



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

## Today and Yesteryear...

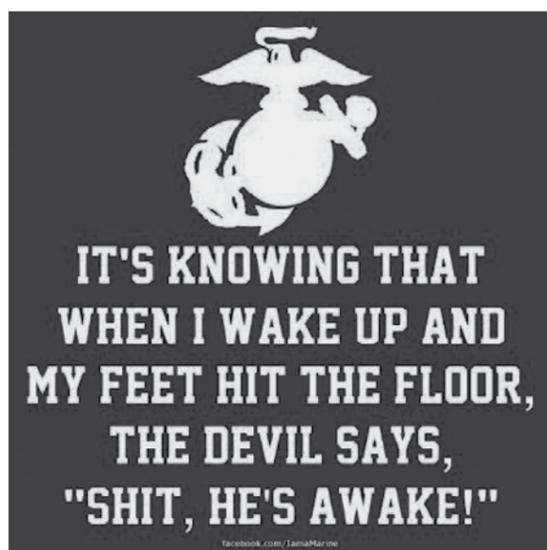


*Featured Stories:*

- Remembering Bob Minetto..... Page 24
- 90 Days a Grunt ..... Page 27
- Remington Raiders ..... Page 31



**TANKERS CREED**  
 The tanker, that dusty, crusty,  
 Grease covered, unshaven,  
 oversexed,  
 Underrated little dip, who can take  
 A tank and do more battlefield  
 Damage in ten minutes than a  
 grunt squad can do all day!  
 Maj Gene "Dunk" Duncan



## Letter from the President

### RANDOM THOUGHTS:

1. I love the expression: "The United States Marine Corps is a drug and I am a recovering addict."
2. We ran an ad in the last issue of this magazine for the VTA "sprocket and track" medallions. I am pleased to announce that they are SOLD OUT.
3. In just 17 months we will be meeting & greeting in St Louis for our 2017 reunion!!!
4. Please join me in welcoming Jim Coan, Bill Davis and Jim Raasch to the Board of Directors.
5. There seems to be some confusion: The list of KIA names that appeared on Page 11 of the most recent issue is where we are looking for missing photos for the "Faces on the Wall" project at the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. Any names of KIA's that seem to be omitted from that list are names that the VVM already has a photo. So, if you happen to have a photo of any of the names that are on that list, please forward it to me.
6. Inside of the Welcome Bags at the 2015 DC reunion we stuck a Sponson Box Questionnaire. Just in case that it was not obvious, we wanted to find out if there were a good amount, not enough or too many articles of different subjects published. We also asked for suggestions as to how to improve the magazine. The vast majority of respondents said, "Everything is OK", which is good in one way but it did not offer up any suggestions of how to improve your magazine. There was even one comedian who suggested that an improvement would be to include naked photos of me. The few folks who did offer up a suggestion or two indicated that we need more stories about tankers of yesterday and today. That suggestion falls right back on the membership: Where are your stories? You want more stories, then you have to share yours with us.
7. A comment that we continue to see on the email grapevine is that there are too many stories published here that are about 3rd Tanks and far too few stories about 1st Tanks. We have to remind everyone that there are roughly 500 names listed on the VTA membership roster. Of that number, 244 (or 48%) list 3rd Tanks or 3rd ATs as their Vietnam unit. And another 256 (or 51%) list 1st Tanks or 1st ATs as their unit. And yes, there are some who list 5th Tanks for their time in-country, but the membership is virtually split down the middle between the two tank battalions. QUESTION: So, where are the stories from 1st Tanks?
8. Ten of the 20 personal histories that we recorded during the 2015 reunion in Washington, DC, are up and ready for viewing on the VTA website.

Refer to: <http://www.usmcvta.org/members-stories/video-interviews>

*John*

"Of the four wars in my lifetime, none came about because the U.S. was too strong."

Ronald Reagan



### Executive Directors

**John Wear, President**

5537 Lower Mountain Road; New Hope, PA 18938  
(215) 794-9052 · E-mail: johnwear2@verizon.net

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

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

**Bruce Van Apeldoorn, Treasurer**

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

**Ronald C. Knight, Secretary**

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

### Directors

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

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

**Carl Fleischman**

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

**Fred Kellogg**

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

**Robert H. Vaxter**

45749 Prairiegrass Court; Belleville, MI 48111-6428  
(734) 385-6395 Email: rvaxter47@yahoo.com

**Pete Ritch**

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

**Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri**

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

**Greg Martin**

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

**James (Jim) P. Coan**

15374 East Lantana Drive, [Sierra Vista, AZ 85650-5401  
]Phone: 520-378-9659 Email: zjjmco@aol.com

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

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

**Jim Raasch**

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

### Committees & Chairmen

**SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll**

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

**Bruce Van Apeldoorn**

Audit & Finance  
585-613-6564 EST

**CWO4 Bob Embesi**

CRCS/CR Representative  
406-821-3075 MS

**Joe Liu**

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

**Ron Knight**

Member Data Integrity  
770-623-9237 EST

**1st Sgt. Rick Lewis**

VA Information  
VTA History Project  
858-735-1772 PST

**Bob Peavey**

Fallen Heroes  
770-365-3711 EST

**Pete Ritch**

VTA History Project  
850-734-0014 EST

**Jim Coan**

Scholarship Committee  
Phone: 520-378-9659 PST  
Email: zjjmco@aol.com

**Greg Martin**

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

Web Site: www.usmcvta.org

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

Tuyen Pham - Layout and Design

Sandra Coan - Proofing

Printed in the USA

### New Members

**McKee, David E**

PO Box 2041

Richland, WA 99352

Phone: 509-947-7384

Email: mac48a3@gmail.com

A Co, 3rd Tanks, '69 - '70

MOS: 1811

DOB: ???

Recruited by: Jan "Turtle" Wendling

**McKeown, Tom**

612 Morgan Drive East

Coatesville, PA 19320-2241

Phone: 610-383-7133

Email: marinepiper@comcast.net

H&S Co, 1st Amtrac Bn, '61 - '62

MOS: 2533

DOB: 6/27/42

Wife: Nancy

Recruited by: Joe Tyson

**Thoms, Guy E.**

439 S. Pin High Drive

Pueblo West, CO 81007-6036

Phone: 719-331-9648

Email: guy.thoms@yahoo.com

B Co, 3rd Tanks, '68 - '69

MOS: 2111

DOB: 2/28/50

Wife: Susan

Recruited by: Guy Everest

**Trantham, Janice W.**

2 Pershing Road

Asheville, NC 28805

Phone: 828-299-0221

Email: jantran@carter.net

Honorary Member-Wife of KIA Ken Bradley

Recruited by: Bob Peavey

### MEMBER INFO CHANGES

**Richard (Rick) Beirne**

Email: rick.beirne@aecom.net

**Steve Curti**

Email: stpcurt@gmail.com

**Steve Patton**

Email: rosecreek2@comcast.net

**Willard (Bill) Lochridge**

6400 Montvale Ct.

Charlotte, NC 28226

Phone: (980) 237-9582

**Dave Woodward**

Phone: (360) 574



**FRONT COVER PHOTO:**

(Left) An M-1 Abrams tank; (Right) A British Mark V "Landship" tank from WW 1

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### More on the Harold Riensche Story

I know there will be stories in the next issue of the "Sponsor Box" submitted by members to discuss to their best memories, the Harold Riensche retriever ambush incident of March 24, 1969. I kept a Vietnam Tanker's diary which gave me some more clarity and actually filled in some questions for me.

For me, I had ALWAYS wanted to let Harold know ( he didn't know) that we got his radio transmission and that three tanks from my First Platoon, Bravo Company led by Al Soto in F-22, (Larry Parshall and I were in the second tank, not sure who in the third tank ) tried to IMMEDIATELY make it to his position near Gio Linh that early evening in reaction to his ambush situation. We left the Bravo Company CP at Vinh Dai at full speed. Then, two of our three reaction tanks had mine hits 400 meters from his position/ambush site. Larry Parshall took care of getting the tanks buttoned up while columns of ARVN'S passed us in the dark returning to their outpost at Gio Linh, refusing our request for some security for the tanks.

At our recent reunion, we (Harold, Pete Ritch, Mike Bolenbaugh and myself) discussed and taped some of this general feedback on the incident and it's available on the USMVCVTA.ORG website.

Harold had mentioned during the taping/ video that he remembers receiving a radio transmission that a reaction force couldn't get to him until the next day. My platoon member, radio repairman and most capable gunner, Mike Bolenbaugh, also remembers that transmission given over the radio.

After talking with Larry Parshall last night, he reminded me that half of our platoon with APC's was left at the outpost Gio Linh with Gunny Burr while we ( the other half) were at Vinh Dai repairing tanks.

So, that radio transmission came from Mike Bolenbaugh up at Gio Linh telling Harold that THEY couldn't get to him until the next day.... Clears thing up some more! Thanks to John Wear and the USMVCVTA organization for providing the forum to help clear up these incidences in war.

Bottom line, it's good to open up and talk and keep talking about this stuff that interests all of us as Veterans.

An additional benefit—no chronic Alzheimer disease going on here!

God Bless Harold Riensche!!!

God Bless the USMC!!!

Bob Skeels

### PHOTO ID



Laura Riensche wrote: We have the original photo that you used for the article. When Andy Anderson called this evening to tell Harold that he thinks he did an excellent job on his recollection of March 24, 1969, Andy wondered why the man on the left was listed as "Unknown". That is Ricky Sermons. So it goes L to R: Ricky Sermons, Harold Riensche and John Harper.

### A Note Left At The Vietnam Wall

My Dearest Son: Today, I am coming to see your name on the "Wall." I haven't been ready until now but I knew I must see it before I die. I miss you so much. I think of you every day. You had so much of life to live and your life was taken so quickly. With a lump in my throat and teary eyes, I am on my way. I wanted to bring your teddy bear but just couldn't part with it. Instead I brought your first sweater. You are always in my heart. How I love you! God be with you 'til we meet again.

Love Mom

>>

### Does Anyone have a Tape Recorder?

I recently came across some 3" tapes that I sent home from Vietnam. Is there some way I can get a request out to the membership to buy or borrow a 3" reel to reel recorder to listen to these tapes and determine which ones I might like to convert to disk?

Dave Lenox  
Tucson, AZ  
Phone: (520) 269-7169

### From Dave Danner

You could say my tour as a Marine started when I was in the 4th grade. There was a small branch library near my school on the west side of Sioux City, and it was there that I had been checking out all sorts of books during the year. As luck would have it, I checked out a book on Medal of Honor winners from the war while the Victory at Sea series was running on television. It was from this book that I read about John Basilone who won a Medal of Honor with the 7th Marines on an island called Guadalcanal.

Having been born on the West Coast during the war, all of this stuck with me. When I got my induction notice in the

fall of 1964, there was just no way I was going in the Army. The Marine recruiter then sealed the deal and signed me to a 3-year enlistment. I rotated into Vietnam with BLT 3/3 and a platoon of tanks from C Co. after sitting in the South China Sea for a month. From our landing at Dong Ha in October 1966, I was then assigned to A Co. as a 2141 and relocated to Camp Carroll.

I got back stateside at the end of October 1967 and was discharged the following January at Camp Pendleton. My stint with the FMF was everything I expected and I still feel I owe a lot to those who fought World War II, my father included. I have been in Iowa City ever since where I finished school and finally found a job with the City in 1979. I drive a transit bus for them and handle well over 100 people a day, from all over the world, within Iowa City.

If I learned anything at all from Vietnam, it is that politics changes almost everything that you would expect from life. I feel fortunate to have found a steady job. I was married and divorced and have a grown daughter. I would not trade my experience in the Marine Corps for anything and they are not kidding anyone, they are the finest.

