com
610-264-7733

CAN YOU IDENTIFY?

Tank crew from B-33 from 3rd Tanks - L to R: Tom Rodgers, Oscar Parrott (KIA), Unknown, and TC Chris Christenson. I am trying to put a name on this crewman - I remember him as quiet, and it seems to me that he was married and from Oklahoma.

Rod Henderson - Lt Fuzz
gjobrod@aol.com



WHO IS THIS?



Doug Scrivener sent in this photo from the reunion of 2/1 that was held in San Diego this past November. We were surprised to see someone wearing one of our new VTA covers. Does anyone recognize himself in this photo? Please let John Wear know who you are.

Above & Beyond

It is with great pride and awe to list the following members who went over and above with their financial contribution to the USMC VTA. If we inadvertently missed someone who also participated in the financial well being of the organization we humbly apologize for the omission and please notify us of our oversight.

Jack Arena	RB English	John Juarez	Chet Ruby
Joe Balleweg	Edgar Evans	Fred Kellogg	James Sausoman
Richard Beirne	Guy Everest	Jim Knee	Ned Schultz
Mike Belmessieri	Doug Ewers	Roger Kropke	John Schuyler
Sammy Binion	Danny Farrell	Joe Landaker	Doug Scrivner
Bill Bisbee	Sid Ferguson	Rick Langley	Michael Shaw
Eddie Blanchette	Fritz Firing	Marty Lenzen	George Search
Howard Blum	James Fischer	Rick Lewis	David Schollenbarger
Bill Bohlen	Charles Fischer	Pete Limenak	Frank Slovik
Mike Bolenbaugh	Mike Flick	Robert Lynch	Michael Smith
Ken Bores	Robert Fornwalt	Jim Mackenzie	David Smith
Frank Box	Doc Forsyth	Boston Manns	James Stayton
Cecil Brown	Warren	Bruce McLaren	Marty Steele
Joe Brusha	Frankenburger	Geary McLeery	Herb Steigleman
John Byrne	Mario Fuentes	Otis Martin	Robert Stokes
Rene Cerda	Robert Gates	Freddy Martinez	Edward Tierney
Roger Chaput	Fred Goger	Joe Martinez	Richard Traiser
Joe Chassereau	Jeffery Griffith	Gary Mefford	Ev Tungent
Donald Chester	Jim Guffey	Ken Metcalf	Bruce Van Apeldoorn
Albert Christy	Robert Gulbranson	Armando Moreno	Allen Van De Bogart
Darrell Clock	Doc Hackemack	Craig Newberry	Bob Vaxter
Jim Coan	Tim Hackett	Richard Oswood	Chris Vrakeols
Ben Cole	Garry Hall	David Owen	Jerry Wah1
Randy Conrad	Bob Haller	Jimmie Patrick	Robert Walker
Richard Coulter	John Hancock	Bob Peavey	David Walters
Fred Cruz	John Harper	Jim Raasch	Jan Wendling
Corky Cummings	Rodney Henderson	Dover Randolph	Charles West
Steve Curti	Chris Hicks	Harold Riensche	Stan Williams
William Davis	Gordon Hollister	Pete Rich	Guy Wolfenbarger
Ron Davidson	John Hughes	Robbie Robinson	
Jimmy Didear	Fid Jarnot	Richard Rodriguez	

Recollections of Hue

BY JOHN WEAR,
BRAD GOODIN & CARL FLEISCHMANN

John Wear:

I want to depart from telling my own personal version of the story and ask two other Marine tankers who had also been in Hue during Tet 1968 to have an e-mail “conversation” with me about their recollections.

Brad Goodin:

John... I have tried to recall those tankers in the initial first few days of the penetration into Hue City. I am not having very good luck since the old brain housing group ain't what it used to be.

There were four tanks from H&S Company. Two M67A2's (flame-thrower tanks) and two M48A3's (90mm gun tanks). So there must have been 14 guys (tank crewmen) total. One of the gunners in one of the gun tanks was PFC Turtle and another guy was Joe Rochloe (sp?). A guy named Berthald (or Berthold), a driver in one of the guns (gun tanks). Plus the guys you mentioned in your e-mail to me. PFC Turtle and I had only been in Phu Bai one or two days before we were assigned as tank crewmen to go up to the Hue to get on a couple of LCU “Mike” boats at the boat ramp on the Perfume River. We hadn't had time to get to know many of the other guys in the company before we were on our way to Hue. The plan was to get on the “Mike” Boats, go out to the ocean, up the coast to the Cua Viet River and down to Dong Ha to join up with the rest of the battalion who had already made the trek. Third Tanks (Battalion) was moving its rear to Dong Ha / Quang Tri from Phu Bai.

Just as we got outside of Hue, the shit hit the fan. We were in a small convoy with a grunt unit. I can't recall the battalion or regiment. (Edit: Alfa 1/1) As we started to cross a rice paddy on a pretty good road that was elevated from the paddy, the NVA regulars had a cross fire ambush set up from

both our left and right. They were using tree lines on both sides as cover. Their automatic weapons and RPG's (rocket propelled grenades) cut the Marine grunts to pieces. There was no where to take cover except around the tanks and we were on the move (a slow crawl with intermittent stops). I was driving one of the flames (tanks). I was buttoned up and using the periscopes to navigate through the carnage. I saw twenty to thirty guys go down with each taking multiple hits. Their buddies were trying to drag the bodies off the road so we wouldn't run over them. Those guys were taking hits as well. I estimate that company took 85% casualties. Anyway, somebody made the decision to make a run for the outskirts of Hue and get out of the crossfire, which we did. As you can imagine we were traversing turrets and laying down as much machine gun fire as we could in both directions all during the fire fight. The NVA were too far away to use the napalm.

Carl Fleischmann:

I recall that the Tank Commander of one of the gun tanks (Hotel 51), his name was Cpl Hicks, got hit in the neck by a sniper during the initial moments of the ambush.

Two of our tanks were in the front of the convoy, Hick's gun tank and Cpl Charlie West's flame tank. There were three or four Marine 6X (two & ½ ton) trucks, then an Army “Duster” (twin 40 mm cannons mounted on a tracked vehicle) and then the other two HQ tanks. My tank's TC was Cpl Robert Hall and the other flame tank (behind us) had a new guy as TC, I cannot recall his name. He was medevaced a few days later and I never learned his name. As we approached the Hue City limits, all hell broke loose from both sides of the road. The first thing that happened was the grunts piled out of their 6X's and took the gooks on from the ground. The gook .51 cal

machine gun and AK-47 fire was withering. Hick's tank took two or three hits from B-40 rockets but none of them penetrated. I was driving my tank and was completely buttoned up. I looked out my driver's periscopes and saw at least forty grunts go down in the initial contact. The remaining grunts ran behind the lead tanks as the tanks took the enemy soldiers under fire. The fallen grunts had to be moved off of the road so that the tanks could pull forward without squashing them. There were at least ten incredibly brave grunts that ran into the gook gun fire and pulled their wounded or dead buddies off the road and out of the way of the approaching Marine tanks. In the process, most of these brave grunts got hit. Hicks got hit as his lead tank began to fire canister and machine gun fire at the ambush. His turret was pointed to the left and his cupola was pointed right. He was not totally buttoned up (he had the clam-shell cover half cocked and a lucky shot went between the TC's hatch and the cupola. It nicked him in the back of his neck between his helmet and his flack jacket. He was still able to direct his tank into the middle of the ambush and awhile later he was medevaced back to Phu Bai. To our left was a beautiful Catholic cathedral. There were NVA snipers in the steeple and a B-40 antitank gun team in the front door. Cpl Hall had the gunner fire a few HE (high explosive) rounds into the steeple and it came crashing down on top of the gook crew served weapon in the doorway. A few yards forward, the South Vietnamese civilians started throwing rocks at us because we blew up the front of their church. The bad gooks were shooting at us and the “good” gooks were throwing effen rocks at us!

After we fought our way to the MAC-V compound, it was about 3:00 PM, the grunt CO left his company there and took our tanks over to the big bridge that spanned

and then they were finally able to approach, see, and touch, those names together.

Many people came to the Wall in the privacy or serenity of darkness. Our security men reported that there were only a few minutes each night that the Wall had no callers at all. One visitor spent several hours in the middle of the night standing in front of a certain panel. Whenever anyone came close, he would move away. When alone again, he would move back to that panel to continue his silent vigil. Still others came in the darkness before dawn to watch the break of a new day over the Wall.

One vet came in a wheelchair. He could not talk or walk, but with great effort, Peter's shaking hand could scrawl messages on a pad. The nurse who pushed his wheelchair said that Peter had been excited about the Moving Wall visit since he first read about it in the Daily News. Peter came to see the name of his friend he thought had died in 1975, but he could not remember the man's name. They had been high school buddies and joined the Army together. They went to boot camp and Vietnam together. Peter saw his friend die. At the bottom of panel I West I squatted down and read off the names of the small number of men and one American woman who died in Vietnam in 1975. Peter

did not recognize any of the names.

The EDS computer operators ran a search, but found no Vietnam casualties from Peter's small home town. We asked if his friend might have come from another town, and Peter wrote "Wales?" The computer search gave one name, but he was killed in 1968. I went back to Peter and asked "Was his name Eric Jednat?" The shock on Peter's face, and then his tears, told us that we had found the right name. We moved to panel 53 West where we turned the wheelchair so Peter could touch his friend's name.

Many people came who were not related, but knew one or more of the men named on the Wall. A high school teacher told me "I taught four of these boys." Others said: "He was the little boy who lived across the street," "We were going steady in high school," "He delivered my newspapers," "I was his Boy Scout leader," "He went to our church," "I worked with his mother at the time he was killed," "My son played football with him," or "We were classmates for twelve years." There were hundreds of similar personal connections between the visitor and one or more names on the Wall.

To other visitors, the names were not as personal, but still were significant: "I didn't know him, but I remember how it shocked

the town when he died," "I just wanted to pay my respects," "I didn't know any of them, thank God," "I came to show support for the vets who came back," or "My son went to Vietnam, but he came back OK."

Others expressed amazement: "I wanted to see the names of the seven young men from Holley, I can't believe our little village lost so many boys," "I had no idea so many lost their lives," "Such a waste. Such a terrible, terrible, waste," "I hope and pray we never go through that kind of war again," or "Is this the price of peace?" Some visitors asked rhetorically: "Will mankind ever learn?"

Two weeks after the visit of the Moving Wall to Baravia, a friend told my wife "I don't understand all the concern about the Moving Wall; why don't people just forget about that dirty war?" For many, the Moving Wall does not need to be explained. Those who do not understand are, perhaps, more fortunate than those who do.

Jim Schuecker is the founder of the virtual wall.

Jim@VirtualWall.org

The Virtual Wall, www.VirtualWall.org
8219 Parmelee Rd. LeRoy NY 14482

Permission was obtained from the author

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

had to at least say good bye to him. Dale was one of only a few Marines with whom I served that was from the SF Bay Area. I met his wife, sisters, and daughter as well. They were very moved by the fact that someone who served with Dale cared enough to attend his service. Dale died of pancreatic cancer. He only lived 9 months after having been diagnosed.

Semper Fi

Michael "Belmo" Belmessieri

LINDA MCCLEERY

Wife of Geary McCleery lost her struggle from injuries sustained in a traffic collision that occurred on the 20th of Feb; she passed away on the 25th. Geary and Linda were married almost 42 years. Geary said, "She was an organ donor and for that we were all thankful for having her as long as we did.

God Bless,

Geary

DON "THE BATMAN" RAPP

Donald C. Rapp, of Factoryville, PA, passed away on March 31st, after a brief battle with cancer. He was a quiet, sincere, quick witted, and trusted Marine. He was a mentor to many "new Marine Tankers" upon their arrival to the Nam. He served two tours of duty in Vietnam - his first tour during Operation Starlight with Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks in 1965. His second tour began in the summer of '66 till the summer of '67 with Bravo Co, 1st Tanks. Donny was TC

JOANNE DREWES

Raymond Dreves sadly reports that his wife passed away from small cell lung cancer on 3/24/09. No other details were given. ♦



ROGER R. DAVIS FAMILY REQUEST
I just got a call from Roger R Davis step-daughter. She was calling to say that someone recently called her mother to try to get in contact with Roger and it really upset her mother because Roger passed away on April 22, 2008. Obviously our distribution of the VTA membership roster spurred someone to make the call.

His step-daughter was nice enough but asked if we could try to keep the incoming phone calls to a minimum. It seems that after a 30 year fight with what they believe was Agent Orange induced cancer Roger finally succumbed to it. She said that right after he got off of Active Duty he was diagnosed with stomach cancer and it just kept coming back year after year. Unfortunately the VA was never involved. Rest in peace our Marine brother.