Semper Fi

Dave Danner

ceptionally good shape after 47 years. Long story short, I got my ass chewed over those names on the gun tubes. They asked me, "What to hell were you thinking about?" And then they said something about my competence as a section leader and politely ordered me to have the names removed. My memory is not that good anymore, but I think we only had the names on the tubes for a couple of days before they noticed it and they blew a head gasket. I believe I was against the new names that were being suggested by you and the other guys, but I was coerced into allowing it after listening to chants of "POO-POO HEAD IS A CHICKEN SHIT" and other assaults against my character that are too crude to mention in an e-mail. Anyway, we returned F-13 to "HOT STUFF" but I don't remember what we put on F-12. Well, that's my story and I'm stickin' to it. Semper Fi Marines... Poo-Poo Head-Out.

P.S. Actually I really can't remember much about the incident except for the ass chewin'. Looking back now, it was pretty stupid stuff but I guess that's the way the adolescent mind works. Of course, we just thought the lifers were up tight. The part about them rethinking my competence to be Flame Section Leader is true. I was a lance corporal with two years in the Corps when the then current Flame Section Leader was rotating home. They were faced with a dilemma. No one in Alpha Company knew anything about a flame tank but me. (Actually the legendary Flame Man, Ray Drews, was there too but they had their reasons for not choosing him and he really didn't want it). I had spent my first year in the Corps in the Flame Section of H&S Company, 2nd Tanks at Camp LeJeune, so I had some actual on-the-job training. They promoted me to corporal and made me section leader of F-13 and F-12. Either Col. Casey had a lot of confidence in me or he was desperate... between you and me, I think "desperate." Well, you know what they say John; if you live to tell about it, it must have been OK. — Dennis.

From the book Welcome to Vietnam Macho Man  
By Ernest Spencer

"Tanks move up and into the fight. One tank's flame thrower is not operational, but the tank still runs and its machine guns work. I see a Marine jump on top of the tank to try to guide it. A gook runs out into the open and shoots him right off of the tank. The tank commander pops up out of the hatch and starts firing his grease gun; another hidden gook does him. The tanks are in too close to use their cannons."

### Dead Lined Tanks?

Right after TET in Feb. of 1968, we had a lot of 3rd tanks put on "dead line" status due to tracks worn down to the metal, rubber pads gone. The Navy's resupply chain had new tank tracks low down on the priority list. The story I heard was that Alpha Company's gunny was approaching Dong Ha with a load of beer in the trailer he was towing when he spotted off to the side of the road several stacks of new M-48 tank tracks. An Army dozer was digging out a trench to bury the track because the Army tank unit was pulling out. The gunny approached the NCO in charge and offered to trade a few cases of beer for the tracks. The doggie agreed, and Alpha Company was soon back in business.

Jim Coan

### Tank Treadmill



### Amphibious "Tank"



### Flame Tank Names



I did enjoy your flame-thrower tank article immensely. Apparently, back in the day 1st Tanks was not politically correct. Above are two photos: one of F-12 (aka "Napalm Sticks to Kids") and F-13 (aka "Burn Babies Burn"). I think when the lifers finally noticed the names, they tried to hang the flame tank section leader, Dennis Martin!!!

Lee Dill

**And Dennis replies:** Well, my old friend, it's like this: One day last week I had my annual colonoscopy and my doctor confirmed that there was indeed a jungle boot lodged way, way up in my colon. The exciting part of this was that he was actually able to read the name printed on the side of the canvas upper. The boot belonged to Gunny Jones. The doctor was impressed. He told me that the boot was in ex-

From a Grunt



I think this picture was taken somewhere in the mountains west or SW of Da Nang. Royce's squad was choppered off Hill 37 to go out to provide security for (maybe) ARVN's or PF's. In January '67 it was cold and rainy where ever it was. We were only out there for a couple of weeks, then sent south of Quang Ngai for "Operation Desoto." I just remembered that one time we were riding on one of the tanks as several of us were sitting on the top when the turret started to turn and my foot was caught between it and some cases of C-Rats, it scared the crap out of me!

Mike Reed  
Mike Co, 3/7

Correction

Steve Falk writes: I was disappointed to see that someone got the name wrong in the latest Sponson Box. The "Fallen Hero" that I presented at the 2015 DC reunion was James Sefrhans.

Welcome Home



This is part of a Veterans Memorial located in Telluride, Colorado.

Another Correction

In the most recent edition of the S-Box on Pages 20-21 under "What Members are Doing" was a letter from Rick Lewis that somehow slipped in without being properly proof read. We want to apologize to our most able and thorough proof readers Sandra and Jim Coan. This mistake should in no way reflect in their abilities.

CONGRATS!

I just wanted to compliment you highly (as you are the SB editor, publisher and the main USMC VTA reunion organizer) on both an excellent October 2015 USMCVTA Tanker's Reunion in Washington, DC and also on the recent February 2016 issue of the 5-Star rated "Sponsor Box" magazine. This recent edition of the SB was really superlative in many ways, especially with the center spread with its color photo recap of the events and snaps of all the smiling attendee's. Additionally, I think that every association member almost always says they read the SB cover to cover. I think that's because it's evolving into a continuously better publication with every issue, mainly due to your efforts on all the many NEW sections that are of immense interest to all of us Vietnam Tankers; and, just the fact that more members are contributing stories or reflections of events like maybe a particular enemy contact on their individual tours. Sometimes, because memories fade, that members just participating by helping fill in a gap makes the story complete. It is also very therapeutic to the Marines involved in the action.

Bob Skeels

The Guest Column

A USMC Wife Shares a Realization

As the mother of three, I realized what my mom had told me about childbirth, "The pain goes away with the delivery", was true. And that was the way the separations between my husband and me, brought on by the Marine Corps and the Vietnam War, were viewed in my mind. As soon as he was home and we were back together, the pain of separation just went away. While we were busy with our young family and work, we almost never mentioned the Vietnam War. It was in the past. It was over. However it was not over for my husband and the father of our children. He lived with it almost nightly and vainly he tried to forget the horrors and the losses. Many years have passed and here we are in our "senior years" with the family grown and, finally, time for each other again.

On the drive home from the 2015 reunion in Washington, DC, we stopped for the night in Nebraska. I found that one of the two movie channels on the hotel television was going to show "American Sniper" at 8 PM. The two of us had not seen the movie, so we thought that we would watch it. And why not, it still got us old folks to bed by ten o'clock. In the movie, when Chris Kyle returned home from one of his de-

ployments, his wife responded just as many military wives and sweethearts would have in that situation: **Everything is back the way it was.** Or is it? At that point in the movie it really clicked in my head. That was the reaction of so many other wives and girlfriends during other wars before her. In our case, something stronger than both of us had held us together all these years. For that gift, we are thankful.

It is never too late to say, "I wish I had been more attuned to your world". Share your thoughts with one another in the way so many people are no longer doing. It is never too late to talk and really listen to one another.

In closing, I want to add that we thoroughly enjoyed the Washington, DC reunion. It was great to finally see the many war memorials. The best times of all, by far, were spent in the "Torsion Bar" hospitality room where all of the tankers gathered to share stories and photos with one another. **Thank you** to all the folks who worked so long and hard to make the reunion possible. We'll see you in St Louis in 2017.

Laura Riensche  
Wife of Harold Riensche

Photo from Vietnam



Bravo-31 at Khe Sanh from Joe Harrigan

24 July 1969

Dear Brian,

Well, I am still in Vietnam, but should be home by mid-August, barring something out of the ordinary.

Hope you did well in your bar exam, but you probably do not have the results yet. Best of luck anyhow.

Diane has been doing outstanding at West Chester. She'll be looking forward to my return so she can vacation for a while prior to returning to school this fall. She'll probably be going to University of Maryland in that I received my orders to return to the Naval Academy to teach Chinese to first-semester students. That'll prove to be a ball for me and work into a lot of plans that I have.

I am glad the Army satisfied your desires and is giving you until January 20 before they tank you away. Don't fret Vietnam, that is, seeing it. The thing will be over before you'd have the opportunity to come.

I've got many plans and none. You know how it is; I'll probably just stay in the Marine Corps and rest well in security and hope for another war somewhere to do "my thing." It is all the time an experience. I couldn't have done it any other way, and will never regret the past 13 months. Your not desiring to come is rather immaterial in that if you're assigned, you go, or if you feel strongly against doing so, resist. At either rete, you are definitely the man of decision if dictated so by your principles. Yet, if you came as a lawyer you'd never be faced with killing, or defending those that have done so in excess. Really, it isn't all that bad – war, I mean. In the large sense disgusting, but in the smaller sphere, combat is a happening. At least we know this is at last "the war to end all..."

I really have no perspective.

When I get home next month, maybe you can "tune me in" and perhaps, just perhaps, "turn me on."

Until later –



Capt. Michael Charles Wunsch, Company A, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, was killed in a rocket attack near the DMZ on 28 July, 1969, ten days before he was to return home to Feasterville, Pennsylvania. He received the Silver Star for his actions during the operation, called "Idaho Canyon," in which he was killed. He was 25 years old. This letter was written to his friend Brian Baker. Reprinted from the book "Dear America – Letters Home from Vietnam."

*Editor's Note: We have added this new section to our magazine. If you or your loved ones have been fortunate enough to have kept any correspondences that you sent home, we'd love to share them with the membership. Please contact John Wear with your letters. Please...* ■

BY MICHAEL WUNSCH  
26NOV67-1:00 PM SUNDAY



Book Review

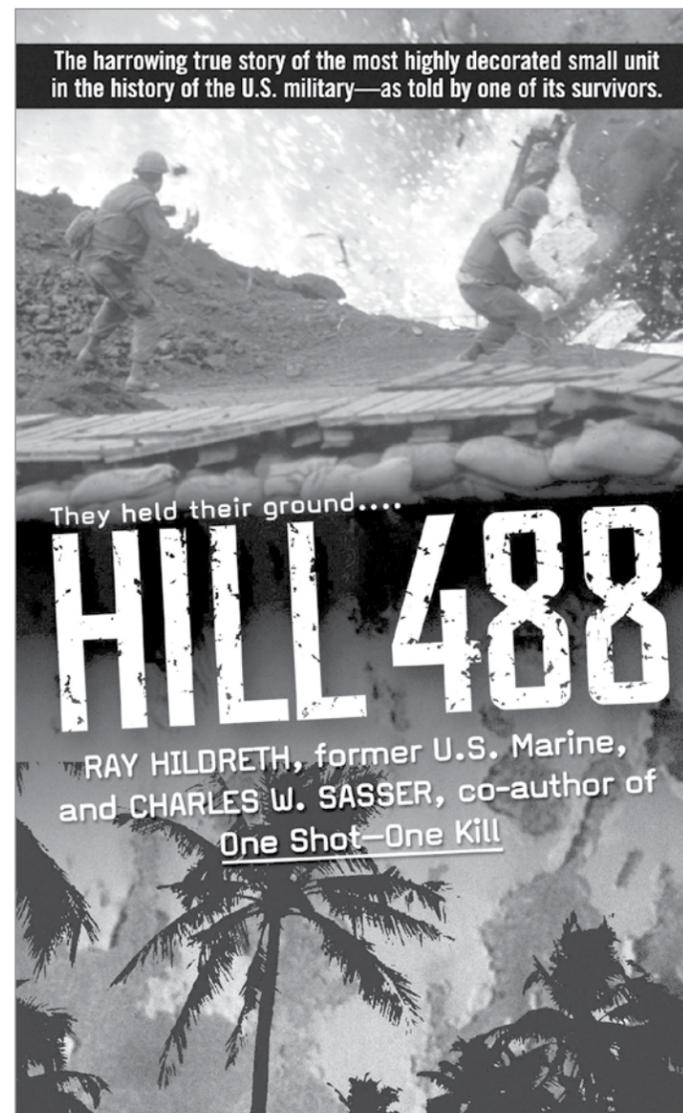
# Hill 488

BY RAY HILDRETH AND CHARLES SASSER

Hill 488 is written in the language used by young U.S. Marines at the time which is profane and very familiar to Vietnam Marine combat veterans. The book is engaging and a very easy read. It quickly establishes itself as personal and meaningful to the Marines of the Vietnam generation.