DALE HEDLIN

Last week I got some bad news. Early Tuesday morning I received a call from Bill Stevenson who is a guy that lives here in town and a Marine who I served with while in B Co., 5th Tanks (he was in Embessi's herd). Bill called to tell me that while reading the morning paper he read that a fellow tanker we served with, Dale Hedlin, had died. Dale was an E-5 and was one of our radio guys. I am not sure who he served with during his 2 tours in country, but I know at least 4 guys who may possibly remember him from Bravo Company (Gunner Embessi, Blues Unland, Porras, and Zeba Camardese). I attended his funeral as I

AGENT ORANGE LAWSUITS UPDATE

On 21 JAN 09, the Supreme Court refused to hear the appeal of Haas vs. Peake. This action makes final a Court of Appeals decision which held that VA could deny service connection for herbicide related presumptive disabilities for certain veterans who received the Vietnam Service Medal but who did not actually set foot in Vietnam. Those most affected by this ruling are veterans who served in Thailand and on board ships off the coast of Vietnam (blue water navy). On 22 JAN 09 VA issued instructions in their Memorandum NO. 01-09-03 allowing the resumption of processing of those cases stayed while the Haas case worked its way through the judicial system. The memo includes a summary of actions taken during the case which led to its release and is included as Addendum (2) to this Bulletin.

[Source: VFW National Veterans Service Committee msg 26 Jan 09 ++]

NEW VIETNAM MEMORIAL

The formal dedication/ribbon-cutting ceremony for Phase One of the Onslow Vietnam Veterans Memorial will be held at 11am on Saturday June 13th. The event is free & open to the public.

This massive project is at the corner of Hwy 24 Business & Montford Point Road (next to the Beirut Memorial) in Jacksonville, NC and is one of the few in the country to display all 58,229 names.

It is dedicated to ALL the men & women from ALL branches of the service who served (whether in country or not) during the Vietnam era. PLEASE help us get the word out (across the nation) to all Vietnam Vets or anyone who might be interested in attending.

You can get more information from the website:

<http://www.onslowvietnammemorial.org>
Kenji (Kat) Horn, President

Onslow Vietnam Veterans Memorial Foundation

ELECTION OF USMC VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION OFFICERS

If you would like to run for a position on the Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, you will need to submit your name and desired position. Elections will be held during the business meeting of the reunion in Charleston, SC. Positions available are: President, Vice President, Secretary, Treasurer and four director chairs. You must be a current member in good standing to run for office. Only nominations submitted in writing by July 1, 2009 will be accepted at the meeting. Nominations can not be submitted directly from the floor. All who want to be considered for election must submit the request in writing to:

SgtMaj William Carroll, USMC (ret)
2396 Heath Ave North
Oakdale, MN 55128
651-773-8279
All requests must arrive no later than July 01, 2009.

WHAT MEMBERS ARE DOING

PETE RITCH (LEFT), USMCVTA MEMBER RECEIVES A HALL OF HERO'S CITATION

From Tom Gentilcore, President of the Madison County Military Heritage Commission.



Pete Ritch inducted into Hall of Heros.

On Veterans Day 2008, Pete Ritch, USMCVTA member since 2005, was inducted into the Madison County, Alabama, Hall of Hero's. The President of the Madison County Military Heritage Commission, Tom Gentilcore, presented the citation of induction into the Hall of Heros. Pete was awarded the Bronze Star Medal and the Navy Commendation Medal with Valor while serving in the Republic of Vietnam in 1969. In part, Pete's induction stated, "... while serving in the United States Marine Corps, in the Republic of Vietnam, Lt. Ritch's armored column was ambushed by an NVA platoon. Ritch manned his 50 caliber machine gun while being exposed to small arms and automatic weapons fire and successfully suppressed the majority of enemy fire. Still taking automatic weapons fire and in an exposed position, he deployed his tanks between the enemy and a Marine infantry platoon and used his 90 mm weapons to terminate the ambush. Ritch

was awarded the Bronze Star Medal with Valor for his actions. Later during his tour in Vietnam, Ritch was awarded the Navy Commendation Medal with Valor, for actions resulting in the rescue of a disabled Tank Retriever that had been ambushed by an NVA platoon.

...TO SUPPORT AND DEFEND THE CONSTITUTION OF THE UNITED STATES...

On January 20, 2009 there were two significant ceremonies conducted where an individual swore "to support and defend the Constitution of the United States".

One involved the Oath of Office administered to Barack Obama to begin a four year term of office as President of the United States and the other involved my administering the Oath of Enlistment to my grandson, John, to begin a four year active duty commitment in the U. S. Marine Corps. (The Oath of Enlistment for my grandson was done right the first time, incidentally.)

As a Marine Corps Recruiting Officer at RS, Cleveland, Ohio in the early '60s, I literally administered the Oath of Enlistment hundreds of times. This one, however, along with the one I administered to one of my sons many years ago as he entered the U.S. Army, holds emotional meaning beyond description.

In my introductory remarks before he took the oath, I told my grandson, "I want you to know that you have honored me and made me very proud to have been asked to participate in your enlistment processing. I will also be one of the proud

and loving witnesses to your graduation from Recruit Training at MCRD in San Diego a few months from now. As that title of 'Marine' is bestowed upon you for the first time, you will from that point on be a member of a group which will be Semper Fidelis, meaning Always Faithful, to their country and one another." I also mentioned to him that I had taken the same oath 58 years ago and experienced the same anxieties about how my life was about to change as he was experiencing that day.

As I am writing this, he still has about 8-9 weeks of Boot Camp remaining. I recently wrote to him and said that there was good news and bad news in relation to where he was in the training cycle. The good news was that he only had another 10 weeks or so to go and the bad news was that he still had another 10 weeks or so to go. He has adopted a personal motto of "Failure is not an option!", so I know he will persevere.

In my pause to reflect on my pride in my grandson, I came to realize that he is carrying on a family tradition of dedicated service to our country and community. I certainly don't wish to come across as being boastful and I'm sure many of you reading this can list similar family accomplishments in this regard. My family didn't get off to a rip roaring start. I have an early relative who didn't want to leave his Virginia farm to fight the British during the Revolutionary War, so he shot his trigger finger off! Not quite as bad as Benedict Arnold, I guess. My late uncle got us back on the right track when he enlisted in the Navy in 1922, went up through all the ranks and retired as a Lieutenant in 1952.

My three older brothers served in WWII, two in the Army Air Corps. One was in the 8th Air Force in England with a B-17 Squadron and the other was

My job as a volunteer "visitor guide" was to help people find names on the Moving Wall Vietnam Veterans Memorial. More importantly, I gave visitors a chance to talk. While searching the directory or leading a visitor to the name they sought, I would quietly ask "Was he a friend or a relative?" Over the six days, I began conversations that way with several hundred people. Only a handful gave me a short answer; almost everyone wanted to talk. Each had their own story to tell. For some, the words poured out as if the floodgates of a dam that had been closed for thirty years had just burst open. For others, the words came out slowly and deliberately between long pauses. Sometimes, they choked on the words and they cried. I also cried as I listened, asked more questions, and silently prayed that my words would help to heal, not to hurt.

"I came to see my son's name." I heard those and similar words from several parents who came to the Moving Wall. Their son had died in a war that divided our country like no other event since the Civil War. He died in a war that some Americans had blamed on the soldiers who were called to fight it. Some young men had no choice; they were called by the draft. Others, including some 30,000 women, were called differently, by a sense of duty to their family and nation.

Our culture mourns and respects our dead, but in the shadow of that bitter war, the sacrifices of those who died and their families were not allowed to have dignity. Mothers and fathers came to see that their sons had not been forgotten; that their names were remembered on that Wall; that someone else cares.

A frail and elderly mother came to the Moving Wall in a wheelchair. As we looked for her son's name, she described his interests during high school, and then the agonizing days when she was first told that her son was

injured, then missing, then classified as "lost at sea." She asked me to thank all the other people who helped bring the Moving Wall to Batavia.

"'Til death do us part" came abruptly to thousands of marriages because of that war. I met two widows of men whose names are on the Wall. One woman showed me a picture of her husband and separate picture of their daughter. A man who never met his daughter. A girl who grew up without a father. I was painfully aware that had some Viet Cong soldiers been slightly better marksmen, my wife and son might have come to the Wall to see my name.

Sisters and brothers came to see a name. One brother so close in age that "People were always calling us by each other's name, and we both hated it." A sister said "I was so much younger than him I didn't realize why my Mom was crying when we said goodbye to him at the airport."

One brother confided that, although he had not been a war protester, his feelings and his first confrontation with the Wall in Washington were almost identical to those of the brother in the play "The Wall, a Pilgrimage". He said "It was as if the actor had reached into my soul and exposed every one of my feelings about my brother and the war."

A group of four people stood near one panel. I offered to make a rubbing of a name. The man pointed to the name Paul D. Urquhart. I asked "Is that Captain Paul Urquhart, the helicopter pilot?" The man nodded and said "He's my brother." I explained that I flew with Paul on his first tour in Vietnam and read that he had been shot down during his second tour. Paul's brother said that he and his family came from Pennsylvania on the anniversary date of Paul's becoming Missing In Action. I made a rubbing of Paul's name and added a

The Moving Wall

BY JIM SCHUECKLER

rubbing of the Army Aviator wings from my hat, a symbol we had both worn so proudly so long ago.

Aunts and uncles also came to see a special name on the Wall. One aunt said "He stayed overnight at our house so much that one neighbor thought he was our son." An uncle lamented: "I took him hunting, I was the one who taught him to like guns."

Cousins came to the Wall, and many said "He was like a brother." One man asked me to look up the name Douglas Smith. I asked back, "Do you mean Doug Smith, a Marine, from North Tonawanda High School?" The man introduced me to his wife, Doug's cousin. She was pleased to be able to talk about Doug with a classmate who remembered him. I showed her Doug's name on my own, personal, list.

Veterans came to see the names of their buddies. Most of them were eager to tell me about their friend or how he died. Many remembered the day in great detail; and spoke of what's called survivor guilt. "He went out on patrol in my place that day." Or "If I hadn't been away on R & R (rest and recuperation), he wouldn't be dead." Others were bothered that they couldn't remember much about their friend because they had tried to "block it out" for so many years. Another man said "I lost a few good friends while I was there (Vietnam), but I don't want to find just their names, because I feel the same about all 58,000 of these names."

"Tree-line vets" are men or women who have finally been able to go to a Moving Wall location, but are terrified of coming close enough to actually see some names that have been haunting them so many years. One such veteran stood for a long time some fifty feet from the Wall. My brothers Vic and Chris talked with him. After a while he and Vic were able to laugh about some of their common Marine Corps experiences

NOTHING HAS CHANGED

Tank Marines work hard, stay on track

1/1/2009

By Cpl. Sean P. Cummins,
Regimental Combat Team 5
UBAYDI, Iraq

Heaving heavy tanks over miles of rough terrain means that the tankers and tank mechanics in western al-Anbar province, Iraq, have their work cut out for them when it comes to keeping their vehicles running.

The Marines of 3rd Platoon, Alpha Co., 2nd Tank Battalion have been operating out of Combat Outpost Ubaydi, supporting combined anti-armor teams from Weapons Co., Task Force 3rd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment, Regimental Combat Team 5 as they patrol near the Syrian border.

"Mainly we do overwatch and security for the infantry as they go out to the border forts. A lot of times we support each other, but now since there is no armor threat, we're trying to find different ways to employ tanks while we're out here," said Gunnery Sgt. Jeffrey T. Peeler, 30, a platoon sergeant with 3rd Plt. from Phoenix, Arizona. "We provide that security for them to make sure they're safe while they do their job."

To make sure everything is running right, the Marines of Alpha Co., 2nd Tank Battalion work around the clock, inspecting every piece of track and greasing every lube point whenever they have the chance.

"The primary focus is to keep these tanks up. That way they can go out and operate, make sure they get the job done," said Sgt. John L. Green, 21, maintenance chief with 3rd Plt. from Denver, Colo. "Every day there's something going on with these tanks. My guys are always working weird hours; the tanks go down at random times."

Every morning the Marines head out to their M-1 Abrams main battle tanks to begin daily maintenance: checking fluids, looking for loose bolts and cleaning off sensors. Mechanics and tankers work together to ensure everything is running smoothly inside and outside the tank.

"We work on the tanks every day. Every hour of operation is about eight hours worth of maintenance, so daily they're out here

running the engines, hitting all the grease points, lubing up every hole point, and making sure our weapons are good to go," said Peeler.

While on missions the tankers themselves must be prepared for anything. Anything from hydraulic systems and hub seals to tracks and transmissions can break at any time.

"One tank threw track and we had to break it and put it back on," said Lance Cpl. Andy A. Goldsmith, 21, a gunner with 2nd Tank Bn. from Fort Myers, Fla.

The missions don't end when the tankers return to base either. The tank crew must perform after-operations maintenance when they return from a mission so they are ready for the next day.

"(After-operations maintenance) consists of walking the track and making sure none of the track is loose or coming apart and then checking all the suspensions components, drive components, final drive components, checking for leaks, stuff like that," said Sgt. Ryan S. Wilson, 23, a tank commander with 3rd Plt. from Round Rock, Texas.

The dry, dusty terrain is a far cry from what many of these Camp Lejeune-based Marines are used to. This deployment has been a learning experience for many of the young Marines.

"The guys that haven't been out here before aren't used to troubleshooting different problems with the suspension because that stuff doesn't go down in Camp Lejeune," said Green. "It's a more rocky climate [in Iraq]; the heat changes the performance of the hydraulics and you just have to learn to adapt. They're just trying to get used to different conditions, so there is always something new that they're learning." ♦

PAYMENTS TO DISABLED VETERANS

The Economic Stimulus bill recently signed by President Obama contains a provision for a \$250 payment to disabled veterans. NAUS recently received the following program outline from the VA:

"The President recently signed the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This Act provides for the one-time payment from the U.S. Treasury of \$250.00 to individuals receiving Supplemental Security Income or adults receiving Social Security benefits, VA compensation and pension benefits, and Railroad Retirement benefits.

To qualify for the payment, the beneficiary must have been entitled to receive compensation, DIC (including Parents DIC), pension (live or death), or Spina Bifida for any month between November 1, 2008 through January 31, 2009.

The beneficiary must live within the United States, Puerto Rico, Guam, the Northern Mariana Islands, America Samoa or the U.S. Virgin Islands.

We anticipate that the \$250.00 payment will be issued in June 2009. No action will be needed by you to receive this one-time payment."

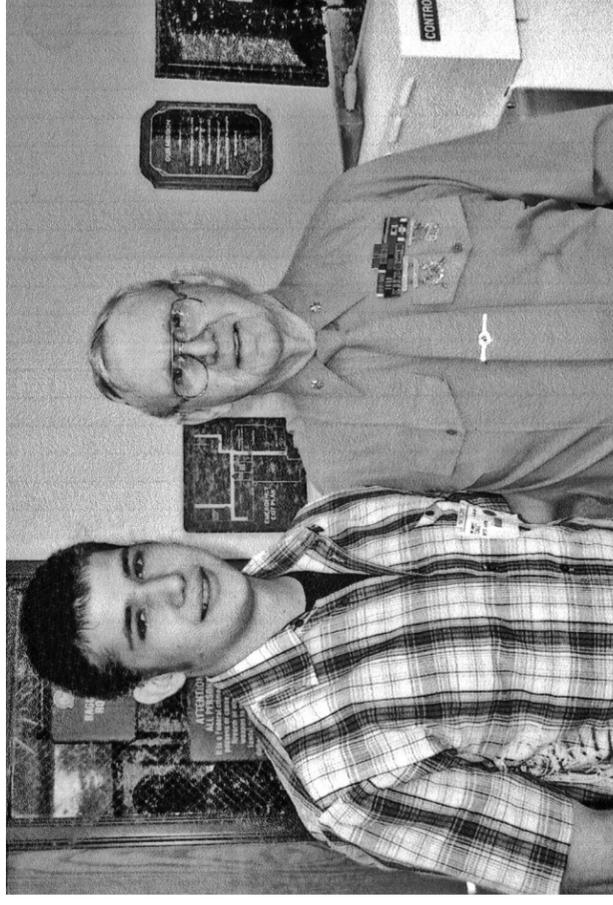
DD-214'S NOW ONLINE

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC) has provided the following Web site for veterans to gain access to their DD-214's online at:

<http://vetrecs.archives.gov/>

This may be particularly helpful when a veteran needs a copy of his DD-214 for employment purposes. NPRC is working to make it easier for veterans with computers and Internet access to obtain copies of documents from their military files. Military and the next of kin of deceased former military members may now use a new online military personnel records system to request documents.

Other individuals with a need for documents must still complete the Standard Form 180, which can be downloaded from the online Web site. Because the requester will be asked to supply all information essential for the NPRC to process the request, delays that normally occur when NPRC has to ask veterans for additional information will be minimized. The new Web-based application was designed to provide better service on these requests by eliminating the records centers mailroom and processing time.



LtCol Everett Tunget swears in his grandson

ship supporting air operations against North Viet Nam and one was a decorated officer in the Mobile Riverine Force in the Delta Region of South Viet Nam.

I mentioned community service earlier, which can also involve "to support and defend". Two of my sons and their wives are retired from the Los Angeles Sheriff Department and one son is a currently serving member of the LASD. One of the retired sons also had the U.S. Army service. The other son was medically retired due to injuries received during a drug related shoot-out in LA County for which he was awarded the Department's Medal for Bravery.

I hope I haven't strayed too far afield from my original purpose of discussing my pride in being able to bring my grandson into the Marine Corps fold. As I reflected on that, it became readily apparent that there are generations past, present and those yet to come who have and will continue to sacrifice to keep our country strong. If I may paraphrase the quote John placed in his Letter from the President in the last issue of the Sponson Box, "It's not so much that the (country) builds extraordinary men (and women). It's more likely that extraordinary men (and women) are drawn to become (defenders of that country)."

Everett Tunget
LtCol USMC (Ret)

FULL CIRCLE

Have you ever had one of those moments of clarity? When the sense of changing roles in life hits you with a jolt? Well I think I had one of those a couple of Saturdays ago.

It was after my grandson, Gavin's, birthday party. My nephew Dusty had showed up with his three girls and my niece Hope with her daughter.

After the party, everyone came to my house where we visited a while. The energy of 6 kids aged 3 to 7 couldn't be contained inside so naturally we hit the back yard. We sat out back and watched as Dusty and my son, Berry rolled around on the ground and rough-housed and wrestled with the kids. With all the laughing and screaming, it was a real show. Even Hope's "girly girl" Hanna got in on the act.

As I watched, emotion began to well up inside me. Berry and Dusty had spent over 30 months in Iraq. I couldn't be more proud but I was so scared they wouldn't come back. The relief at seeing them together was overwhelming.

I realized that they were doing with their children exactly as I had done with them. I was always rolling on the floor or ground with Berry, Dusty, Chris and Hope and other friends or cousins who might be over at the time. Whenever we were all together, it seemed my place was on the floor with kids crawling over me. It was good. And it was good to see them doing it with theirs.

Then it dawned on me that I was sitting on a bench that my father had built. Daddy had probably sat in the same seat and watched me "rastle" with kids. And now I was sitting on the same bench watching my kids play with their kids. I hope he felt the same pride and love that I felt.

I experienced a generational shift in roles at that moment—A passing of the baton as it were. And it was good. Tears began to well up and I took a little walk lest I be taken for an old man in his dotage. I'm not quite ready for that yet.

These words seem so inadequate. I'm not sure what I'm trying to express, but I had to try.

Getting old isn't so bad I guess... but aging really sucks.

Fred Cruz ♦

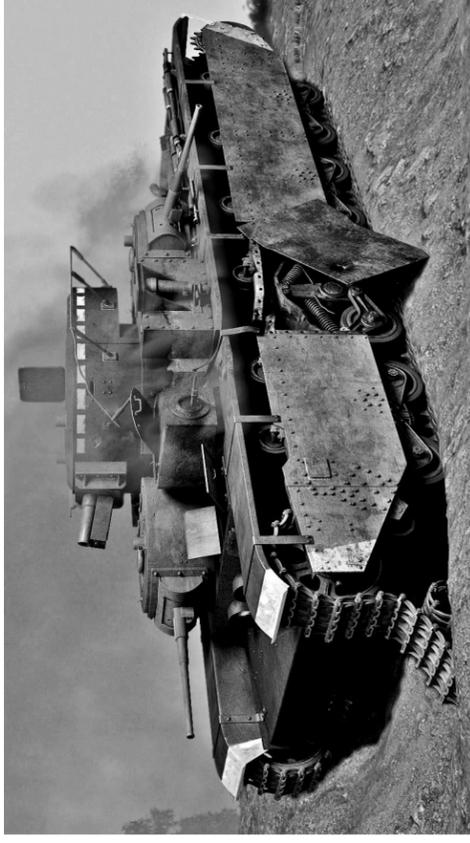
Name That Tank

This issue's mystery tank was the only production tank with 5 turrets! What was the country of origin and the model number?

First to call Bob Peavey with the answer wins a 10" VTA patch.

Last Issue's Winner: Jim Sausoman

The T95 series were American prototype tanks from the mid-1950s and early 1960s. The vehicles incorporated many high-tech features that appeared in later tanks. Among these innovations was siliceous-cored armor, a precursor of modern composite armors. The T95 also featured the T53 OPTAR rangefinder, which used an intense beam of light to calculate range. Various T95s were armed with guns ranging in caliber from 90mm to 120mm. There was much expected of the T95 program when it was initiated, but slow progress dogged the development process. It was finally decided that the T95 would not offer an appreciable benefit over an up-gunned and re-engined M48A2 Patton, so the T95 was cancelled in favor of what eventually became the M60. Much was learned from the T95, however, and the pilot tanks were used for further component testing after the cancellation of the program. T95s took part in experiments with hydro-pneumatic suspensions, engines, and combination gun/missile launchers, with this experience directly influencing the M60A2 and MBT70 projects.



about the Marines who made that emblem and title meaningful. So long as you can march and shoot and revere the legacy of the Corps, you can take your place in line. And that line is unified spirit as in purpose.

A soldier wears branch of service insignia on his collar, metal shoulder pins and cloth sleeve patches to identify his unit. Sailors wear a rating badge that identifies what they do for the Navy. Marines wear only the Eagle, Globe, and Anchor, together with personal ribbons and their **CHERISHED** marksmanship badges. There is nothing on a Marine's uniform to indicate what he or she does, nor what unit the Marine belongs to. You cannot tell by looking at a Marine whether you are seeing a truck driver, a computer programmer, or a machine gunner. The Corps explains this as a security measure to conceal the identity and location of units, but the Marines' penchant for publicity makes that the least likely of explanations. No, the Marine is amorphous, even anonymous, by conscious design.

Every Marine is a rifleman first and foremost, a Marine first, last and always!

and so they live forever. Dan Daly's shouted challenge takes on its true meaning - if you lie in the trenches you may survive for now, but someday you will die and no one will care. If you charge the guns you may die in the next two minutes, but you will be one of the immortals.

All Marines die; some in the red flash of battle, some in the white cold of the nursing home. In the vigor of youth or the infirmity of age, all will eventually die. But the Marine Corps lives on. Every Marine who ever lived is living still - in the Marines who claim the title today.

It is that sense of belonging to something that will outlive your own mortality, which gives people a light to live by and a flame to mark their passing.

Author Unknown
Submitted by Bruce Van Apledoorn

Yes- even Marine Corps aviators. You may serve a four-year enlistment or even a twenty plus year career without seeing action, but if the word is given you'll charge across that Wheat field! Whether a Marine has been schooled in automated supply, automotive mechanics, or aviation electronics, is immaterial. Those things are secondary - the Corps does them because it must. The modern battlefield requires the technical appliances, and since the enemy has them, so do we, but no Marine boasts mastery of them. Our pride is in our marksmanship, our discipline, and our membership in a fraternity of courage and sacrifice."

For the honor of the fallen, for the glory of the dead", Edar Guest wrote of Belleau Wood, "the living line of courage kept the faith and moved ahead. "They are all gone now, those Marines who made a French farmer's little Wheat field into one of the most enduring of Marine Corps legends. Many of them did not survive the day, and eight long decades have claimed the rest. But their actions are immortal. The Corps remembers them and honors what they did,

Court turns down Agent Orange cases

WASHINGTON — The Supreme Court has turned down American and Vietnamese victims of Agent Orange who wanted to pursue lawsuits against companies that made the toxic chemical defoliant used in the Vietnam War.

The justices offer no comment on their action Monday, rejecting appeals in three separate cases, in favor of Dow Chemical, Monsanto and other companies that made Agent Orange and other herbicides used by the military in Vietnam.

Agent Orange has been linked to cancer, diabetes and birth defects among Vietnamese soldiers and civilians and American veterans.

The American plaintiffs blame their cancer on exposure to Agent Orange during the military service in Vietnam.

The Vietnamese said the U.S.' sustained program to prevent the enemy from using vegetation for cover and sustenance caused miscarriages, birth defects, breast cancer, ovarian tumors, lung cancer, Hodgkin's disease and prostate tumors.

All three cases had been dismissed by the 2nd U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals in New York.

The appeals court said that lawsuit brought by the Vietnamese plaintiffs could not go forward because Agent Orange was used to protect U.S. troops against ambush and not as a weapon of war against human populations.

The other two suits were filed by U.S. veterans who got sick too late to claim a piece of the \$180 million settlement with makers of the chemical in 1984. In 2006,

The Associated Press
Posted: 03/02/2009 07:17:08 AM PST

the Supreme Court deadlocked 4-4 on whether those lawsuits could proceed.

The appeals court ultimately said no to both. In one case, the court said companies are shielded from lawsuits brought by U.S. military veterans or their relatives because the law protects government contractors in certain circumstances who provide defective products.

In the third suit, the appeals court ruled that the companies could transfer claims from state to federal courts.