The first half of this book covers Mr. Hildreth's background, his childhood upbringing, the circumstances for enlisting in the U.S. Marine Corps, and then being sent to Okinawa as a replacement early in the Viet Nam War. Ray Hildreth is clearly just like we were; a highly motivated young man full of patriotism and hope who finds purpose for his life in our Corps.

The second half of this book goes into explicit detail about the heroic stand of an 18-man reconnaissance platoon on Hill 488 located north and west of the Chu Lai TAOR on 15-16 June, 1966. Because it is co-authored by one of the survivors, the book is authentic and riveting. For those who have been in combat, real combat, please be aware that you may find yourself flashing back. Several things are made clear: First is the respect and admiration each member of the platoon held for S/Sgt Jimmie Howard, and the second is the ferocity of their fight against an estimated



enemy battalion that was determined to kill the Marines down to the last man. The protracted delay for the recon Marines receiving supporting arms (arty & air) was particularly troublesome. The terror of their ordeal is as palpable and real as their sacrifice and well documented individual heroism. Of that 18-man platoon, 6 were killed in action, all were wounded in action and 18 Purple Hearts were awarded. In addition 13 Silver Stars, four Navy Crosses and a Medal of Honor were presented for obvious valor in the battlefield.

This book is highly recommended for all as it relates pure and true the character of U.S. Marines fighting for their very lives

in combat. Readers will find that some of the language is inconsistent with Marine usage. For example instead of "Ooo-rah!" you will see "Hoo-ya," the term "gunboat" used for "gunship," "dust off" for medevac and "Congressional" Medal of Honor for Medal of Honor to site just a few examples, but there are many more. I attribute these jargon-related deviations and errors to Ray Hildreth's co-author who is (unfortunately) ex-Army.

Review by Ken Zebal

Can you guess what this is in the photo?  
What did it do? Where was it located?

The first person to contact John Wear at 215-794-9052 with the right three answers will have their name entered for a prize drawing to receive a yet unnamed mediocre prize.



## GUESS WHO Photo Contest

### Last Issue Winner

On January 18, 2016 at 3:46 PM I got an email from Chris Olsen correctly identifying the photo in the last issue as the M8 Armored Gun System. Designed for airdrop, it was to replace the not very successful M551 Sheridan tank. The M8 had a 3-man crew, a 105mm main gun with an autoloader system that could hold 21 rounds and another 9 in storage racks. It could fire 12-rounds a minute! Six of these tanks were built and passed Army testing with flying colors. It was ready to be introduced when the Bosnia Peacekeeping effort began which depleted the Army's budget and the M8 tank project was axed in 1998.



### Looking for

#### UPSIDE DOWN TANK PHOTOS

I saw the article in the latest sponson box on that destroyed tank. I hope you get some feedback. I thought you told me that you spoke to Ray Scheruich. I did get hold of him and had a good bull session with him. As soon as I heard his voice I thought we were back in Nam. It was the same old Ray. The one thing he did tell me was that three bodies were recovered and that the driver was the one that only pieces of him were recovered—such a bad situation. I'm not sure if I passed this info to you. I did find the names of the crew: Sgt. Hallas, L/Cpl. Smith, L/Cpl. Spohn and L/Cpl. Bennett (who was the driver). I also found out that the incident took place in Thua Thien Province Vietnam on August 16, 1967. I know that Ray could be of more help than me. I talked to him several times. I really hope you get more info. Seems like there isn't a lot of info from the years 66-67. I did

recognize some names like S/Sgt. Siva and Cpl. Hamby. If anything more comes up, I'll pass it on

Adam Zlotek

Email: lonestar\_19@verizon.net

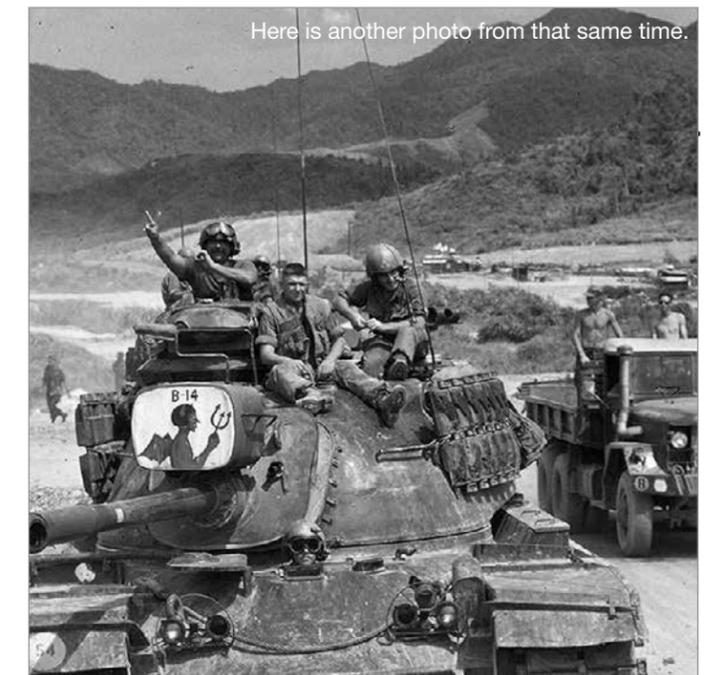
#### BOBBY CORSI

I got a phone call from Mike Nolan who said that he and Bobby were pretty good friends while they were assigned to Bravo Co, 1st Tanks out near Marble Mountain. Mike seems to remember that Bobby was on a resupply run when the truck that he was riding in hit a mine and he was KIA. Mike also seems to recall that another of Bobby's buddies was Murrell A. Jordan from Jasper, TX. Unfortunately Murrell has never been located so he is not a VTA member. Mike said that he was going to give Bobby's nephew a call and talk to him.

#### LOOKING FOR PHOTO IDENTIFICATION

**Bob Skeels writes:** The TC in the photo is Al Soto. He was with my 1st platoon and then he went over to Pete Ritch's 3rd platoon in mid-1969. I am interested in finding out who

the loader is and where the photo was taken... maybe near LZ Stud or along Route 9, west of Cam Lo. Please contact John Wear at 215-794-9052.



## CHARLES "MIKE" COFFEY



The photo reads: Mi Loc March '68-1st Platoon 3/3/3 and Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks

(Front) Thomas (Red) Rucksal – Richard Doc Hall – 1st Platoon Corpsman. (Back) Wayne (Reb) Williamson, Charles (Mike) Coffey – Driver C Co., 3rd Tanks

I hope that someone remembers and calls me about my good buddy Charles M. Coffey (everyone called him "Mike") who was from Bogalusa, Louisiana. Mike got to Vietnam around February or March 1968 and was with Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks. The last time I saw him in-country was when he was driving the tank in the photo and after the tanks busted up a gook ambush and they took us back to the rear. The photo was taken (I believe) near Camp Carroll. I remember that the NVA tried to take out the tank

that was in front of us, but Mike's tank came roaring up and did a neutral steer on top of the gooks. In the photo I am on the rear of the tank with Mike bending over looking at something.

Wayne "Reb" Williamson  
Kilo Co, 3rd Bn, 3rd Marines, 3rd Mar Div (68 – '69)  
7044 Carrabelle Key  
Mobile, Alabama 36695  
Phone: (251) 447-2608  
Email: SWAMPMAN50@YAHOO.COM

### LOOKING FOR BUDDIES

New VTA member, Steve Rasner, is searching for some Marines whom he served with in Headquarters Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division in Vietnam from June 1968 – October 1969. None of these men are VTA members, but if anyone knows contact information for any of them, please let Steve know.

Steve is looking for: **Lloyd Harris**  
**E.M. Wetzel (mechanic)**  
**Tommy Stevens**  
**Rick Thomas**

Contact: (William) Steve Rasner  
12504 North 2100 Street  
Marshall, IL 62441  
Home: 217-251-7350  
Cell: 217-251-1304 ♦

## USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. Scholarship Program 2016

The Board of Directors of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association has implemented an annual academic scholarship program. One scholarship will be awarded to an individual student each year in the amount of \$1,000. To be eligible, the applicant must be a spouse, child, stepchild, or grandchild of a VTA member who has a DD-214 on file with the VTA and whose membership dues are current. The scholarship recipient's eligibility will remain in effect for up to four years of school, provided that the student continues to maintain an overall accumulative GPA of 3.0 or better.

### Student Scholarship Criteria:

1. A minimum GPA of 3.0 at the last high school or academic institution attended.
2. Be registered to attend a minimum of half-time (as determined by the institution) at an accredited educational/technical college or university.
3. Agree to authorize the VTA to publicize the scholarship award announcement in the Sponson Box newsletter.
4. Application materials must be postmarked no later than the June 30 deadline.

The scholarship program committee will review all applications for completeness, then the VTA Board of Directors will select one scholarship winner for the year. Determining factors will be letters of recommendation, a letter in the applicant's own words expressing current educational goals and prior accomplishments, and a 500-word essay on the topic: Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans.

To obtain a scholarship application form, contact Jim Coan, 5374 E. Lantana Drive, Sierra Vista, AZ 85650, 520-378-9659, or e-mail him at [zzjimco@aol.com](mailto:zzjimco@aol.com) **before the June 30 deadline for receipt of applications.** ♦

## Photo from Vietnam



A Marine tank from 1st Tank Bn. rumbled through a cemetery during a search of a Vietnamese village. The Marines were from Alpha Co., 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, 1st Marine Division. They were taking part in "Operation Lafayette" about six miles north of Hoi An in Quang Nam province in February, 1967.

Not everyone can be a Marine.

Not everyone wants to be a Marine.

And some that want to be a Marine are told  
they do not have what it takes to be a Marine.

But once you are a Marine, you are a Marine for eternity.

It was a Marine who came up with: Once a Marine, Always a Marine.

Submitted by Jim Coan

# To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“They will find the streets are guarded by United States Marines!”

## Eddie Miers

Virgil Melton, Jr. writes: I am sorry to inform you that Sgt. Eddie Miers passed away December 16, 2015. Eddie spend 21 months in Vietnam attached to 1st Platoon, Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks. He was a tank commander participating in many operations and search/clear actions, most notably Lam Son 250. Eddie saw combat action in all the Lam Son operations from August 1968 thru October of 1968. We went thru Boot Camp and Tank School together, and we ended up together in the same platoon in Vietnam. He was one of my best friends. He had severe heart problems due to Agent Orange exposure for many years. Eddie has a wonderful family and will be greatly missed.

## Timothy E.R. Tews

Tim, 67, of Allentown, PA, died September 1, 2008. He served as a tank commander in the Marine Corps for 18 years, including three tours of duty in Vietnam. He received two Purple Heart medals.

*John Wear writes: I fondly remember S/Sgt. Tews as a courageous warrior who was with 1st Platoon, Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks in the summer of 1968. May he rest in peace.*

## Harry Cornell “Buck” Hopkins Jr., 83, of Dolly Court, Orange, Va., went to be with the Lord on Tuesday, October 13, 2015, at the Dogwood Village of Orange. Born March 5, 1932 in Rapidan, VA. Harry was a retired Master Sergeant in the Marine Corps. He served in Vietnam with USMC tanks in the mid-1960’s.

## Francisco Antonio Carlos

Tony entered everlasting life on October 3, 2010. He was born in El Paso on June 2, 1945. He graduated from Burges High School in 1964 and joined the U.S. Marine Corps. He served in 3rd Tank Battalion in Vietnam from June 1966 to July 1967 achieving the rank of Lance Corporal.

## Lt. Col. Franklin Wisner Coates, USMC (ret.)

Frank passed away at his home in Arlington, VA, on June 25, 2015. He was a Korean War veteran and a member of the “Chosin Few.” Later he went on to serve as the 3rd Tank Battalion logistics officer in Vietnam.