The cases are *Isaacson v. Dow Chemical Co.*, 08-460, *Stephenson v. Dow Chemical Co.*, 08-461, and *Vietnam Association for Victims of Agent Orange v. Dow Chemical Co.*, 08-470

Immediately Introduced Himself

(Continued from page 29)

my new girlfriend and my 56 Chevy. I never got a response from Gary.

About a year later, while attending Marine Security Guard School, I ran into a Marine by the name of Rooker. Rooker had trained with us and was even on our flight to Vietnam. He then told me that Gary had shown him the letter I sent. "Well the dirty rat didn't write me back." I said. Rooker then told me that Gary had been killed in July of 1968. He apparently tripped an anti-personnel mine. I was devastated. I wanted to call his family but didn't know who or how to call.

It had taken me 40 years to put this letter together and I am appreciative that

the Yakima Herald Republic newspaper allowed me to include it in their Veterans Day issue.

One of the reasons I put the article in the paper was in hopes that it would flush out a relative of Gary's. Sure enough it did. At 10:00 am on Veteran's Day I received a call from Lynn Keller Locke, Gary's sister. I had a lump in my throat the size of a golf ball. I didn't quite know what to say. I didn't have to say anything. She was so grateful and she expressed her gratitude with tears of joy and sadness at the same time. She had been awakened out of bed by her aunt who first read the article. She then awakens her mother who is also Gary's mother. Her name is Anna and she is still going strong at 90 years of age. Lynn put her Mom on the phone and I now have two lumps in my throat. I was so overwhelmed with the

GySgt. John D. Foster
USMC veteran
Echo 2/9 67-68

The Games Tankers Played

BY ROBERT PEAVEY

he knew it. The smile on his face said that he had done this before.

“Wanna see that again?” he asked with a half smile. “Who’s going to be first?”

If ever there was a pregnant pause this was it, for no one moved. One of my classmates eventually spoke up, “Not if it means losing my hand.”

“It can’t take your hand off,” said the instructor trying his best to convince us otherwise. But we weren’t falling for that after what we just witnessed.

We were then instructed in the use of breech-cocking lever that would open the closed breech and allow us to pull out the dummy round. It involved a lot of strength and the leverage of a well placed foot on the lever to open the breech. It only served to reinforce the immense power that was behind the breech or hand-amputating machine as we were convinced it was.

The instructor once again placed the tip of the round’s projectile in the breech ring while holding the base of the round with his right hand. Instead of throwing the round home as he had done before, he slowly pushed the four-foot round into the chamber with his fist.

Just as his fist passed into the breech ring there was a sudden blur of steel as the massive block slammed home— “Ka-Chung!” The instructor’s arm flew up and he immediately fell to his knees grabbing what had to be a bloody stump. “My hand!” he screamed.

Seconds later another scream from a nearby turret on the ramp, “My fingers are gone!” We immediately looked from one amputation to another. The next tank’s students

“Ka-Chung!”

The noise and force with which the 90mm breech slammed shut had four tank school students sitting bolt-upright; the instructor had loaded a dummy round into the main gun. To a bunch of students, the sudden and decisive closing of the breech sounded like that of a locomotive hitting a concrete wall. I searched the dumbfounded faces of my fellow students, doing my best to look nonchalant but I doubt I was pulling it off.

We were sitting on top of the turret, peering down through the open hatches at our instructor. We could not believe what we just saw, our eyes as big as saucers. The only thing I could compare the sound to was a machine that used to frighten me as a small boy. My family owned a steel fabrication shop and in one of the smaller rooms, off to the side of the main shop, stood a forge and a large drop-hammer. The 12-foot high machine would pick up a steel die weighing hundreds of pounds and repeatedly drop it on a red-hot piece of steel two-times a second. To a boy of 10 it was the machine from Hell as sparks squirted out of it with every impact. It shook the very foundation of the entire shop with its relentless blows of mind-numbing noise as it reshaped a piece of glowing steel. What I had just witnessed took me back to that monster . . . but without the sparks.

It was January, 1967 and we had just finished several weeks of book-learning at the Marine Tank School in Del Mar. We were finally allowed access to the magnificent beasts. But nowhere in the classroom had we learned the ferocity with which the main gun’s breech closed. There were no warnings about the dangers of losing one’s hand or fingers, which we were now suddenly convinced it could do. In fact, I looked on the turret deck for the hand that used to be connected to the instructor. Certainly at least a finger lay somewhere on the turret floor.

The instructor had our attention— and

ESPRIT DE CORPS

enlistees are sailors or airmen as soon as they get off bus at the training center.

The new arrival at Marine Corps boot camp is called a recruit, or worse, but never a MARINE. Not yet, maybe never. He or she must earn the right to claim the title of UNITED STATES MARINE, and failure returns you to civilian life without hesitation or ceremony.

Recruit Platoon 2210 at San Diego, California trained from October through December of 1968. In Viet Nam the Marines were taking two hundred casualties a week, and the major rainy season operation Meade River, had not even begun. Yet Drill Instructors had no qualms about winnowing out almost a quarter of their 112 recruits, graduating eighty-one.

Note that this was post - enlistment attrition; every one of those who were dropped had been passed by the recruiters as fit for service. But they failed the test of Boot Camp, and not necessarily for physical reasons; at least two were outstanding high school athletes for whom the calisthenics and running were child’s play. The cause of their failure was not in the biceps nor the legs, but in the spirit. They had lacked the will to endure the mental and emotional strain, so they would not be Marines. Heavy commitments and high casualties not withstanding, the Corps reserves the right to pick and choose.

History classes in boot camp? Stop a soldier on the street and ask him to name a battle of World War One. Pick a sailor at random to describe the epic fight of the Bon Homme Richard. Everyone has heard of McGuire Air Force Base. So ask any airman who Major Thomas McGuire was, what aircraft he flew, and why he is so commemorated.

I am not carping, and there is no sneer in this criticism. All of the services have glorious traditions, but no one teaches the

Ask a Marine what’s so special about the Marines and the answer would be “Esprit de Corps”, an unhelpful French phrase that means exactly what it looks like - the spirit of the Corps, but what is that spirit and where does it come from? The Marine Corps is the only branch of the U.S. Armed Forces that recruits people specifically to fight.

The Army emphasizes personal development (an Army of One); the Navy promises fun (let the journey begin); the Air Force offers security, (its a great way of life). Missing from all the advertisements is the hard fact that a soldier’s lot is to suffer and perhaps to die for his people, and take lives at the risk of his/her own. Even the thematic music of the services reflects this evasion.

The Army’s Caisson Song describes a pleasant country outing. Over hill and dale, lacking only a picnic basket. Anchors Aweigh, the Navy’s celebration of the joys of sailing and exotic liberty, could have been penned by Jimmy Buffet. The Air Force song is a lyric poem of blue skies and engine thrust. All is joyful, invigorating, and safe.

There are no land mines in the dales nor snipers behind the hills, no submarines or cruise missiles threaten the ocean jaunt, no bandits are lurking in the wild blue yonder.

The Marine Hymn, by contrast, is, all combat. ‘We fight our Country’s battles; First to fight for right and freedom; we have fought in every clime and place where we could take a gun, in many a strife we have fought for life and never lost our nerve.’

The choice is made clear. You may join the Army to go to adventure training, or join the Navy to go to Bangkok, or join the Air Force to go to computer school.

You join the Marine Corps to go to War! But the mere act of signing the enlistment contract confers no status in the Corps.

The Army recruit is told from his first minute in uniform that ‘you’re in the Army now’, soldier. The Navy and Air Force

young soldier, sailor or airman what his uniform means and why he should be proud of it. But ask a Marine about World War One, and you will hear of the wheat field at Belleau Wood and the courage of the Fourth Marine Brigade, fifth and sixth regiments.

Faced with an enemy of superior numbers entrenched in tangled forest undergrowth, the Marines received an order to attack that even the charitable cannot call ill - advised. It was insane. Artillery support was absent and air support had not yet been invented, so the Brigade charged German machine guns with only bayonets, grenades, and indomitable fighting spirit. A bandy-legged little barrel of a Gunnery Sergeant, Daniel J. Daly, rallied his company with a shout, “Come on you sons a bitches, do you want to live forever”? Aspiring Marine Corps recruits study this sitting on their locker boxes.

He took out three machine guns himself, and they would give him the Medal of Honor except for a technicality; he already had two of them. French liaison officers, hardened though they were by four years of trench bound slaughter, were shocked as the Marines charged across the open wheat field under a blazing sun directly into the teeth of enemy fire. Their action was anachronistic on the twentieth- century battlefield; so much so that they might as well have been swinging cutlasses. But the enemy was only human; they could not stand up to this. So the Marines took Belleau Wood. The Germans called them “Dogs from the Devil.”

Every Marine knows this story and dozens more. We are taught them in boot camp as a regular part of the curriculum. Every Marine will always be taught them! You can learn to don a gas mask anytime, even on the plane in route to the war zone, but before you can wear the Eagle Globe & Anchor and claim the title it must be ingrained in you to know

he knew it. The smile on his face said that he had done this before.

“Wanna see that again?” he asked with a half smile. “Who’s going to be first?”

If ever there was a pregnant pause this was it, for no one moved. One of my classmates eventually spoke up, “Not if it means losing my hand.”

“It can’t take your hand off,” said the instructor trying his best to convince us otherwise. But we weren’t falling for that after what we just witnessed.

We were then instructed in the use of breech-cocking lever that would open the closed breech and allow us to pull out the dummy round. It involved a lot of strength and the leverage of a well placed foot on the lever to open the breech. It only served to reinforce the immense power that was behind the breech or hand-amputating machine as we were convinced it was.

The instructor once again placed the tip of the round’s projectile in the breech ring while holding the base of the round with his right hand. Instead of throwing the round home as he had done before, he slowly pushed the four-foot round into the chamber with his fist.

Just as his fist passed into the breech ring there was a sudden blur of steel as the massive block slammed home— “Ka-Chung!” The instructor’s arm flew up and he immediately fell to his knees grabbing what had to be a bloody stump. “My hand!” he screamed.

Seconds later another scream from a nearby turret on the ramp, “My fingers are gone!” We immediately looked from one amputation to another. The next tank’s students



Removing the breechblock of the M41 main gun.

I WAS THERE LAST NIGHT

BY ROBERT CLARK

A couple of years ago someone asked me if I still thought about Vietnam. I nearly laughed in their face. How do you stop thinking about it? Every day for the last twenty-four years, I wake up with it, and go to bed with it. But this is what I said. "Yea, I think about it. I can't quit thinking about it. I never will. But, I've also learned to live with it. I'm comfortable with the memories. I've learned to stop trying to forget and learned instead to embrace it. It just doesn't scare me anymore."

A psychologist once told me that NOT being affected by the experience over there would be abnormal. When he told me that, it was like he'd just given me a pardon. It was as if he said, "Go ahead and feel something about the place, Bob. It ain't going nowhere. You're gonna wear it for the rest of your life. You might as well get to know it."

A lot of my "brothers" haven't been so lucky. For them the memories are too painful, their sense of loss too great. My sister told me of a friend she has whose husband was in the Nam. She asks this guy when he was there. Here's what he said, "Just last night."

It took my sister a while to figure out what he was talking about. JUST LAST NIGHT. Yeah I was in the Nam. When? JUST LAST NIGHT. During sex with my wife. And on my way to work this morning. Over my lunch hour. Yeah, I was there. My sister says I'm not the same brother that went to Vietnam. My wife says I won't let people get close to me, not even her. They are probably both right.

Ask a vet about making friends in Nam. It was risky. Why? Because we were in the business of death, and death was with us all the time. It wasn't the death of, "If I die

before I wake." This was the real thing, the kind where boys scream for their mothers. The kind that lingers in your mind and becomes more real each time you cheat it. You don't want to make a lot of friends when the possibility of dying is that real, that close. When you do, friends become a liability.

A guy named Bob Flannigan was my friend. Bob Flannigan is dead. I put him in a body bag one sunny day, April 29, 1969. We'd been talking, only a few minutes before he was shot, about what we were going to do when we got back in the world. Now, this was a guy who had come in country the same time as myself.

A guy who was loveable and generous. He had blue eyes and sandy blond hair. When he talked, it was with a soft drawl. Flannigan was a hick and he knew it. That was part of his charm. He didn't care. Man, I loved this guy like the brother I never had. But, I screwed up. I got too close to him. Maybe I didn't know any better. But I broke one of the unwritten rules of war. DON'T GET CLOSE TO PEOPLE WHO ARE GOING TO DIE. Sometimes you can't help it.

You hear vets use the term "buddy" when they refer to a guy they spent the war with. "Me and this buddy a mine . . ." "Friend" sounds too intimate, doesn't it. "Friend" calls up images of being close. If he's a friend, then you are going to be hurt if he dies, and war hurts enough without adding to the pain. Get close; get hurt. It's as simple as that. In war you learn to keep people at that distance my wife talks about. You become so good at it, that twenty years after the war, you still do it without thinking. You won't allow yourself to be vulnerable again.

My wife knows two people who can get into the soft spots inside me—my daughters. I know it probably bothers her that they can do this. It's not that I don't love my wife, I do. She's put up with a lot from me. She'll tell you that when she signed on for better or worse, she had no idea there was going to be so much of the latter. But with my daughters it's different. My girls are mine. They'll always be my kids. Not marriage, not distance, not even death can change that. They are something on this earth that can never be taken away from me. I belong to them. Nothing can change that. I can have an ex-wife; but my girls can never have an ex-father. There's the difference.

I can still see the faces, though they all seem to have the same eyes. When I think of us I always see a line of "dirty grunts" sitting on a paddy dike. We're caught in the first gray silver between darkness and light. That first moment when we know we've survived another night, and the business of staying alive for one more day is about to begin. There was so much hope in that brief space of time. It's what we used to pray for. "One more day, God. One more day."

And I can hear our conversations as if they'd only just been spoken. I still hear the way we sounded, the hard cynical jokes, our morbid senses of humor. We were scared to death of dying, and trying our best not to show it.

I recall the smells, too. Like the way cordite hangs on the air after a firefight. Or the pungent odor of rice paddy mud. So different from the black dirt of Iowa. The mud of Nam smells ancient, somehow. Like it's always been there. And I'll never forget the way blood smells,

I first met LCpl Gary Keller during ITR (Infantry Training Regiment) for advanced infantry training at Camp Pendleton in late 1966. All the Marines looked alike in their utilities and short cropped hair. One stood out from the others. He appeared to be more mature and with no chevrons, I assumed he was an officer. He was a private. It was our first day at the training facility and we were being assigned billeting in Quonset huts. As I was putting my gear away, a Marine tapped me on the shoulder. "My name is Gary Keller and I am from Yakima, Washington." I introduced myself as PFC John Foster. I was surprised that Keller had just completed boot camp. I thought he was older but he was 18, just like me. After we all got settled in, we were called out on the deck for a promotion ceremony. About 6 Marines were being promoted to LCpl. Gary was one of them but he was getting his first promotion to PFC.

We became very good friends and spent most of our off-duty hours together. One weekend we had a three-day pass and decided to hitchhike to my hometown, Santa Cruz, California. We caught a ride right away. Gary immediately introduced himself to the driver, "My name is Gary Keller and I'm from Yakima." The driver who was driving to San Francisco gave us a ride all the way to Santa Cruz which was a seven hour drive. Gary kept me and the driver entertained all the way with stories of life in Yakima. When the driver dropped us off at my Mom's house, Gary gave the driver a \$100 bill. That was more than we made in a month. That \$100 could have paid for both of us to fly round trip.

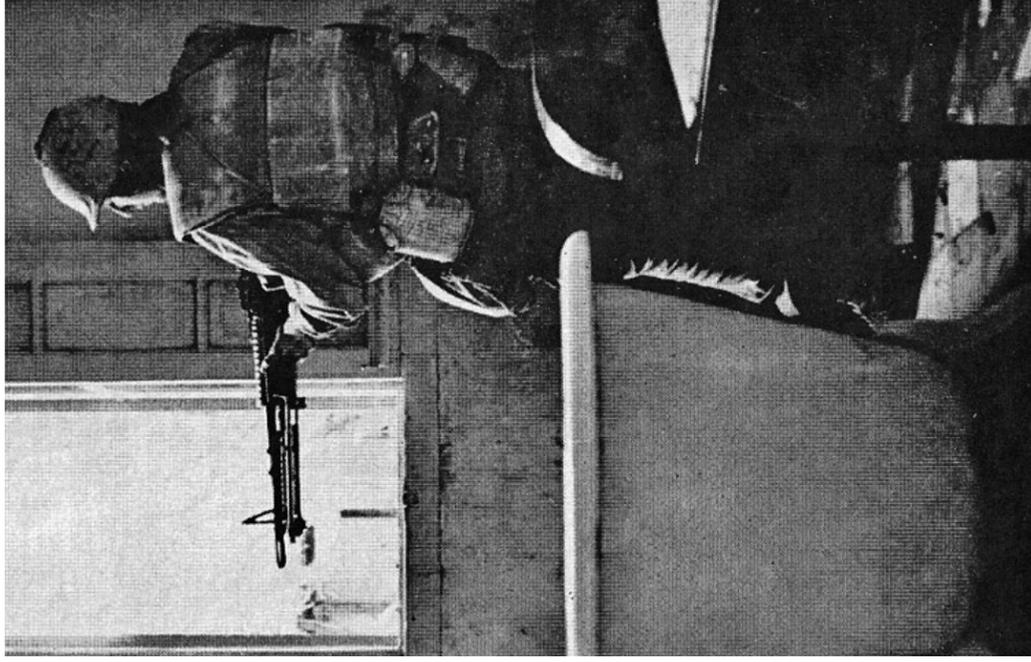
After several weeks of intense infantry training, we were ready to take on the entire Viet Cong and NVA. Gary wasn't scared at all. He was more interested in visiting a lush tropical country and getting to know its people.

We flew to Vietnam aboard a Flying Tiger DC-10. Gary began introducing himself to

the stewardesses and crew. "My name is Gary Keller and I am from Yakima." We were on our way to war yet Gary helped make the flight reasonably pleasant. He returned all the money he won in poker games. And if he saw a Marine who seemed nervous, he would start a conversation to cheer them up. As we got off the plane in Da Nang, many of the Marines were pleading with the stewardesses for a last goodbye kiss. They only obliged with a hug. As Gary was leaving the plane, he said goodbye to one of the ladies and then whispered something in her ear. She replied with a kiss on his lips. I would have never believed it if I hadn't seen it; it must have been his charm. There was a staging area in Da Nang for all the new arrivals. Unlike the War in Iraq, we never deployed over as a unit. We went as a group and once there, we were individually assigned units. I was immediately assigned to 2/9, 3rd MarDiv. I lost contact with Gary and never knew what unit he went to.

We arrived in country during some of the fiercest fighting of the Vietnam War. I often wondered how Gary was doing. I figured he would use his charm to survive.

I was wounded during Tet of 68. The million dollar wound got me back to the



L/Cpl Gary D. Keller of H Co., 5th Marines sets up his M-60 overlooking the streets of Hue City

states. While I was recuperating in a military hospital, someone gave me a copy of the May, 1968 issue of Leatherneck Magazine. In it was an article about the Battle of Hue. And there was a picture of Gary giving protection for his men with his M-60 machine gun.

I then learned that he had been assigned to Hotel, 2/5. When I got out of the hospital I wrote Gary a letter. I sent a picture of me,

(Continued on page 31)

Marines in the vehicles and the VC. The 106 gunners, who were truly crack shots, would fire at the snipers, undoubtedly scaring the bejesus out of the truckers, and perhaps erasing a few VC.

The 106 had a .50 caliber rifle on top of the weapon. This was called the minor caliber. The 106 itself, was called the major caliber. The gunner, when he found the target with the minor caliber, would yell, "fire the major caliber." The explosion from the recoilless rifle was like the crack of doom. The difference between the minor caliber and the major caliber was like the difference between a hand grenade explosion and the atom bomb.

We also had a dog which provided some entertainment. The dog was named Boom. Boom, either out of respect for the 106 or after entertainment of the same name which was available for a few piasters from one of the professional women who plied their trade in the village of Nui Kim Son. It was a nice little dog and probably lived its entire life on top of Crow's Nest since

I am sure the OP was occupied by U.S. troops until the pullout. That is not a lot of running room for a dog for an entire lifetime but it probably beat becoming rotisserie dog.

One of the problems with eight Marines on a small piece of real estate was that of field sanitation. This had been temporarily solved by placing a 106 ammo box, with an appropriate hole cut into it, over a shaft in the limestone which was at least 12 to 15 feet straight down. It seemed to angle off to the side after that and we suspected that it continued deep into the mountain. When relieving ones self of C-rats washed down with beer, the alimentary canal produced a product which resounded with a satisfying splat as it bottomed into the abyss of the pit.

In time, the OP, especially at night, became redolent of sewage. As a highly trained second lieutenant, having been a recent graduate of The Basic School, Quantico, Virginia, I resolved to solve this. Someone could have become ill as a result of this situation, or at least gag. Accordingly, I contacted the S-4 on the radio and requested gasoline so that the offending matter could be incinerated. In due time the supply helicopter arrived with its cargo net with four jerry cans of diesel fuel.

It may have been a product of our boredom or the excitement of having something new to accomplish, but in any event, as soon as the cans were unloaded, we removed the ammo box and poured twenty gallons of diesel fuel into the pit. With great anticipation we threw a match into the pit. Nothing.

Then we lit a pack of matches and tossed it into the odoriferous hole. Again — nothing. Then we lit a large splinter from an ammo box and tossed it into the maw. It made a nice little fire for a while but the diesel didn't catch. Next we threw in an illumination grenade. The pit remained as fireless as a tenderfoot with flint and steel. That is when we learned that diesel fuel is very hard to light, at least it was on Crow's Nest. Our disappointment was palpable.

This failure resulted in a radio call to the air officer requesting gasoline. We were informed that the pilots thought gasoline to be unsafe cargo when put in a cargo net which had to be deposited on a narrow rock ledge. If the gasoline can impacted the rock, the whole helicopter would erupt in flame, or so I was told. It was suggested that we should climb down the mountain, walk to the CP, strap a five gallon can of gasoline on a pack frame, and manhandle it up the mountain. This suggestion, it should be noted, came from the air officer.

The situation was becoming one of "welfare for the troops" issue and with all of the indignation that a second lieutenant could muster, I suggested that this was a matter that needed to be kicked upstairs. Eventually, the battalion executive officer came up on the net and we had a serious discussion about field sanitation and the lack of an infantry battalion commander's power to order Marine aviators to do anything.

The following week the cargo helicopter arrived and in the big net I spotted five jerry cans. I knew right away they contained gasoline because the pilot flipped me the bird right before he choppered back to the Marble Mountain Airstrip. I don't know how the battalion got it done but, in any event, we were in business.

Into the abyss went twenty-five gallons of gasoline which mingled with the diesel which had pooled there from the previous week's effort. It was late afternoon. The breeze off the South China Sea rustled the

stick and drying on my hands. I spent a long night that way once. That memory isn't going anywhere. I remember how the night jungle appears almost dream like as the pilot of a Cessna buzzes overhead, dropping parachute flares until morning.

That artificial sun would flicker and make shadows run through the jungle. It was worse than not being able to see what was out there sometimes. I remember once looking at the man next to me as a flare floated overhead. The shadows around his eyes were so deep that it looked like his eyes were gone. I reached over and touched him on the arm; without looking at me he touched my hand. "I know man. I know."

That's what he said. It was a human moment. Two guys a long way from home and scared ****fess. "I know man." And at that moment he did. God I loved those guys. I hurt every time one of them died. We all did despite our posturing. Despite our desire to stay disconnected, we couldn't help ourselves. I know why Tim O'Brien writes his stories. I know what gives Bruce Weigle the words to create poems so honest I cry at their horrible

beauty. It's love. Love for those guys we shared the experience with.

We did our jobs like good soldiers, and we tried our best not to become as hard as our surroundings. We touched each other and said, "I know." Like a mother holding a child in the middle of a nightmare, "It's going to be all right." We tried not to lose touch with our humanity. We tried to walk that line: To be the good boys our parents had raised and not to give into that unnamed thing we knew was inside us all.

You want to know what frightening is? It's a nineteen-year-old-boy who's had a sip of that power over life and death that war gives you. It's a boy who, despite all the things he's been taught, knows that he likes it. It's a nineteen-year-old who's just lost a friend, and is angry and scared and, determined that, "Some ***** is gonna pay." To this day, the thought of that boy can wake me from a sound sleep and leave me staring at the ceiling.

As I write this, I have a picture in front of me. It's of two young men. On their laps are tablets. One is smoking a cigarette. Both stare without expression at the

camera. They're writing letters. Staying in touch with places they would rather be. Places and people they hope to see again. The picture shares space in a frame with one of my wife. She doesn't mind. She knows she's been included in special company. She knows I'll always love those guys who shared that part of my life, a part she never can. And she understands how I feel about the ones I know are out there yet.

The ones who still answer the question, "When were you in Vietnam?" with "Hey, man. I was there just last night."

"The High Ground"
PO Box 457
Neillsville, WI 54456

VIETNAM VETERANS MEMORIAL FUND'S NEWS

Scruggs, Selleck to Unveil New Traveling Museum on March 26

Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund (VVMF) President Jan Scruggs and actor Tom Selleck will unveil the new traveling museum for VVMF's half-scale replica of the Vietnam Veterans Memorial, called The Wall That Heals, in a ceremony on the National Mall at 10:30 a.m. on March 26.