## Robert G. Kern, Sr.

Bob walked through the gates of Heaven on May 9, 2012. He was born on January 9, 1952 and served in the U.S. Marine Corps during the Vietnam War in 1st Tank Battalion.

## Robert W. Maddox

Robert W. Maddox, 70, of Princess Anne, MD, returned to his home with the Lord on April 2, 2011. Born March 28, 1942 in Cold Spring, N.Y. He served in Vietnam from February 1967-68, where he commanded “A” Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marines in Que Son Valley.

## Robert J. Millerbis

At the age of 66, Humboldt Co. County, California, lost a great man on December 31, 2015. Bob “Bubba” was honorably discharged from the U.S. Marine Corps after serving for 2-1/2 years as a tank gunner and tank commander in Vietnam.

### My Friends

Writings from a foxhole in 1966 on the DMZ  
By VTA Member Jon C. Chambers

*All of my dead friends live in my head.*

*Their blood flows from my eyes as tears.*

*My hand is their hand.*

*Their souls live within me.*

*The headless, the member less.*

*The less lessness of no one left.*

*But I with parts of them dripping off of me.*

*I live in death, my foxhole filled with blood.*

*My mind is filled with this.*

*Dear God help me.*

*So I can fight on in the red soil of death.*

# In Memory of Sergeant Eddie Miers

BY JAN “TURTLE” WENDLING

Feb 11, 2016

I first met Sgt Eddie Miers on February 1, 1969 on the day that I arrived at the “Charlie Two” artillery outpost just south of the DMZ. Eddie was the tank commander of “A-14” (with the name “Bleeding Eyes” on the gun tube). He was from Athens, Texas and he spoke with a big Texas drawl.

Eddie and Virgil Melton, Jr, were both sergeants in 1st

Platoon, Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks. They were both from the same hometown in Texas; had gone through boot camp, Infantry Training Regiment, Tank School and they were placed in the same platoon in Alpha Company when they got to Vietnam. You could tell that they were best friends. Both of them were very well respected and very much looked up to by all of the crewmen in the platoon and the company.

Me being the new guy was not fun. Eddie sent me over to the arty battery (12th Marines) with a bucket to try to find some “orifice remover.” I spoke to a new guy at the arty battery and asked him if he had any orifice remover and he asked me what it looked like. I told him Eddie said that it was a white powdery liquid. He said that he thought they had some at the POL dump so we started looking for it. A sergeant from the battery asked us what we were doing and I explained it to him. He got a big smile on his face and asked me if Eddie had sent me over. I advised him that it was indeed Sgt Miers and the arty sergeant told me that they were fresh out and he walked away laughing. A couple of days later that same new guy from the arty battery came into the tank park and asked if we had any “ST-1.” I then asked Eddie and he said, “We got plenty,” and he picked up a stone and hit the kid with it. I suddenly got smarter.

I became the driver on Eddie’s tank, with for me seemed like a promotion from the gunner position. He taught me all that he could, which was invaluable for me later on. We did a lot of road sweeps, search & destroy missions. We were under fire numerous times and Eddie always kept a cool head when everybody else was falling apart. He and Virgil were



Sergeants Virgil Melton, Jr and Eddie Miers

both cut from the same cloth in that way.

Eddie’s first priority was to his crew. He always made sure that we had what we needed. If we didn’t have it, we would usually “barrow” it from the Army. Eddie was always good at getting us C-Rats and ammo.

Eddie was getting short in June of ’69 and he had to

pick a replacement to take over as tank commander for A-14. Eddie chose me. He must have seen something in me that I didn’t but I was truly honored to take his place. I just couldn’t believe that an 18 year old lance corporal could be a tank commander. Eddie stayed on the tank as my loader until he rotated back home. He always gave me good advice as how to handle the tank and the crew.

The last operation that we went on together was “Idaho Canyon.” We were set up on Mutter’s Ridge west of Charlie-2 and on the last day of the operation, I had taken a 5 gallon Jerry can down to the creek and filled it up. When I got back to the tank, I noticed someone had moved my 12 gauge sawed off shotgun from the gypsy rack and had left it sitting on top of the TC cupola. We didn’t carry a round in the chamber but someone had jacked a round in it and had taken the safety off. Unaware, I picked up the shotgun and just as Eddie was climbing up on to the turret, the shotgun went off about three feet from his head. Of course, I thought that I had killed him with the accidental discharge. He grabbed the side of his head because the blast but he was OK. Years later I called him in Texas and the first thing that came out of his mouth was, “Remember when you almost blew my head off>”

Sgt Eddie Miers was truly a Marine’s Marine. He taught me how to survive in the most difficult times and to always take care of my crew.

Eddie died on December 16, 2016 but he will always live in the hearts of all who knew him.

May the good Lord keep you Eddie. ♦

# What Vietnam Taught Me

BY RICK LEWIS

It's was nothing like they told us!

I can remember in Tank School in 1965, sitting around talking about when we got to Viet Nam, we were going to blow those "rice burners" apart. We would be on the Range 407A at the tank gunnery range at Camp Pendleton, just feeling the power of the 90 rounds going down



range and thinking, "Man, I can't wait till I get the bad guys in my sights!" We were invincible! We did a small training operation with some grunts at Pendleton. I remember one night, we had a firepower exercise that put the five tanks and a company of grunts all on line and we let it rip. The show was outstanding! There was no way the Viet Cong could touch us.

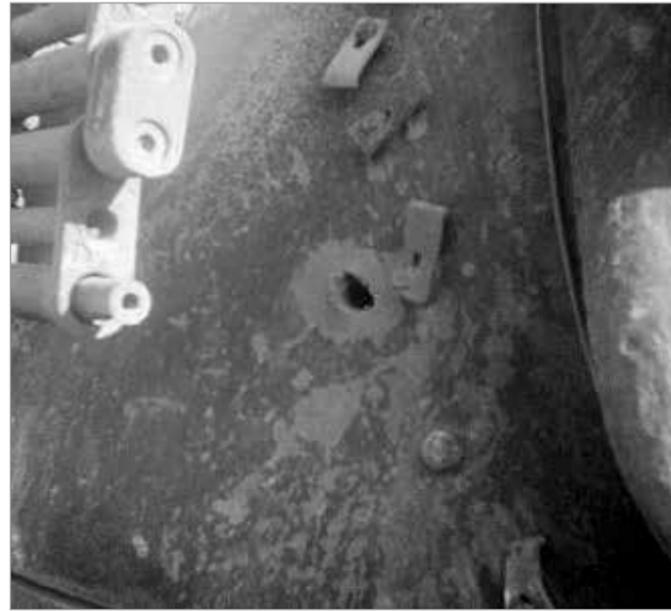
Then I arrived in-country. As I got off the plane, I looked around and saw a C-130 being loaded with coffins. Some old Marine sergeant says, "Those are Army. Don't worry; we know what we're doing."

I thought to myself, "I sure hope so."

When I arrived at Bravo Co., 1st Tanks in Chu Lai, I saw several tanks that were flagged for deadline. Later in the day I went back to look at those tanks. I climbed on them and saw holes in the side and dried blood inside the turret. I thought to myself that something does not

add up here. How did this happen? The VC didn't have tanks. Right?

About that time, an old Gunny Sergeant that was in charge of maintenance asked, "Who the hell are you?" I told him that I had just got there and was looking at the holes in the tanks.



He said, "Those are from RPG's."

I asked "What are RPG's?"

And he replied, "You'll find out soon enough."

He was right!! Although it did not happen until we moved to Da Nang a few months later. In my mind it was still better to be a tankerman than a grunt any day.

We soon learned that it's the bullet that has "To whom it may concern" written on it that is the one that counts.

Home cooking is missed and things I should have said to everyone back home kept repeating like a broken record in my head. Life had become about making it home, getting a do-over back in the "World of the Round Eyes" and pushing the edge of the envelope every day from here on out.

Coming home, you have become a different person. It does not take long to enjoy all that takes place around you. *(Continued on page 44)*

# A Rainy Night in Chu Lai

BY JOHN M. HUNTER  
1ST. AND 3RD. TANK BATTALIONS  
RVN 1965-66

I was going to title this little story "Shitty Night in Chu Lai," but I wanted to be politically correct. The idea came to me after reading the latest Sponson Box, and the story called "75MM BBQ," by Robert Kendrick.

I was the driver of B-35, for B Company, 1st. Tanks at Chu Lai in 1965. For a lot of evenings during my time there, at night we would go out to the Chu Lai Airport to guard the perimeter.

The crew of B-35 consisted of Sgt. Mackenzie, tank commander; L/Cpl. Tilden, gunner; L/Cpl. Eugeno, loader; PFC Hunter, driver. On one such evening we proceeded to the Airport; after arriving it started to rain. The first thing we did was get into the tank and close the hatches. I can remember sitting in the driver's seat as the rain poured in around the leaking

rubber gasket. Of course, there was someone watching the wire from the TC's hatch, most likely Sgt. Mac. After only a few minutes of this, we all decided we needed to vacate the tank and get outside where it was a little dryer. I agree with Robert Kendrick, it does get cold in VN, when we would start the engine to charge the batteries, we would stand behind the tank and breathe diesel fumes in an attempt to get a little heat. I might add that every grunt for a 100 yards around would be standing behind the tank with us.

After a while, one of the tankers came up with the idea of taking the tank tarp and propping up one end so the crew members not on watch could get under it and keep dry. About this time the wind starting blowing. You would think that the wind could not move wet sand, but by dawn the next

morning the tarp was half buried under a foot of wet sand. Now that makes a heavy tarp, wet and cold, and trying to pull a wet tarp out of the sand and fold it up to go back to the area where the Chu Lai Hilton was waiting for us was a real pain. The Chu Lai Hilton was our tent, and it was not a hard-back tent like I was to later sleep in at Marble Mt. with 3rd Tanks in Da Nang. It was all sand, but dry, and a heck of a lot better than a wet tarp.

As a tanker I know we are not supposed to complain about the fact we lived in tents in the area, rode everywhere on our tanks, always had hot food, and had armor plating to protect our asses. But, little hardships like the rainy night just make one a better Marine! It is like taking a bath in a rice paddy, or drinking a warm beer . . . all part of the RVN experience. ♦

# What Members Are Doing

## A Trip to See Burt



(L to R) Frank, Blues, Sheila and Burt Trevail.

Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz writes: Last week Roger "Blues" Unland picked me up and we had a brief visit with "Belmo" in San Francisco and then spent a few hours with Burt and his wife. They were moving to Texas the next day and they gave my grandson, Connor, a very nice telescope. Burt said he did not want to pack it and asked if my grandson would use it. Connor is deeply into science and so I said, "Yes." Blues is carrying the box with the telescope in it. Burt said that he is thinking about going to St. Louis in 2017 for the VTA reunion. As an aside, Burt was responsible for teaching me how to stay alive in Vietnam. The lasting friendship is there.

## The Last Hard Rock Miner in California



Long-time VTA member, Tom "Sparrow" Moad who possesses the title, is shown here working his mine in the mountains above the Mojave Desert.

## Jimmy and Max

By Jimmy Didear

Here is some information in reference to my service dog. His name is Max. He is Chocolate Lab and American Bull terrier mix. He was 3 years old this past February. He and I have been together since February, 2015.

A little over two years ago, I started looking into getting a service dog for my PTSD. During the process, I asked my VA doctor and he thought it was a great idea that I get one, so I applied to two different organizations. One was in New York State and the other was in Florida. I was accepted by the group in New York. It is unfortunate that the group in Florida told me that they didn't take pre-911 veterans and that certainly left me out. I was thinking about traveling from my home in Corpus Christi, Texas to New York and that I would have to stay there for several weeks at my own expense. Then, a few weeks later, while I was attending my weekly Tuesday VA group, the guy in charge told me about a place in San Antonio that had started a program helping veterans with getting service dogs for PTSD. I contacted them and it took around six months to get all the paperwork done and approved. Luckily, I was approved in January, 2015. I then visited them and looked at eight different dogs before I was blessed to find Max. The most amazing and wonderful fact was that I found Max just two days away from him being put down.

After getting him, we started our training in Corpus Christi which worked better for me since I live here. He and I would go to classes twice a week for several hours at a time to get the basics. Then, we had to work together every day for at least an hour or two. It took a little over 3-½ months for all the training and a final test to get him certified as an official service dog. Since then, I have helped other veterans apply and receive a service dog through this same program.

The program that is based in San Antonio is called TAD-SAW, or "Train A Dog Save A Warrior." They use rescue dogs in their program. I have to admit that if it wasn't for my VA doctors and the personnel at the VA, I wouldn't have Max. The VA has supported me and Max as much as they can, but they do not help with any of his expenses. Hopefully, someday they will, especially after they see all the good that a service dog can do for the veterans with all types of problems.

Max is now certified to travel with me almost every-

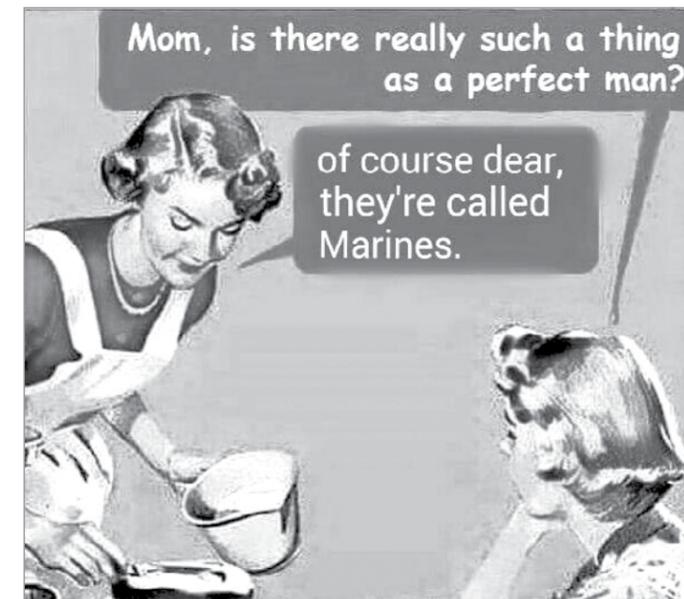


where I go including flying with me. He keeps an eye on me when things start going bad and I start to get upset. He

also watches around me when we are out in the public. I take him with me to my weekly group meeting at the VA. He picks up on when other veterans are starting to feel bad or having flashbacks while others are talking. I will let the other vets pet Max or spend time with him as long as I am there. Max really does help them to feel a little better. As long as he can see me or knows where I am he is ok. Sometimes at home when I am having a bad dream or something starts to get me upset, he is right there checking on me and letting me know things are going to be OK. The service dog is something that will always be there for you.

As far as my family is concerned, I think they are glad Max came to me. I really feel that Max helps me to get closer to my family. It is really hard to let others get close to me. I don't always let them know when things are not right with me. After all these years, we (veterans) have learned how to hide our feelings. Max helps me figure out where I am with my feelings. What a blessing!

Anyone who is reading this story and is interested into learning about getting a service dog, they should talk with their local VA and/or doctor first. If they want to contact me about who I talked with, please have them contact me via email first at [mctanks@grandecom.net](mailto:mctanks@grandecom.net); and, if needed, I would give them a contact phone number. Others can go on the internet and look up "Service Dogs for Vets." That is where I got the two places I contacted. And to tell the truth, my VA Group leader was the one who helped the most. ♦



# V. A. News & Updates

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

## The Top 10 Overlooked Disabilities Most Vets Can Claim

**1. Erectile Dysfunction** – Erectile dysfunction, or ED, is the inability of a man to have an erection hard enough to have sexual intercourse. It can also be known as impotence. It is not unusual for this to happen to a man on occasion, but frequent ED can be a sign of a bigger medical problem that needs attention. ED can also lead to complications in a man's life all on its own.

**2. Agoraphobia** – The essential feature of Agoraphobia is anxiety about being in (or anticipating) situations from which escape might be difficult or in which help may not be available in the event of having a Panic Attack (or panic-like symptoms). Oftentimes, when in this situation, an individual may have the vague thought that something dreadful may happen. Such concerns must persist for at least 6 months and occur virtually every time an individual encounters the place or situation (especially those that remind a veteran of battle situations).

Agoraphobic fears typically involve characteristic clusters of situations that include being outside the home alone; being in a crowd or standing in a line; being on a bridge; and traveling in a bus, train, or automobile.

More specifically, the diagnostic criteria in the DSM-5 requires that an individual experiences intense fear in response to (or when anticipating entering) at least 2 of the following 5 situations:

1. using public transportation, such as automobiles, buses, trains, ships, or planes
2. being in open spaces, such as parking lots, marketplaces, or bridges
3. being in enclosed spaces, such as shops, theaters, or cinemas
4. standing in line or being in a crowd
5. being outside of the home alone

A person who experiences agoraphobia avoids such situations (e.g., travel is restricted; the person changes daily routines) or else they are endured with significant distress. For example, people with agoraphobia often require the presence of a companion, such as a family member, partner, or friend, to confront the situation.

**3. Keloids** – A scar that rises quite abruptly above the rest of the skin. It is irregularly shaped, usually pink to red in color, tends to enlarge progressively, and may be harder than the surrounding skin. Keloids are a response to trauma, such as a cut to the skin. In creating a normal scar, connective tissue in the skin is repaired by the formation of collagen. Keloids arise when extra collagen forms.

**4. Sexually Transmitted Diseases** – (See VA for updates)

**5. Pseudofolliculitis Barbae** – a common condition of the beard area occurring in men and other people with curly hair. The problem results when highly curved hairs grow back into the skin causing inflammation and a foreign body reaction. Over time, this can cause scarring which looks like hard bumps of the beard area and neck.

**6. Plantar Fasciitis** – Plantar fasciitis is the pain caused by inflammation of the insertion of the plantar fascia on the medial process of the calcaneal tuberosity. The pain may be substantial, resulting in the alteration of daily activities. Various terms have been used to describe plantar fasciitis, including jogger's heel, tennis heel, policeman's heel, and even gonorrhoeal heel. Although a misnomer, this condition is sometimes referred to as heel spurs by the general public.

**7. Pleurisy** – Pleurisy is inflammation of the parietal pleura that typically results in characteristic pleuritic pain and has a variety of possible causes. The term "pleurisy" is often used to refer to a symptom and a condition. It is more precise to use the term "pleurisy" for the condition and "pleuritic pain" to describe the symptom. Pleuritic pain is a key feature of pleurisy; therefore,

this article reviews the physiology and classic characteristics of pleuritic pain, focusing on the presentation and diagnosis of the patient and the management of various causes of pleurisy. Pleuritic chest pain is a common presenting symptom and has many causes, which range from life-threatening to benign, self-limited conditions.

**8. Tropical Phagedena (Jungle Rot)** – tropical phagedena, Aden ulcer, Malabar ulcer, and jungle rot (from Vietnam), as well as various native terms. It occurs on exposed parts of the body, primarily the legs, arms, and feet. Frequently on pre-existing abrasions or sores, sometimes beginning from a scratch. As a rule, only one extremity is affected and usually there is a single lesion, although it is not uncommon to find multiple ulcers on two or more body parts.

**9. Hemorrhoids** – Hemorrhoids are swollen and inflamed veins around the anus or in the lower rectum. The rectum is the last part of the large intestine leading to the anus. The anus is the opening at the end of the digestive tract where bowel contents leave the body.

**10. Sleep Terror Disorder** – Sleep terror disorder is also known as night terrors. Sleep terror is characterized by the following symptoms that a mental health professional looks for when making a diagnosis for this condition:

- Recurrent episodes of abrupt awakening from sleep, usually occurring during the first third of the major sleep episode and beginning with a panicky scream.
- Intense fear and signs of autonomic arousal, such as tachycardia, rapid breathing, and sweating, during each episode.
- Relative unresponsiveness to efforts of others to comfort the person during the episode.
- No detailed dream is recalled and there is amnesia for the episode.
- The episodes cause clinically significant distress or impairment in social, occupational, or other important areas of functioning.
- The disturbance is not due to the direct physiological effects of a substance (e.g., a drug of abuse, a medication) or a general medical condition.

## Veterans: Don't Let Scammers Bilk Your Benefits

November 9, 2015 – by Carol Kando-Pineda

According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the nation had more than 9.3 million veterans aged 65 and older in 2013. For most of us, Veterans Day means a time to thank all our former service members. But it's a sad truth that scammers operate out of greed, not gratitude. Not-so-honest people target older veterans and their families to cheat them out of their hard-earned benefits.

In one type of scam, unscrupulous advisers claim to offer free help with paperwork for pension claims. But these attorneys, financial planners, and insurance agents persuade veterans

over 65 to make decisions about their pensions without giving them the whole truth about the long-term consequences. They tell veterans to transfer their assets to a trust – or to invest in insurance products – so they can qualify for Aid and Attendance benefits. What they don't say? The transaction could cause the veterans to lose eligibility for Medicaid services or the use of their money for a long time.

For veterans experiencing cash flow trouble, there's a different pitfall. Some companies offer an advance on your pension to get you the funds you need fast. You sign over your monthly pension checks for, say, five or 10 years, in exchange for a lump sum payment of a lesser amount. Pension advances aren't a cheap way to get cash; fees can be high. And what's more, the company often requires retirees to buy a life insurance policy – with the pension advance company named as the beneficiary – to make sure that the repayments continue.

If there are veterans in your life, fill them in about these scams. Encourage them to pass it on to their friends, family, and community to help more veterans dodge a bad deal.

Source: FTC Scam Alert at [http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/veterans-dont-let-scammers-bilk-your-benefits?utm\\_source=govdelivery](http://www.consumer.ftc.gov/blog/veterans-dont-let-scammers-bilk-your-benefits?utm_source=govdelivery)

## VA COMPENSATION TABLE

Percent Disabled	No Dependents	Veteran & Spouse
10%	\$133.17	N/A
20%	\$263.23	N/A
30%	\$407.75	\$455.75
40%	\$587.36	\$651.36
50%	\$836.13	\$917.13
60%	\$1,059.09	\$1,156.09
70%	\$1,334.71	\$1,447.71
80%	\$1,551.48	\$1,680.48
90%	\$1,743.48	\$1,888.48
100%	\$2,906.83	\$3,068.90

## New Death Confirmation Policy

The Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has implemented a new policy change that affects all veterans. The VA is currently in the process of updating its procedure to request further confirmation of a veteran's death before it terminates any and all payments to the veteran. Basically, the process will now involve more exhaustive confirmation of a veteran's death before payments are stopped. For instance, when VA officials believe that a veteran has died, the VA will send a letter to his or her address on file and request confirmation of the death from a surviving family member. If the VA doesn't receive a response from the family – or from a veteran erroneously believed to be dead – only then will the VA terminate payments permanently. Keep in mind, it is always best for a veteran to work with an accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) who can explain the complex workings of the VA benefit system. ♦

# My Recollections of Bob Minetto

BY TOM COLSON



(L to R) John Wear, Bob Minetto, John Perry at the Dong Ha tank park April 1968

My story, "RPG's on the DMZ", happened June 20 and 21, 1968. That operation started on the first of June. I know this for sure because the op started without me. I was medevaced to Dong Ha off of A-51 and got my first Purple Heart. I took a piece of shrapnel from a mortar at The Washout on May 29, 1968.

Next subject that I want to write about is the death of Cpl. R. N. Minetto, which was a real tragedy because my tank's TC got scared and freaked out. At the time, we weren't in any real danger and we never got that close to the firefight. I'm going to try to make this short and to the point. I will write the complete story later and include pictures and details of that whole operation from start to finish. John (Wear), this story is very close to your own version except for a few things.