The trailer that houses The Wall That Heals converts into a museum when the Wall panels have been unloaded. Earlier this year, Featherlite Trailers in Cresco, Iowa, retooled the trailer, and Ralph Appelbaum Associates of New York created the new museum exhibits.

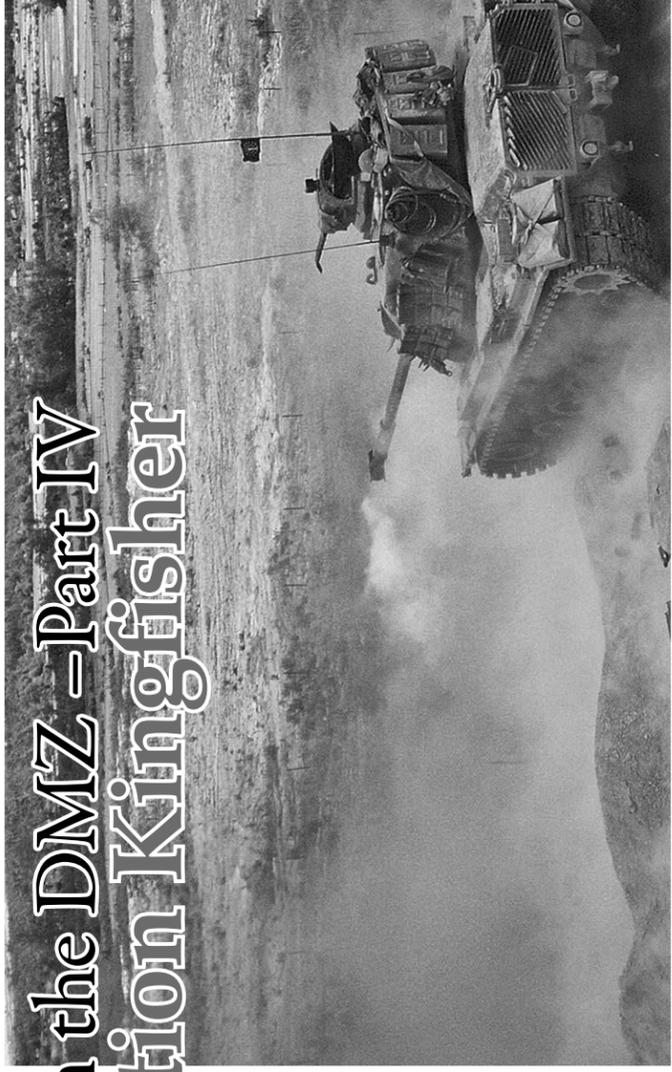
Appelbaum is the same design firm that is creating the exhibits for the Education Center at The Wall, which is being built on the National Mall near the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. In fact, the March 26 unveiling will be held on the site for the Education Center. Tom Selleck recently joined the campaign to build the Center as its national spokesman.

The new exhibits in the traveling museum put faces to the names on The Wall, provide a timeline of key events in the Vietnam War and showcase some of the items that have been left in tribute at The Wall. The March 26 event is free and open to the public.

National sponsors for The Wall That Heals include New Century Transportation Inc., which donated a semi cab; Disabled American Veterans Charitable Trust; Federal Express; GEICO; Harley-Davidson Foundation; and Target Corporation.

Tanks on the DMZ - Part IV Operation Kingfisher

BY JIM COAN



In late summer, 1967, the 3d MARDIV was deeply concerned over intelligence reports that the NVA were intending to resume their earlier attempts to sever the Cam Lo to Con Thien MSR, then launch a major attack on Con Thien. To counter that anticipated attack, the 3d Bn., 26th Marines, which had been operating out of Khe Sanh since June, was relocated into an area three clicks south of Con Thien during the first week in September.

Two companies from 1/9 and tanks from the 2d Platoon of Bravo Company, 3d Tanks, had been patrolling the area for two weeks without contact. The grunts considered the area quiet, nothing was happening there.

Lt. Paul Drnek commanded the four tanks from Bravo's 2d Platoon. He was new to Vietnam and so was his platoon sergeant, Gunnery Sergeant Harold Tatum, who had replaced Gunnery Eckler after the infamous Marketplace Massacre that nearly wiped out B/1/9 on 2 July, 1967.

The Churchyard Battle. On 7 September, a patrol from India Company, 3/26, made contact with the NVA and suffered several casualties in the ensuing firefight. Lt. Drnek's four tanks (three gun tanks and one flame tank) escorted Kilo Company from the churchyard at Nha Tho Bai Son out to retrieve India's casualties and provide an escort back into the churchyard perimeter. Shortly after 1700, the linkup was made and India's

two KIAs were loaded aboard one tank. Kilo Company then abruptly departed, headed back for the churchyard.

The tankers had seen Kilo Company move out, leaving them and India behind. Less than a minute after the last man from Kilo disappeared from sight, all hell broke loose. Several NVA had maneuvered across the trail separating the two companies and opened up with small arms fire and RPGs. A volley of 140mm rockets and 82mm mortars rained down around the tanks. Simultaneously, a probing attack was launched at the 3/26 battalion perimeter back at the churchyard.

Drnek wanted his tanks out of the open. They were drawing fire like magnets. He led them out of the open paddy area about a hundred meters away near a thickly wooded tree line. The tank commander of B-22, Cpl Jack Wilder, radioed that there were 50 NVA on the trail. Gunnery Tatum, new to the platoon and to Vietnam, told Wilder not to fire as those had to be Marines. Cpl Wilder replied: "I know NVA when I see NVA and I'm firin'!" He cut loose with his coaxial .30-caliber machine gun.

The flame tank commander, Cpl Guy Wolfenbarger, came up on the radio shouting: "For Christ's sake, they're all around me!" "Are you sure they're not Marines?" Lt.

Drnek could not fathom that the NVA could be that close to them.

Wolfenbarger replied: "Those are definitely gooners. Can I zap them with the flame?" Lt. Drnek refused that request to fire the flame tank, uncertain as to what it could do, and not willing to risk roasting some Marines on accident. [During an interview conducted years later, both Wolfenbarger and Wilder were adamant that, had Wolfenbarger been allowed to fire his flame tank at that moment, it could have dealt a fatal blow to the NVA and permitted India to load up its casualties on the tanks and make it back to the battalion perimeter.]

Sgt Frank Vining, a tough Irish kid from Boston, exhorted Drnek: "We better get the hell outta this brush. We're sitting ducks." No sooner had he said that than Drnek's tank stopped moving. An RPG had ripped through the engine compartment, taking out the transmission. Drnek and his crew disabled all the radios and weapons on their crippled tank and dispersed themselves among the other two gun tank crews. His two remaining gun tanks plus the flame tank moved over to where India's men were attempting to get organized into a semblance of a defensive perimeter. As night fell, the beleaguered India Company Marines believed the worst was over. They had the

FIELD SANITATION

BY HARRY HOOPER

In mid-September of 1966 I was ordered to an observation post called Crow's Nest. It was on top of Marble Mountain south of the airstrip at Danang. It was the mission of the Crow's Nest observation post to protect the airstrip, and to keep the Viet Cong from damaging the air-conditioned trailers of the aviators, and the nice barracks of their support troops, by firing rockets or mortars at them. The aircraft were a concern also. The mission was to be accomplished by raining artillery fire onto the heads of any VC who had the temerity to attack the big base and the Marine air base which was north and east of the mountain.

Marble Mountain was actually several spindly shafts of rock. The highest one rose 105 meters straight out of the sand just west of the South China Sea and it was upon this rock that the Crow's Nest sat. The mountain was mostly made of marble except that the marble became karst at the higher elevations. The entire mountain was

was quite difficult and entailed shinnying up a hawser for part of the way. At night we would pull the hawser to the top and we felt pretty sure that no VC could get to us, at least not without working up a substantial sweat. Occasionally, at dusk, a sniper would crank off a round or two in our direction and we would answer with a short blast from the M-60. If we were feeling particularly surly, or if a round holed our tin roof, we would reply with a 106 HEAT round.

It did occur to me that my military career would be in serious jeopardy if some enterprising VC got to the top, swung the 106 to the north, and proceeded to blast away at important people's command posts and trailers. Consequently, every time we heard any strange sounds from the side of the mountain we tossed grenades at them.

Days were spent eating, drinking beer, smoking cigarettes, and listening to a tape player which had a single Beatles tape. The album was called "Revolver" and Eleanor Rigby was the featured song, or at least the only one I remember. We must have heard it a thousand times. After enough beer I would actually begin to worry about Eleanor's plight.

On a typical day we would watch air traffic circling and landing at Da Nang. One day we saw a B-52 make an unsuccessful emergency landing. Crow's Nest must have been at least ten miles from the airfield but nevertheless, when the wind was favorable, it was possible to hear C-130's revving up. At night we would watch F-4s and F-105's scream overhead with their afterburners flaring. One night we saw an F-4 get hit by an errant 105 millimeter illumination round and watched in amazement as the pilots parachuted from the plane. More astonishingly, a little Kaman helicopter was there to pick them up almost as soon as they hit the ground.

When vehicles traveled the MSR heading south, to what was then the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines CP, we would watch closely for snipers shooting at them. Occasionally we would see a small firefight between the



Marble Mountain viewed from the China Sea

full of caves and tunnels. Most of them were too small for a man to enter. I think if it had been possible to saw the mountain in half, it would look like a plank eaten by termites.

At the summit was an area which was 20 feet at its widest and in length, it was perhaps

Need a Warrior Be Clothed?

BY BRUCE APELDOORN

The Marine Corps does not own many Tanks. There is but one Battalion in each Division. The only reason the Marine Corps has Tanks is to support infantry operations. Normally a Tank Platoon consisting of 5 tanks is assigned to an Infantry Battalion. The Tank Platoon is then normally split in two with two tanks assigned to one Infantry Company and three to another.

In Vietnam Tanks were used to assault bunker complexes, set in defensive positions as fire support, and escorted early morning sweeps by engineers looking for mines on the roads. It was quite common that the tank crews would move from one duty to another without revisiting their home base for weeks at a time.

The cycle I remember was starting out with a platoon of grunts to head out in search of NVA rocket teams. The Da Nang Air Base during the Tet Offensive of 1968 was under daily attack by these NVA rocket teams. Our job was to leave the CP just before sunset to set up a night long ambush in hopes of being within striking distance of one of these rocket teams as they launched rockets to Da Nang. The following day we would go on a Search & Destroy Mission to search the area for the rocket teams possibly spending another night or two in Indian country trying to stop the rocket attacks. We did have some success but it's hard to be quiet with a Tank.

The Grunts would get a day off but we would get to go on a road sweep. About 3-4 hours of crawling along the road, searching

the tree lines for snipers, while the engineers looked for mines. If they did a good job the road was safe for travel. Convoys could be released and everyone was happy. The road sides showed the results of not sweeping the roads. Burned out trucks, jeeps, and amphibious tractors were easily visible.

That afternoon we had a chance to clean guns, load more ammo, take on fuel and perform lots of tank maintenance. Normally a mid afternoon cat nap was possible. Then it was time to move on for the evening at either a CAP unit or as bridge security.

The CAP unit (Civil Action Platoon) consisted of 2 or 3 Marines with a dozen ARVN soldiers. Their mission was to provide the village with security so Charlie would not take their food, crops, and young men. If there was a potential of the CAP unit being destroyed a couple tanks would be added to the mix for the evening. One evening we took a flame tank with us to burn out snipers on Marble Mountain. Very impressive and effective! In the morning it was another road sweep.

That afternoon it was tank maintenance and off to spend the night with a Grunt platoon at the bridge. We did have a fair amount of action there as the NVA would have loved to take the bridge out. We spent most of the evening watching the river for floating explosives and using our pistols to kill rats attempting to get on the tank to look for food. While this was going on Charlie was setting mines in the road. In the morning we would be sweeping the road and would do our best to locate them.

This cycle finally ended with us sweeping



our way back to our CP where the Tank Company that we belonged to was located (our original starting point). We would again load ammo, fuel up, and get all of the tank maintenance caught up. The prize was that we normally had a steak dinner, a shower, and a full night rest.

I had, like everyone else, been getting by on a couple cat naps per day, eating C-rations and washing out of a helmet. The thought of a steak dinner, a shower and not having to stay up most of the night made the reward worth the past several days.

After eating and hanging around with the guys for a couple hours I decided it was time to hit the showers. It was about 9pm and the sun had just set. We had a hut with a couple 55 gallon drums on top. Plenty of hot water provided by the sun! I just could not wait to get clean. I decided that I was going to wash a couple times and not worry about how much water I used. I completed the first cycle and it was wonderful to see the red water run off me. I then started the second cycle of washing. Got that cloth full of soap and proceeded to work it in from head to toe... then the rockets started hitting the base.

Rockets make a distinctive sound and you can hear them coming. Instinctively I did what every good tank driver does... get to your tank and have it running prior to the rest of the crew arriving. It is a must or they cannot turn on the radios and fire control system (old technology). I slid over the slope plate into the driver's compartment and started the engine just as the rest of the crew showed up. As the rockets were landing we were on our way to our predetermined location on the perimeter to prepare for an NVA attack.