On the first of May 1968 after dark, Alpha Co. 3rd Tanks moved three tanks to the Cam Lo Bridge. They were

two gun tanks, A-41, A-51 (or A-55) and a flame tank, F-13. I was the driver of F-13. We stayed at the bridge for about two hours and then we drove in the dark to the "A-4" Firebase to join their reaction force. We then went out on a sweep operation for about 12 days. The tragic event happened on the last day, just as we were sweeping back to a fire base and to end the operation. That is when we were ambushed by the two gook .51-cal. machine guns.

The tanks and grunts were moving fairly fast on the sweep because we were out in open ground without much foliage or cover and nothing to get in our way. The three tanks were spread out about 200 to 250 feet apart with the grunts interspersed in front, behind and next to us. On this op, the flame tank was kept in the center of the two gun tanks, but I really did not know why because this was my first ever op in real combat. My TC, Cpl. Frank Eaton, had told me that the flame tank was always to be protected by the other

tanks because we were a "rolling coffin" of napalm. He said that we could create death or we were death. I remember the TC telling me that he would totally freak out if we got hit with an RPG, mostly because he was "short."

Anyway, we were moving along and the terrain was real flat except for this one area that we approached that had a real large, deep ravine. The ravine was shaped like a large crescent roll (or horse shoe). The main part of the ravine was about 200 yards long and about 25 to 50 yards deep and about 100 yards across. The ravine was covered all over in bushes except at the very bottom. The bottom looked like water had been running down through it and out to the lower end. The tanks were in line abreast out in the flat, moving forward, when my TC yelled to me over the intercom, "Driver stop!"

I could hear small arms fire going on off to my left side. The grunts around us started moving toward our left and, like all U.S. Marines, they moved toward the sound. Eaton, the TC, told me to go left and follow the grunts. I could see the gun tank on my left, which was Minetto's tank. The tank moved quickly forward of our tank and then disappeared down into the ravine. As we pulled up to the edge of the ravine, Eaton told me to stop.

The other gun tank, Cpl. Perry's tank, was somewhere off to our right, but I couldn't see it yet. Minetto's tank was already in the bottom of the ravine heading towards the fire fight. There was smoke coming up out of the bushes straight ahead of our tank across the ravine. I could see movement all over down inside of the ravine. By this time, I saw Perry's tank off to my right on

the edge of the ravine. I could see and hear that there was massive small arms and heavy machine gun fire coming from where the smoke was. I could see the grunts running around and hitting the ground. Then I heard over the radio that Minetto was calling for the flame tank to move forward and burn the gooks out. I thought we were in the perfect spot to accomplish that task since we were sitting straight across from the area of the firefight. I did not hear Eaton make any commands to move forward, so I figured that the problem was that we were just barely within range of the flame thrower ... or maybe that we had run out of napalm. I figured that we probably needed to move forward for a more accessible target. The grunts had cleared out of the way, so we could move over the bank and down the side to the bottom of the ravine. I could hear my TC, Eaton, cussing over the intercom that he didn't want to pull down the slope.

The gunner came on, "We've got to get closer. We are out of range."

Finally, Eaton said, "I am going to charge the system!"

I thought, "Oh shit!" I know that I heard the safety valve blow!!!

The gunner was yelling, "What the fuck did you do, Eaton? You did that purposely?"

Shut the fuck up!" shouted Eaton.

Since I was the driver, I really didn't know what was going on inside of the turret. Then I could hear Eaton on the radio telling the other two tanks that we can't fire the flame and that we were dead in the water. Then I saw Minetto's tank down in the bottom of the ravine start to move forward and up the other side towards the heavy machine gun fire in the bushes. I could hear the two gun tank TCs talking over the radio while

we just sat there on the edge of the ravine watching this maneuver being played out. I heard the yelling coming over the radios. Everything was so intense at that moment. I heard Minetto yelling, "I can't get the gun low enough to fire the 90!" Obviously, he was so close to the enemy that his main gun and coax machine gun could not depress low enough to shoot the enemy.

By that time, Minetto's tank was just in front of the gook machine gun fire. I could see gooks coming out of the bunker where the machine gun fire was, and they were trying to climb on to Minetto's tank. I could see a head and arms come out of the TC's cupola and fire a pistol at the gooks. The gooks were all over trying to get up on the tank. I saw the head and arms come up out of the TC cupola again and then instantly disappear out of sight and back into the tank. Then I heard someone else on the radio screaming, "Our TC is dead!"

Then I heard Perry calling Minetto's tank over the radio and telling them what to do. I heard someone yelling, "Run them over!" I saw Perry's tank on my right start firing the .30 cal. machine gun, shooting at the attacking gooks that were climbing on Minetto's tank, also known as "scratching their back." Then Perry's tank moved forward down the hill toward Minetto's tank and towards the gook ambush. Our tank just sat there doing nothing. I heard Perry say: "We can't fire the 90. You are right on top of them!"

AS PERRY'S TANK REACHED MINETTO'S, BOTH TANKS WERE DRIVING ALL OVER THE TOP OF THE GOOKS. THEY WERE DOING NEUTRAL STEERS AND CRUSHING THE ENEMY BUNKERS. THEN ALL OF

A SUDDEN THE GUN FIRE STOPPED AND THE TANKS STOPPED. THE GRUNTS MOVED IN AND STARTED DRAGGING BODIES OUT OF THE BUNKER THAT WAS FULL OF DEAD GOOKS AND TAKING THEM DOWN TO THE BOTTOM OF THE RAVINE IN THE OPEN AREA. THEY LAID THE SEVEN DEAD NVA SIDE BY SIDE. THE GRUNTS ALSO PULLED OUT THREE CAPTURED .51 CAL. MACHINE GUNS, TWO RPG'S AND THREE NVA THAT WERE STILL ALIVE.

Then, I watched as Bob Minetto's body was removed from the turret of his tank and put in a black zipper bag. He was taken to the bottom of the ravine, but he was laid off to the far left away from the dead NVA. Then, all three tanks moved up out of the ravine and we continued on the sweep to the "A-4" fire base. The two gun tanks stayed there while our flame tank headed back to Dong Ha to have our safety valve repaired. The gunner on the flame tank (I can't remember his name but his photo is below) told me that our TC, Frank Eaton, purposely charged the system too quickly, which blew the safety valve. He went on to say that Eaton did it because he didn't want to have to go down the hill and engage the enemy. That day, when I got back to Dong Ha, I went to see the company Top and told him the story. I also told him that I wanted to be moved to another tank. The very next day, I was put on a 5-ton truck and taken to the "Washout" fire base. I became the loader on A-51.

That's the short story of what happened that day. Our tank >>

never backed up, never fired a single gun. We just sat there and I watched the whole thing, like being in the audience at a movie. I wasn't overly excited or scared. That's how I can remember almost every detail. Where our flame tank was sitting on the edge of the ravine and the action happening on the other side, we were too far away for even an RPG to be effective ... especially with bullets flying all over at them. For my next story for the Sponson Box, I would like to write the whole story from when I landed in Vietnam and how I got on the flame tank up until I got on A-51.

(L - R:) Ron Sergeant and Tom Colson

John Wear wrote: I do recognize the photo of you on the right and Ron Sergeant, the gunner, on the left. Ron never joined the VTA. I may have told you this already. In 2001, when we were in Minneapolis for the second VTA reunion. We were at the MSP Airport Double Tree Hotel. On the second day, most of us were in the slop chute hospitality suite drinking beer and swapping sea stories, when in walks a familiar face (Ron Sergeant). He said that he was in town for the wedding of (I think) one of his kids. It was simply a case of "ships passing in the night." He had no idea that there even was a VTA and that we were at the exact same hotel where he was staying. He said that he was living (I think) in Michigan and

that he was in contact with several of our tanker brothers. At that time of the VTA, I was only marginally involved with the management of our group, and very unfortunately no one seemed to be deeply engaged in recruiting new members. I remember exchanging several emails with Ron for months after the reunion, and I am pretty sure that we included a few of his other Marine tankers pals in those email exchanges. They all seemed interested in joining but, unfortunately, none of them ever did. And since, at the time, I was deeply involved with my "real" job and other (now what seems to be) nonessential shit, I never followed up with them properly to get them to join the VTA. I am guessing that they may now want to join, but I am also guessing that they just don't have the gumption to look us up on the internet. You can lead a horse to water... etc., etc., etc. ♦



Photo from Vietnam

LONG ISLAND PRESS, MONDAY, JANUARY 22, 1968



### In Their Country's Service

Two Marines who did their share in Vietnam receive Purple Hearts and the New York State Conspicuous Service Cross at a ceremony at Marine Reserve Headquarters in Garden City. Lt. Col. Lawrence P. Flynn of Albany, left, presents the medals to Sgt. Michael Giuinazzo Jr. of Astoria, center, and Cpl. Robert Devoti of North Merrick. Cpl. Devoti lost a leg in Vietnam.

*Editor's Note: It is understood that between 1968 and 1969 in Vietnam, the 3rd Marine Division Commanding Officer, General Raymond B. Davis, ordered any and all "FNG-boot" lieutenants arriving in-country that they would serve their first 90 days in-country as an infantry platoon leader.*

## 90 DAYS A GRUNT

BY PETE RITCH

This past summer I received an invitation from Terry Arndt, a USMC Basic School classmate of mine, inviting me to our class reunion in San Diego. Unfortunately, the TBS 2015 reunion was scheduled around the same time as our VTA reunion in Washington, DC. I advised Terry of the conflict in reunion scheduling and asked him if he was aware of the 3rd Marine Division SOP that required all new 2nd Lts. arriving in Vietnam to spend their first 90 days in-country as an infantry platoon commander, regardless of MOS. Terry sent an email blast to all of our classmates asking them if they had encountered this rather unique procedure. Following are comments from some of us who spent 90 days as a grunt, and some others who had heard of the procedure:

USMC VTA Members Bob Skeels, John Heffernan and I were assigned to 3rd Marine Division upon arriving in Vietnam and served as infantry platoon commanders. "Hef" was so good at it that he spent an additional 30 days or so, as a grunt.

Jack Higgins and Ken Best said that Col. Ray Davis, CO of 3rd Marine Division, in the late 1960's, created the policy. They said that Davis was an Engineering Grad from Georgia Tech.

Dan Legear: I recall there were some lawyers who were assigned to an infantry platoon for 90 days.

Mike Levin—a JAG Officer, arrived in Vietnam in 1968 and spent his first 90 days as a grunt. He remembered that Wilbur (Bill) Fly, Dave (Mad Dog) Moore and Tommy Allison, all JAG Officers, were assigned to infantry units. Can you imagine a lawyer grunt? Mike, Bill, Dave and Tommy spent the last six months of their tour working for Colonel Joe Motelenski, Staff Judge Advocate.

John Everhart—2501, spent 120 days as an Infantry Platoon Commander with India Company, 3/3.

Kent Hughes—1801, assigned to 1st Marine Division (down south) and went straight to a tank company upon arriving in Vietnam.

Pete Ritch continues: After the shock of being assigned to an infantry unit for 90 days wore off and I was transferred

to B Company, 3rd Tanks, I realized that I had just spent 90 days with the Heart and Soul of the Marine Corps.

And in response to the ad in a past issue of the Sponson Box asking for input to this story:

Jim Coan wrote: There were 18 of us 2d Lt. tank officers (1801s) from TBS 4-67 who came over to Nam together on 5 August 1967. Nine stayed in Da Nang to be assigned to 1st Tank Bn., and nine went north to be in 3rd Tank Bn. I was later told that for some time thereafter, all tank officers went to infantry units initially, then transferred to tanks as openings occurred in a tank battalion. Also, fewer Basic School graduates were being assigned to tank school; they were all getting an infantry or artillery MOS. And, by the way, the most hazardous MOS in Nam besides infantry officer was arty FO.

Because of the shortage of new (replacement) tank officers, I was out in the bush for 11 months before moving up to be XO of Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks. I was so happy on my birthday, July 15, 1968, when a shiny new 2d Lt. named Frank Blakemore arrived by chopper out in Leatherneck Square to replace me. I was going back to Dong Ha to be Alpha's XO. We had a new CO named Capt. Sullivan who liked me.

The previous May, the XO of Alpha and I butted heads. We were both 1st Lts., and I was not about to take any crap from him. A week later, I was told to pack my gear and say goodbye to 1st Platoon, that I was being reassigned to amtracs on the Qua Viet. When I got to Quang Tri, the personnel officer told me to go back home to Dong Ha. Seems there was some griping by several senior NCOs in Alpha Company that I was being screwed over. The 3rd Tank Bn. Sgt. Major heard about it and told the colonel who intervened on my behalf.

John Heffernan wrote: Good Morning, John. Pete is giving you the straight scoop. Gen. Ray Davis was the 3rd Marine Division Commander when we arrived in country and, due to the shortage of 03 brown bars, if you were not infantry or artillery you were diverted at Division to >>

an infantry battalion for “90 days”. One of the unintended consequences was that apparently no one at Third Tanks knew where we were, so if your Infantry Bn. didn’t voluntarily cough you up, they could keep you. If you did a bad job with the grunts, you got a job counting jockstraps in the rear for the rest of your tour, so there was significant pressure to perform well, not to mention the fact that you were expected to save your own life and by extension the lives of your platoon. I was the platoon commander for 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, First Battalion, 3rd Marines from the time we arrived in country until March 13, 1969, when I was medevaced out of country to Guam. When I returned from the hospital in May, General Davis was gone, policies had changed, and I was reassigned as S-3 actual, 3rd Tanks, where I served until I took over as the Company XO when Dave Ralston took over Alpha Company after Mike Wunsch was killed. Pete and I went to RVN on the same plane and came home on the same plane, but that’s a story Pete has already told.

Bob Skeels wrote: I think there was an 85% chance of a Marine infantry officer being killed in 1968 in Vietnam. So, Pete & “Heff” are right, we were indeed thrown a curve ball when we arrived in country on September 28, 1968. My sphincter muscle still fires off when I even think of that moment that we were lined up and assigned as rifle platoon commanders in different infantry units. The expressions “War is Hell” and “Hazardous Combat Environment “ are not even close to what we experienced in that DMZ Jungle War. Someday, they’ll really honor those “Marine grunts” that served 24-7-365 days in that jungle before we could rotate them. War is not all combat, and there were a lot of non-battlefield casualties caused by leeches / rat bites / jungle rot and heat stroke!

I was assigned to Third Platoon, Echo Company, 2/4, 3rd Marine Division, and served 90 days until I rotated to B Company, 3rd Tank Bn. at Vinh Dai on January 3, 1969. The greatest honor of my life was when I was asked to stay on with 3rd Platoon and continue as a “grunt Lt.” by Captain Al Hill on Dec. 29, 1968. My replacement, Lt. William Hunt, was KIA two months later at FSB Russell on Feb 25, 1969 (See <http://www.lzrussell.org>).

As a side note, Karl Marlantes, the author of the 2010 blockbuster novel “Matterhorn” arrived in-country at exactly the same time as we did and was assigned to Charlie Company, 1/4. So, Pete & I, for sure, went on some

battalion chopper assaults with him . . . and, for sure, the multi-battalion assault on Mutters Ridge on 12/7/68. I’ve had three e-mails from him, and his book was spot on as to conditions in that DMZ jungle war, and I salute & honor his outstanding service. Most of his enemy contact was in March 1969; that was surely one of those bad months in the ‘Nam. We, in 1st platoon, B Co., 3rd Tanks, had our share of activity during that time !

Rick Lewis wrote: Pete, read your request for anybody who got to play grunt. At C Co., 1st Tanks, it was well known that if your mine-damaged tank was going to be down, while waiting on parts, two of the crew were sent to the grunts until parts came in. Sometimes we would get stuck out there for weeks, because our company could not find us and/or the grunts were in no hurry to give us up. To make it fair, the Plt. Sgt. would have us flip a coin with two out of three times to see who got to go. TC’s did not have to go, just crewmen. There were times that they would have us pull the .30’s with tri-pods and put us at a patrol base with us covering a possible enemy avenue of approach, which was better than humping every day on foot. I do not remember any tanker becoming WIA or KIA but we all came back and kissed our tanks. I will check with a couple of buddies who I think also got stuck being grunts for a while. ♦



## TWO REUNION STORIES

### KORY’S TRIP TO DC

BY KORY DIDEAR

GRANDSON OF JIMMY DIDEAR

H&S AND C COS, 1ST TANKS, '67 - '69

My grandfather and I have always been really close. He’s always been around for me. He has helped me through things my parents couldn’t help with. When he told me about the trip to Washington D.C., he gave me a year in advance notice. I couldn’t wait to go spend time with my Granddaddy.

When it finally came time to go, I was so excited you wouldn’t believe it. Well, we got there and in my mind I imagined it would be really fun ... but it was more than fun, it was the best time of my life. I saw so much and learned so much more; not just about our nation’s capital and American history. I learned so many things from Granddaddy’s friends about him. I even managed to get him to tell me a few things when we visited the National Museum of the Marine Corps.

Speaking of that, when we were at the museum, he taught me so many things I never knew. It was mainly about tanks (obviously), but it was about other things too. One thing that stood out the most is the K.I.A. numbers from the war that he fought in Vietnam. Seeing the numbers hit me hard, but not near as hard as it did the next day. We went to the Wall. Seeing the numbers is one thing but seeing all of the names and realizing it wasn’t just these brave people who had lost their lives, but to think of the families that were greatly affected by the death of their loved ones hit me hard. Let me tell you that was the first time Granddaddy and I cried together.

The reason I am telling you this is because the trip was tons of fun and I learned so much, things that you would never think of on a regular day. For the most part, even with the tears we shed, I know we both had a great time. You should have seen how excited Granddaddy was to teach me these things. I loved hearing about it.

So many people asked me what I liked about D.C. and they expected an answer like the White House or the Lincoln Memorial, but it was spending time with my Granddaddy and learning so much about him. I would

strongly encourage all members to bring their grandchildren. I promise that they will not only love the trip but being with you will be as good or better. All my expectations were beyond fulfilled on the trip. I can’t say thank you enough for the kindness of everyone who I met on the trip. My granddaddy’s name is Jimmy Didear.



Jimmy Didear and his grandson Kory

### A HUMBLING EXPERIENCE

BY ADRIAN KNOX

SON OF CLYDE KNOX

C CO., 1ST TANKS, '68 - '69

In October, I had the honor to attend the USMCVTA reunion in Washington, D.C. This event was truly an eye opening experience for me. Throughout the time I spent in D.C. I realized something...I started to forget about work, bills that needed to be paid, the “What if’s” we all tend to ask ourselves; and the unknown obstacles life can throw at you without a moment’s notice.

As I went through each day, I found myself reflecting on how blessed I really am. Since I was a child learning about my father’s journey, I always recognized the sacrifices made by the Marine Corps in Vietnam. I still recall learning about Da Nang, OP-10 and the Mud Flats, along with parts of the M-48 and constant tank maintenance. My Dad’s scrapbook was something I always would look through, just to learn more.

Even though my Dad knew I had an interest in the >>

Vietnam War, I still think he was surprised knowing that I wanted to join him for this reunion. When we finally arrived, I was greeted with open arms. As I sat with my Dad, I was allowed to freely look into the scrapbooks of fellow veterans at the table. When everyone started to reminisce, I recognized that all of the stories my dad had told me over the years were shared similarly within the group. I was honored to be a part of the conversation and to learn what all of the Marines had gone through. My Dad jokingly asked a few times if I was ready to enlist—he couldn't have been more correct.

All of my time being there, the pride of the Marine Corps was felt within my heart, either in the Museum of the Marine Corps, at The Wall, and especially the night of the Fallen Heroes programs; there was not one time that I did not have goosebumps. I cannot express enough how appreciative I am that I was able to be a part of your reunion.



Adrian and his dad, Clyde Knox

I will always be proud of the Marine Corps and especially of my father. From the bottom of my heart, thank you for everything. God Bless and Semper Fi. ♦

## M1 Tanker's Garand

BY ROBERT E. PEAVEY

The M1 Garand rifle was considered by General George S. Patton as, "The greatest battle implement ever devised." But I recently came across what looked to be a "midget" M1 Garand in a gun store.

At first, I wasn't at all convinced it was a real rifle. When I picked it up I realized that it was indeed a real weapon; I could only wonder why anyone would cut down a perfectly good M1. The storeowner explained the rarity of the WWII piece I was looking at; he

called it a, "Tanker Garand" M1. Of course my ears perked up!

I found it hard to believe crews were actually issued what appeared to be nothing more than a 6-inch shorter M1. Shortening the barrel, gas cylinder and the piston reduced the length. But I still couldn't imagine carrying 5 of them inside a WWII tank.

I did some follow up research and discovered that what I had actually seen was a, "U.S. Rifle M1, T26, .3006 caliber". I also discovered that

it was never designed for or issued to tank crews. Its intended use was for paratroopers and was actually a field modification by an ordnance unit of the 6th Army in the Philippines. The rifle somehow earned the moniker, "Tanker's Garand". A special courier delivered a single model to the Springfield Armory in 1945 for testing and evaluation. It was never tested because the war was about over.

They can occasionally still be found at gun shows and estate sales but beware; there is only one original left and it is in the Springfield Armory Museum. From what I gathered, people apparently wanted them after the war. Springfield Arms made the shortened version for a while and then other companies, like Federal Ordnance, made cheaper versions. One way of telling the copies from the original is the post-WWII gun was chambered for .308, not the .3006 caliber of WWII. ♦



## Office Pogue? My Ass... I Am A "Remington Raider"

BY JOE LIU

C CO., 1ST TANKS

RVN DEC '66 - DEC '67

After reading the "Sponson Box" for nearly ten years, I have come to the conclusion that war stories are fine and dandy for all of you gun bunnies and arsonists out there. They have not shadowed the reality of what us office pagues had to put up with. Call us what you may, "In the rear with the gear pukes, Shitfisters, Office Pagues, Pussies," whatever, but I prefer the term: Remington Raider, with a typewriter in one hand and an M-14 in the other. The Leatherneck magazine even had articles for MOS(s) payroll clerks and mail clerks. No respect was given for the MOS 0141/Administration Clerk.

To begin with, I am a Hollywood Marine, Platoon 327, January 1966. Yeah, I went to MCRD San Diego for boot camp. I graduated a basic Marine just like the rest of you. One shot away from being a rifle expert and experienced the same old shit all of you remember. In boot camp, I broke the cardinal rule of never volunteering for anything. I was a Type J reservist, serving two years Active Duty and four years in the Active Reserves. I wanted to get into computers when I got out of the Corps so I reenlisted for an additional year of active duty to get into computer school. I was told that I had to go to Administrative Clerk

School first. So now, while still in boot camp, I had a three-year service obligation. So, off to Basic Infantry Training at Camp Pendleton. Just a side note here; I have never seen a USMC computer to this day!!!

While at ITR, a secret was revealed about me. I had the ability to type 45+ words per minute. I kept this ability a secret because of the stigma of being called a pussy and all that goes with it. The instructor needed someone with this skill so my life of being a Remington Raider began. I started doing administration duties and the benefits slowly raised its wonderful head. I should explain that typing had had a profound effect on my life as it was learned at an early age as a disciplinary tool by my guardian father. When my four guardian brothers and I screwed up, we were forced to write pages of text by copying articles from books and magazines of all types. After getting hit with 50 pages for various crimes, our penmanship was destroyed. But the effect of reading a lot was really the purpose of this exercise. So, when books on typing appeared, we all learned this skill. Typing saved me in school because my penmanship was so bad I had to type everything. I even took typing class in high school to meet girls. Go Figure! Anyway, at ITR

I learned that typing was an art form that few other Marines had. Life as a "Remington Raider" meant no mess duty, fire watch, gas chamber...Hell! I could really enjoy this life!