After taking out the mess hall the remaining rockets were not effective. We sat in the tank for the better part of three hours waiting for an attack or more rockets. Neither happened. Finally the all clear was sounded.

We drove back to the Tank Park and shut down for the night. I waited until everyone had gone their merry way before climbing back out. You guessed it... when I left the shower for my tank I took nothing with me but the soap on my back.

I did get a shower and a couple hours sleep before hitting the road again. ♦

tanks with them inside the perimeter, the AO was overhead, and they were boxed in by friendly artillery.

To their great relief, no attack came during the long night. In the morning, Lt. Drnek and his three tanks, loaded down with casualties, stopped to tow his disabled tank. Because the brakes were gone, B-21 was hooked up with crossed tow cables and a rigid tow bar to F-23. As they rolled slowly towards the battalion perimeter at the churchyard, from time to time they stopped to hoist aboard a dead Marine they found lying along the way. Signs of enemy dead were everywhere: blood pools, drag marks, torn equipment and uniforms.

The damaged tank was towed to C-2. His other tanks badly needed to take time to replace their expended ammunition, but Drnek was under orders to make a quick trip and rejoin the battalion.

Into the Valley of Death. On 9 September, the 3/26 Battalion CP was moved another click south to Hill 48. The battalion was moving deeper and deeper into dangerous territory, unaware of the history and reputation of that area labeled Nui Ho Khe on their maps. Only a click or so west of Hill 48 was Hill 70, scene of a fierce battle on 30 March, 1967, involving India 3/9. One Medal of Honor and four Navy Crosses were awarded to India Company Marines after that battle. Another click beyond Hill 70 was Hill 94, scene of another major battle fought by 3/9 Marines on 1 June. BLT 2/3 had also fought several battles in that area during Operation Buffalo in July. Now, two months later, an uninformed 3/26 was sweeping blindly towards the precise area where the 812th NVA Regiment was headquartered.

The battalion objective for 10 September was an elongated hill labeled Nui Ho Khe on their maps, about 1,000 meters southwest of Hill 48. That ridge formed the southern rim of a V-shaped valley bordered on both sides, east and west, by low ridges covered with thick brush and shrubs. Hill 48 sat at the apex of the V. The valley floor had once held a dozen acres of rice paddies, now overgrown with weeds and bushes.

Lima Company led the battalion march south that morning. A platoon sergeant who had just returned from a water detail approached the CO and said, "Skipper, I smell gooks out there in those rice paddies." He was dismissed jokingly as having something stronger than water in his canteens. India Company followed behind Lima. Kilo Company and the Battalion CP group remained at Hill 48 with the two Ontos as rear guard. Lt. Drnek's three tanks moved out last with Mike Company.

Later that afternoon, as Lima and India Companies were setting in atop the ridge at Nui Ho Khe, they came under ground attack. The CO of Lima requested that Drnek's tanks be released to come to their location for support. The two gun tanks and the flame tank had made it half way to Lima's position when Drnek's tank, B-22, broke a track. The platoon maintenance man, Sgt. Charles Witkamp, informed Lt. Drnek the track would take a while to repair, so Drnek sent his other two tanks on ahead.

Meanwhile on the ridge, Lima and India were drawing up into mutually supporting defensive perimeters, preparing for the worst. At about 1700, the astonished Marines on Nui Ho Khe could not believe their eyes. "The rice paddy stood up!" recalled one Marine. A young corporal with India Company jumped up and yelled, "God, the whole mountain is coming!" A full battalion of NVA, hundreds of them, rose in unison from their hiding places in the paddy and charged directly at the two companies of Marines holding the ridge, coming at them in waves. Every Marine with a weapon opened up. India's CO later recalled: "It was like shooting bears in a shooting gallery, only as soon as we shot one, two more seemed to take his place." A flight of F-4 Phantoms arrived on site and dropped bombs and napalm on the west ridge where the NVA had four .51-Cal. machine guns emplaced.

The FAC, Lt. Zappardino recalled: "Some of the young Marines broke and ran. Bob Stimson (India's XO) was on them right away, shaking the shit out of them, grabbing them. Stimson got them straightened right out and back

in their fighting holes."

A little cheer went up from the lines when the two tanks arrived at Lima's position. They were going to save the day. The lead tank, B-25, commanded by Gunny Tatum, went part way up the hill and turned back towards the paddies. A 90mm HE round exploded out of his main gun, then the tank's machine guns opened up and dozens of NVA were mowed down. Fifty meters behind the gun tank and lower down on the hill was the flame tank, F-23, commanded by Cpl Guy Wolfenbarger. His gunner, L/Cpl Wayne Chapman, was working the .30-cal. coaxial machine gun back and forth across the paddies. Wolfenbarger alternately fired his .50-caliber and an M-79 grenade launcher at the charging NVA.

Seconds later, a tremendous explosion occurred. Smoke and flames shot out of B-25's turret. First one, then a second tanker dropped to the ground on fire. Nearby grunts rolled them on the ground attempting to extinguish the flames. Others risked their lives to climb atop the flaming tank and throw down cases of ammo stacked on the tank. Gunny Tate and his loader, Cpl Gary "Whitey" Young, had been critically burned when an RPG penetrated the turret and detonated a white phosphorous round in the ammunition ready rack. PFC James Wilson, the gunner, was killed instantly.

Instead of abandoning his fiercely burning tank, L/Cpl Louis Ryle risked his own life by remaining in his driver's seat, despite the searing heat behind him in the fire-engulfed turret, and shifted the tank into reverse, bravely backing down the hill to protect nearby infantry from the tank's exploding ammunition.

Cpl Wolfenbarger's flame tank machine gun was firing so fast and furious that the barrel turned cherry red. He was getting ready to fire the flame tank when B-25, smoke and flames boiling up out of the turret hatches, rolled to a stop near the flame tank. Wolfenbarger recalled what happened next: "I saw NVA running between me

and B-25. I saw what appeared to be two glowing footballs coming at me in slow motion. The whole tank rocked. Both RPGs hit the tank, one of them setting the secondary fuel line on fire. We all bailed out. Ryle, the driver on B-25, and my crew ran up the hill and jumped into a bomb crater holding five or six other Marines. The only weapon I had was my .45 pistol with one clip."

Seconds after Cpl Wolfenbarger and his tankers made it to the bomb crater, F-23 exploded in a fiery conflagration. The tankers and grunts huddled in stunned resignation as the two tanks burned while the fighting raged around them.



Back at Hill 48, the Battalion CP was also under attack. Major Mundy (later Commandant of the Marine Corps) sent for the two Ontos and had them move into the lines with Kilo Company. One Ontos opened fire with its machine gun, "mowing down those rows of NVA like he was chopping corn," later recalled the company gunny. Just as he fired a salvo of 106mm rounds into the massed enemy, a close-in RPG team fired a round which struck beside the driver and ricocheted into the Ontos commander, Sgt Leroy Davis, Jr., killing him instantly.

The second Ontos, commanded by L/Cpl Randall Browning, moved forward without hesitation, realizing they were the only tracked vehicle still running. Despite being wounded earlier by artillery shrapnel, Browning maneuvered his vehicle through intense hostile fire to a firing position. He would fire, duck behind a hill and reload, then pull forward and fire again. His flechette and HE rounds took out many of the attackers. When all of his ammunition was expended, Browning manned a sub-machine gun and continued to deliver devastating fire on the enemy. He would later receive the Navy Cross.

Drnek's tank crewmen soon realized that Mike Company had pulled back towards Hill 48 with no warning, leaving them unguarded. They dropped the breach on B-22 and removed all

the machine gun firing pins, then they bailed out and sprinted towards the nearest Marine unit they could see, shouting: "Don't shoot! We're Marines! Don't shoot!" The tankers all scrambled safely back into Mike's perimeter.



The two critically burned tankers, GySgt Tatum and Cpl Young, lay on a poncho in agony all night. No one could do anything for them as it was deemed too dangerous to bring in a helicopter on the hill. Everyone remembered what had happened to the last helicopter that had tried to land there.

The grunts were getting nervous about the gun tank parked in front of their lines. Flames were still visible from inside the turret, causing the .50-cal. to cook off a round now and then. Someone even reported NVA climbing around on the tank. A rocket man took a LAAW down the hill and attempted to blow up the tank. That seemed to make sense at the time to the starving, dehydrated, battle-fatigued grunts on the line. His LAAW ricocheted off the turret, doing no damage.

Enemy activity became less noticeable with each passing hour. Both groups, Lima-India and Hill 48, were boxed in by artillery and illumination rounds all night. At first light, Lt. Drnek returned to his abandoned tank, relieved that the NVA had not bothered it during the night. His crew got the track fixed on B-22 and started up the engine. Of the four tanks he had started out with on 7 September, only one was still operable.

At mid-morning, a tank retriever and two amtracs arrived. The recovery team leader determined that B-25 was still driveable, even though the turret was burned out. But the flame tank was deemed a total loss. Airstrikes were called in to bomb what remained of the flame tank. The retriever and two amtracs, loaded with wounded men and their equipment, made a hasty exit for C-2 as incoming artillery began impacting nearby. Ryle and Wolfenbarger got B-25 started and drove it to C-2, but Ryle did not stop there. He drove his tank all the

way to Bravo Company headquarters at Camp Carroll, barreling through every Marine guard post and security gate along the way



The 10 September battle had cost the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines 34 Marines and Corpsmen killed and 192 wounded. From 7 September through the 10th, that battalion, plus attached tank and Ontos crewmen, had suffered the loss of 56 killed and 290 wounded. Both burned tankers survived through the night and were medevaced out to the hospital ship *Repose*. Gunnery Sergeant Harold D. Tatum succumbed to his burns on 21 September, 1967. He was awarded a Silver Star posthumously. Corporal Gary Young died on September 20, 1967, also on the *Repose*.

A photo reconnaissance flight during the night of 10 September brought back photos showing more than 300 NVA bodies lying on the battlefield. The official count 3/26 sent up channels was 144 NVA KIA. Major Mundy insisted on reporting what was actually counted. The battalion would enjoy a brief respite at Camp Evans to refit and rebuild, then return again to the DMZ war a few months later, this time at Khe Sanh.

Sources for this article were: James Coan, *Con Thien: The Hill of Angels* (Univ. of Alabama Press, 2004); Eric Hammel, *Ambush Valley* (Presidio Press, 1990); Richard Camp, Lima-6 (McMillan, 1989); and, Guy Wolfenbarger, Jack Wilder and Charles Witkamp.

*Anyone who knows Louis Ryle is asked to contact him and ask if he was ever formally recognized for backing his burning tank down that hill to protect nearby infantry from exploding ammunition. If Ryle's act of heroism was never recognized, Jim Coan wants to organize a committee of USMCVTA members to pursue the awarding of a Silver Star to L/Cpl Ryle. ♦

THREE FINGERS

BY 1ST LT. DICK PEKSENS

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

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

During my second week, the bridge along Route 4 that was in close proximity to us was being hit by a sapper squad and we received an immediate call to provide illumination. As you may recall, the illumination round requires three entries; namely, declination and azimuth of the gun tube, bags of powder for elevation and distance, and a manual setting for the timer fuse. Being a rookie, I "eyeballed" the direction, added two bags of powder to the tube and set the timer. We fired and then began looking skyward for the



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

I shared a bunker on the south finger with an E-5 who was my acting staff sergeant. I've forgotten his name, but he was built like the great Cleveland Browns football great Jimmy Brown and exuded confidence to match my trepidations. On the north finger, I had three Ontos situated for offensive and defensive fields of fire. We also surrounded our outpost with 55-gallon drums of "foo-gas" (a mixture of napalm and diesel which could be ignited with detcord. Our main mission was to observe enemy movement during the day and to quickly return 106mm fire in the event that we observed enemy rocket launches at night. Each of the two occupied fingers had about four well fortified bunkers. I rarely slept inside the bunker because it was infested

illumination to begin. Unfortunately, our aim was perfect but our timer calculation was incorrect. As a result, the illumination round hit within a few meters of the bridge and completely illuminated the grunts rather than the intended enemy. Needless to say, we were not asked to "fire for effect"! The next morning we were surprised by the visit of a Marine captain in a jeep with a driver and his gunny. The captain had asked to be directed to the individual in charge of the mortar and I meekly came forward expecting a verbal assault. In fact, he said nothing, but ordered the gunny to put my mortar and rounds into the back of his jeep. Without a word, they departed.

One night, a few weeks later, my E-5 informed me that our two man listening post had spotted movement directly in front of them outside our east perimeter. I grabbed a M-79 "Blooper" and proceeded to the perimeter where I intended to lob a round over the heads of our OP to inflict maximum hurt on the intruders. I warned the OP to keep their heads down and launched an HE round estimating the proper elevation of the barrel. To my shock, the HE round hit exactly at the location of my listening post. My whole career flashed through my mind as I saw myself standing before my inevitable courts-martial. I was frozen and unable to radio my obviously wounded men below. Suddenly, to my utter surprise, the men came crawling through the concertina wire having been spooked to retreat by the proximity of the sappers. I had escaped prosecution and probably scared away the sappers through pure serendipity. All this goes to show why second lieutenants are never given more than a Colt .45 and K-Bar during combat! ♦

A Most Unforgettable Character

BY: JIM COAN

When I first arrived at Con Thien on 10 September, 1967, I took over the 1st Platoon of Alpha Company, 3d Tanks, relieving 2/Lt Tom Barry who had received two Purple Hearts in a matter of weeks. Con Thien was being shelled daily by artillery, rockets, and mortars fired from hidden positions in the DMZ. Life in the “V” Ring was perilous, to say the least.

One tanker who stood out from the rest was L/Cpl Albert Trevail, a 24-year-old Canadian citizen. I thought that was truly ironic, a Canadian crossing the border to join the Marines and fight in Vietnam. Bert was about 6’2” and 190 pounds, with a red mustache and mischievous blue eyes that twinkled when he spoke. He had prior service in the Canadian Army, then attended college for a few years in Canada before joining the USMC. Bert was the first one to officially welcome me to the platoon. As I entered the tanker’s bunker, he stabbed a bayonet into a can of warm beer, offered me a swig which I gladly accepted, and said with a heavily Canadian accent, “Welcome to the fightin’ first, sir!” It was not exactly the kind of warm welcome this green, rookie LT had anticipated.

Bert Trevail served with me the entire 10 months I was out in the field with 1st Platoon. He was a fearless warrior who relished combat and loved being a Marine tanker. I knew he could always be counted on to come through in a pinch. And he was smart.

L/Cpl Trevail played chess. When we had lots of down time sitting in fixed positions during the monsoons, Bert would tuck his chessboard under his arm and go calling on a nearby attached unit. “Anyone here care for a game of chess?” he would ask innocently. Invariably, a bored officer would take him up on the challenge, then later regret it. Bert never lost a chess match the entire time I knew him.

Once in the spring of ’68, Trevail (then a corporal and a tank commander) led a tank/infantry reaction force out from Con Thien

from division headquarters came out in the field and checked all of the battalion’s tank radios. I learned many years later, as a result of requesting my Service Records through the Freedom of Information Act, that the inspectors stated 1st Tank Platoon of Alpha Company had the best maintained radios in 3d Tank Battalion. Thank you, Bert.

I paid Bert back after Operation Thor in the summer of ’68. During a tank/infantry attack in the DMZ, one of 1st Platoon’s tanks was inadvertently driven down into a 2,000 pound bomb crater. The entire attack came to a halt as incoming mortars rained down on us. No way was I about to leave my tank while those mortars were falling, no matter how much the grunt CO was cursing at us @#&! tankers over the net. Then, as I looked out of my cupola vision blocks, I could not believe my eyes. There was Trevail standing fully exposed out in the open, helping ground guide that tank out of the bomb crater. I wrote him up for a Bronze Star, which he subsequently received.

A few years ago, while conducting research for my book on Con Thien, I hooked up again with Bert Trevail. He was a retired master sergeant then, teaching computer science at a high school in the Sacramento area. It wasn’t really a surprise to learn that he was a computer expert. I could have predicted that. ♦



Cpl Albert “Bert” Trevail is the second person from the right just behind the shoulder of S/Sgt. Woodard on the far right with hand on hip. On the far left is Lt. Jim Coan with hands on knees. Way in the very back, with glasses on, is the head of John Wear.

VACATIONING IN THE RIVIERA 1969

BY DICK PEKSENS

report on our imminent attack, we learned that we were the victims of HI fire from a local 105 mm battery. After the incoming ceased, we began crawling out of the turrets to assess the damage. Miraculously, only a few grunts had been wounded and most of their companions had crawled under the protection of the undersides of our M48’s. Had our tanks not been there, I’m sure that the grunts would have taken at least 50% casualties as the air-burst were directly overhead lasting two or three minutes.

On another occasion, we were crossing a small tributary just south of Marble Mountain adjacent to a CAP village called Nui Kim Sahn. We had witnessed a number of amtracs hitting mines at this crossing point because it was a common route for to and from their BN HQ. The soil was unusually soft. Before allowing my vehicles to cross the river, I played John Wayne and waded across to probe for mines on the other side. Satisfied that my EOD training had not been in vain, I called my tank across with Corporal Aikens at the wheel. I was being cautious since a month earlier, we had hit a mine which blew Aikens from his driver’s seat as we were moving to our nighttime position.

Aikens drove the tank slowly across the river and just as the tank started out of the water, a large mine went off throwing me about 20 feet from the slope plate. Corporal

Aikens was again blown out of his driver’s seat landing 10 feet away from the tank. My helmet ended up in the river and my flack jacket was chock-full of shrapnel. I had been sandblasted, punctured an eardrum, and had only received a small piece of shrapnel in a forearm. The sprocket and a roadwheel had been blown off the left side of the tank along with a section of track. I looked up to see that I was surrounded by Marines from both our group and the local CAP unit. They couldn’t believe that my driver and I had survived essentially unscathed. After dusting myself off, we called for a retriever and were towed to our CP. I had our corpsman remove the piece of shrapnel from my arm and went to 1st Med the next day for my blown eardrum. They gave me an earplug and eardrops (no Purple Heart) and told me to avoid loud noises for a few weeks until the membrane repaired. It was then I took an opportunity to take R&R in Australia.

Sometime later I was leading another platoon for a day operation in the Riviera. The three tanks stopped by a river where a company of marines from 2/1 were stationed. Suddenly there was a loud explosion from within the company CP and I ran to see what had happened. Somebody, perhaps attempting to relieve themselves, had tripped a large boobytrap within the company compound. I soon learned that it

was Lt Puller, Chesty Puller's son, who had graduated a few months behind me from OCS. He had lost three limbs and was a bloody mess. A number of marines were applying tourniquets to his limbs and trying to get him onto a stretcher. I remember he kept saying "Don't tell my dad" as they transported him to the medevac site. I was sure that he wouldn't make it to 1st Med or the Sanctuary. Many years later, when living in Norfolk, Virginia, I was amazed that he had not only survived but had successfully run for the state legislature.

Following this incident, our tanks prepared to cross the river. Corporal Aikens, my driver, waddled across the 30 foot span and found that the water was no deeper than about 4 feet which we could traverse. We started to cross with a grunt in front of each tank, but when we got to midstream, we started listing to port and "sinking". Apparently, the left track had run into a large bomb crater and we were rapidly going under. I looked down and saw water at the level of our breach and my gunner and loader had already taken refuge outside the turret. As the tank continued to sink, I was worried about Corporal Aikens who by now had to be 4 feet under water. After what seemed many minutes, he finally surfaced for air. I asked why he was down so long? He said he was holding his breath trying to put the tank into reverse. Who says Marines can't multitask? At any rate, the engine died with only the turret and the surface mounted 50 cal above the water line.

We then ran two cables to one of the other tanks and tried to pull the tank from its watery grave. After this failed, we hooked up a second tank to form a Conga line—and this too failed. We then called back to Charlie Company asking for the retriever. It came near dusk escorted by two other tanks. Looking across the river, I noted 2 to 3 NVA on a sand dune about half a click away watching our predicament. We didn't want to fire on them for fear that they could be a significant nuisance to our tank retrieval, but it gave us good reason to hustle with the extraction. When the retriever arrived, it hooked into the Conga line. The three tanks and retriever were slowly able to pull the submerged tank from its would be grave. With the

line of tracked vehicles, we started back for the MSR without the ability to make any major turns. This proved interesting when we found ourselves heading directly for an occupied vil where a number of papasans were frantically waving us away. It was growing dark and we had no time to banter with the locals and proceeded to run our daisy chain directly through and over a number of hooches—so much for winning the hearts and minds of the people! I believe that I may still hold the record for sinking a tank in Vietnam.



Dick Peksen's tank, *Deaths Dealer*, had a unique decoration

A 1st Marine company near the leper colony, in the Riviera, had been under heavy fire for a number of days and actually had NVA crawling into their fighting holes. The grunts had asked if tanks could be sent to protect their tenuous position. Subsequently, we left our CP with three tanks and grunts aboard to reinforce the marines under siege. We needed to make a stop along the beach when a marine with active diarrhea had fallen off the back of a tank while trying to relieve himself and ended with a compound leg fracture. When we arrived at the company CP, we noticed that our positions would be less than ideal. On the west side of our slightly elevated position was thick underbrush which approached to within ten meters of our tanks and there was no deflade for any of the vehicles. We positioned one tank pointing south, another north and one west. During the day, we noted NVA running across the open access road leading to the beach. They were traveling in small groups which gave the grunts no time to fire before they scampered into the

pine copses 200 meters from our positions. As soon as it began getting dark, we started getting blooper rounds within our perimeter. We responded with our own blooper and grenades but failed to silence the harassment. Next, we started getting RPG fire aimed mainly at the south-facing tank, which was the most exposed. The TC, Sgt Hoch, came to me and asked if he could pull back as he had taken several close calls. Unfortunately, pulling back would not have changed his exposed nature.

The NVA were also getting onto our frequencies and we were forced to change more than once. The more the night extended, the closer it felt like we would be overrun. We had dug holes under the back of our tanks to keep two crewmembers safe while the remaining two manned the guns. At one time, Sgt Hoch's crew had come over to my tank to check frequencies and received some blooper shrapnel as a reward. They simply pulled out the small pieces and went about their business.

I finally came up with a possible solution for spoiling the NVA plans. I planned for each tank to fire three "shotgun" rounds simultaneously and at the same time spreading the rounds out across the front of each tank cover our entire perimeter. I checked with the grunt CO and he agreed to the plan and arranged for his men to move back parallel to the tanks at the appointed time. At the given hour, we let loose with the shotgun rounds. Trees, shrubs, and our own concertina went flying through the air and we received only sporadic return fire which lasted only a few minutes. The next morning, we found numerous blood trails within feet of our concertina wire. An RPG had been abandoned a few feet outside the wire in front of Sgt Hoch's tank and a dead water buffalo was found about 100 meters away with an NVA heavy MG trapped underneath the carcass. There was no doubt an attack was in the making. Because of the lack of

cover, we were forced to leave the next day after helping to clear good lines of fire by flattening the trees and shrubs with our tanks and an accompanying blade tank.

On the way back to the beach, we passed directly through the leper colony and were amazed by the view of children and adults living in grass huts, missing limbs, and seemingly without medical help. We, of course, were happy to be in one piece. Amazingly, when we returned to the CP, we found that our CO had taken

heat from a senior officer for not clearing our fire mission through the FDC (Fire Direction Control) bunker...apparently he had us confused with artillery!

I would leave Charlie Company to become an Onto's platoon leader at an outpost called Three Fingers along the route from Da Nang to Hill 10 and Hill 55. I followed that assignment by assuming the position of "second" Bravo Company XO at An Hoa. Bravo Company had a "real" XO on Hill 55 with

the 7th Marines, but the distance to our two platoons (and sometimes three when reinforced by HQ platoon from BN) was too great. An Hoa required a person to interface with the Command Bunker of the 5th Marines. Later, during an extension, I would return to Charlie Company as XO during our move to LZ Ross and Baldy, but those are stories for another time.

Dick Peksens
1st Lt USMCR

Chico

BY LLOYD G. "PAPPY" REYNOLDS

I was first introduced to Chico in early 1967. At this time Bravo Company was at Hill 55 and Staff Sergeant (Buddha) Clark was our Maintenance



Chief. I had known "Buddha" at Bravo Company, 1st Tanks back at Camp Pendleton in 1962-63.

Chico lived in the Maintenance tent and as I recall rode on the Company Retriever "Bodacious Bastard".

That was "His" turf and you had to make friends with him if you wanted or needed to enter his turf. This was usually done by first being introduced to him by someone that "He" already knew. Then an offering was made in the form of something "He" liked, usually food or something similar.

From me it turned out that the little shit liked "Shaving Cream" or "Cigarette's". So when ever I visited the maintenance area I had to offer up the goodies or be promptly searched for them.

Here Chico is going through my pocket looking for Cigarette's that he can smell. No, he didn't smoke or shave, he just liked to eat the shaving cream and cigarettes.

It turned out that Chico hated Vietnamese. I don't know why, but if any came into the area they were promptly attacked. And Chico had some very sharp teeth.

"He" was also a great "Snake" alarm. If there were any snakes in the area, Chico was usually the first one to sound the alarm.

I don't know where Chico came from or how Bravo Company got him and I don't know what became of him either.

My Platoon moved out to An Hoa and the Company moved up north. When we caught up with the Company up at Camp Carroll, Chico was gone. Scuttlebutt had it that he had his tail shot off and even presented a "Purple Heart"; I also heard that he had been killed but no details. I thought he had died of the "shits" due to all the weird things he ate. ♦