After ITR came Administrative Clerk School. What a boring and long six weeks. Graduating in the top ten percent and meritoriously promoted, PFC Liu headed for his first leave and just turned 19 years old in the process. Then I was assigned to 2nd BN / 8th Marine Regiment's S-1 Section at Camp LeJeune, North Carolina. The duty assignment was great and, after four months, I was promoted to Lance Corporal. Once again, I broke the rule for not volunteering for anything and so my Caribbean cruise was changed to orders to Vietnam. This happened because another Marine was about to become a father, so I took his place. He never told me if his wife had a boy or a girl. So, on 10 December 1966, I landed in Da Nang, RVN, and was assigned to C Co., 1st Tanks.

As a Remington Raider, I had many duties but my main job was to be the Unit Diary Clerk. This daily report was to give the status of all assigned personnel, basically any changes to duty assignments, wounded or killed in action, hospitalizations, transfers, operations, etc. It called for >>

personnel accounting in modern terms. Being an author of daily activities was a challenge. The hardest part of the job was when someone was wounded or killed. Thank God, we only lost one person while I was there. In a way, I felt part of the history because without these reports, there would be no history. Personnel action reports were compiled by the use of metal name plates. All of the Marine's information was on his plate which was made by a hand embossing machine. Name, rank, serial number and a lot of other information was on these plates. If a Marine was ready to go home or maybe get promoted, information about his status could be drawn from his personnel plate. Anyway, this is all pretty boring to you treadheads...but without those daily reports no promotions, no awards, no history. My other duties included being the mail clerk and maintenance clerk for all Service Record Books of our unit's personnel.

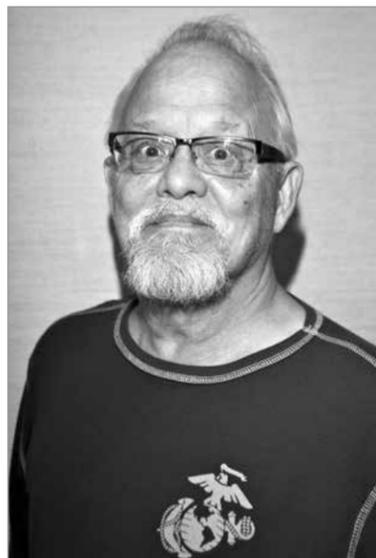
I hated being in the office. I wanted to learn more about tanks and what the tank crewmen's duties were. During my slow-down time in my clerical work, I helped in the tank park with maintenance and repair of mine damaged tanks. I learned to clean and maintain the crew served weapons, and I volunteered to go into the field for any reason...ammunition runs, fuel or water resupply and, of course, the most important "mail call." It was a good thing that I was good at being a true 0141. Since I was so good, it allowed me to get my job done quickly

and it gave me more time to be in the tank park and in the field. One true trait of being in a tank unit, all of us helped each other with the common goal of getting the job done. In working with the tank crews, standing perimeter guard duty, performing maintenance in the tank part, it gave me a chance to learn as much as I could about a tank crewman, hoping one day to get the chance to strap on a tank comm. helmet.

Finally, I was given the opportunity when Cpl. Craig Newberry, a TC of a flame-thrower tank, took me out in the field and I was given the chance to drive...and burn a few hedgerows. I thought that I had died and gone to Heaven. It even got me sexually excited (no, not really!)...but it did feel awfully good to be given the experience that I had always wanted since I first heard a tank rumbling through the compound. Thank you Craig for giving me the opportunity for OJT in order to learn to be a tank crewman. If needed, I wanted to be ready to fill in as a loader or driver! Now I feel like one of the boys. I was glad to be part of an elite bunch of Marines who gave so



Joe in 1966



Joe in 2015

much to get the job done.

It was much later that I learned the importance of the unit diaries and all of those other pogues (or Remington Raiders) writing situation reports and chronologies, etc. Without these, there would be no history of our hardships, successes, and experiences during the Vietnam War. I always thought that I could have done more to help. But like true Marines, we did what we had to do to get the job done. As a result of my efforts, I received a meritorious combat promotion to sergeant and I went home in December 1967. I missed Tet of 1968 by 30 days. I recall worrying about those Marines who fought in Hue and feeling guilty about not being there to help.

I was (and still am) proud to have served in Vietnam with a great group of Marine tankers. All of those Marines shared one thing in common: Getting the job done; watching over and caring for each other. I hope that I have earned the respect of all of you treadheads and have earned the right to say...And I will quote 1st Sgt Rick Lewis... "IF YOU AIN'T TANKS, YOU AIN'T SHIT!!!" I will always be one of you. May the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association continue to grow and bring us all back together.

Joe adds: One of the proudest things about my Vietnam service was my meritorious combat promotion to sergeant as a Remington Raider signed by Lt. Gen. Donn J. Robertson, CG 1st Marine Division. ♦

*Editor's Note: As I indicated in the last issue of the S-Box, in early 2014, I received a rather thick envelope from Lt. Col. Jim Cowman, an 1802 from Clovis, NM. The package contained 56 hand-written personal stories detailing events of Jim's three tours in-country. None of the stories are more than two pages so I thought that after I transcribed a few of them to a Word document, that I'd share a few more them with the membership.*

### The Old Men and The Frag

The major whom I relieved as liaison officer to CG III MAF in early 1971 was Tim Gunity (later a Col. involved in the Beirut bombing). He thought it was a good idea to take me on a quick tour of the area. It had been three years since my first tour in Vietnam, so away we went. We were billeted at the Air Wing facility at Da Nang, where we could "swing with the Wing." Col. "Something" Jack Armstrong was CO of the wing.

The major and I exited the main gate and turned north on the road to parallel the great Da Nang to Hue "railroad," a shambles of a railroad if there ever was one. We had gone less than a block when an explosion behind us indicated something was not right. We agreed that the explosion was a frag (hand grenade) so we returned to see what had scared the hell out of us.

Several locals were severely injured, some were dead, and the MPs related what had happened. Someone had stolen or found a frag grenade and this group of sensitive Orientals were not sure what to do with it. As they passed it from person to person, one of the more intelligent ones managed to "pull the pin." As he did so, the handle flew off as he passed the grenade to the next elderly gentleman (old gook). Now they knew they were in trouble so the old man carrying the grenade shuffled (or was pushed) towards the hatch (door) of the hooch. He did not make it. The resulting

explosion made a shambles of the folks and the hut involved and perhaps a lesson was learned. Don't screw around with live ordinance!

### The Stoner

In the late 60's, the Marine Corps was testing the Stoner weapons system. It was a good weapon and the armed forces made a mistake by not taking a better look at it. By the by, the Stoner was really the AR-15 (Cal. 22) and the U.S. Army really screwed up by modifying and making it the M-16. MCDEC was evaluating the Stoner, and being attached to the command caused my familiarity with the weapon.

In early '71, I returned to Vietnam and during a visit to the 1st Marines, a Stoner was located hanging on their armory wall. I questioned where it had come from. No one knew. I talked to the Executive Officer about the weapon and he indicated he would be most happy if, when he turned his back, I would depart with the weapon, no questions asked! I did so. I repaired the weapon and used it in firing demos along with the XM174 (the 40mm automatic grenade launcher).

When my replacement arrived in-country, I had already packed up the



Stoner and intended to mail it to myself as a keepsake. I later thought better of the idea and turned the Stoner over to my replacement.

I then returned to Quantico for duty and forgot about the Stoner. Several months later a box arrived in the mail. It turned out that my replacement, wanting the Stoner off of his back, had mailed it to me. An unaccounted for, serialized automatic machine gun is not what you want in your home. I knew that the Corps, as well as local law enforcement officers, would frown on such a possession. As much as I liked weapons, and with tears in my eyes, I reluctantly turned the weapon into the MCDEC armory where it probably still is.

### The 48 Second Interview

General Cushman's staff conducted interviews for a "prospective general's aide." My diary indicated these interviews took place about April 1, 1967 ... (also known as "April Fool's Day" and a most appropriate day for such interviews).

I had just returned from R&R in Hawaii and was on my way back to A Co., 1st Tank Bn, when Col. "Roughhouse" Taylor informed me that I had no choice, I was to be interviewed for the aide position. Col. Taylor would have done most anything to get rid of me.

I reported for the interview. One of the senior officers who conducted the interview already knew me. He asked, "What are you doing here?"

"Reporting to be interviewed, Sir," I replied.

"Get out of here." He said.

And I did. I was back in my Jeep and on my way in less than 49 seconds. ♦

# One Top-Notch Sergeant

BY: JIM COAN

During the siege of Con Thien in 1967, I was the platoon leader of the First Platoon, Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks assigned there. Sometime in mid-September, several new replacements arrived by helicopter and found their way to my bunker. They were replacing a half-dozen 1st Platoon short-timers who had seen and done it all the past spring and summer in the Con Thien area.

Those short-timers had been there when Con Thien was almost overrun on May 8th, they'd provided security for the "trace" being bulldozed between Gio Linh and Con Thien that spring, and they'd retrieved the bodies of the "walking dead" left behind at the Marketplace Massacre in July. They were finally going home . . . alive.

When I first arrived at Con Thien on 10 September, I was the shiny new lieutenant with a lot to learn about not becoming a casualty from the daily pounding of incoming being rained on The Hill. A week later, in a sudden reversal of perception, to these new replacements I was the "old man"—the veteran; I could see it in their eyes as I briefed

them on what to expect and how to stay safe.

One of the new tankers stood out from the rest. He was much older, probably around 30, and he was a Sergeant E-5. That was Sergeant Howard. In the coming days and weeks, I would grow to respect this Marine and depend upon him for his savvy and his leadership skills.

Sergeant Howard had completed a four-year tour in the Marines back in the fifties, then left active duty to work in the construction field. When the Vietnam War began heating up in the sixties, he re-enlisted. He subsequently

went through amtrac training, but somehow ended up in 3rd Tank Battalion . . . our gain, their loss.

I assigned Sgt. Howard to replace the departed Cpl. Aranda as TC of A-13. In October, after our platoon sergeant, Gunny Hopkins, rotated back to the rear, I assigned Sgt. Howard to be the acting platoon sergeant until a replacement for Gunny Hopkins arrived.

Sgt. Howard had some quirks. For instance, when his tank A-13 and mine (A-11) hit mines at the former Rocky Ford crossing one evening in late September, I was ordered to abandon

both tanks and strike off on foot with the infantry security from 2/9. It was growing dark and a B-52 strike was due to impact near there that night. I told the crewmen on both tanks: "Carry only the items most important along with you." I assumed everyone knew that meant personal weapons and whatever else could be easily carried on our hike. Howard climbed back inside A-13 and emerged a few minutes later with three or four cartons of cigarettes stuffed down his trousers and shirt. That was apparently most important to him.

Why did I have such confidence in Sgt. Howard? He had a way of keeping his Marines busy without having a lot of griping about it. Whenever I came near his bunker along the southern perimeter at Con Thien, his crewmen were always doing something constructive, like building a deeper, more incoming-proof bunker. He would greet me with a broad grin, holding a C-rat can of coffee in one hand and a lit Camel cigarette stub between the fingers of his other hand. He always knew where every Marine in the platoon was located and what they were doing at that moment. If I got the word from Alpha Company

to send a crewman back to the rear, I passed the word to Howard and never had to give it a second thought, as that crewman would be on the next departing helicopter.

We spent a lot of hours passing the time in our bunkers, talking about home and what we wanted to do if and when we survived long enough to catch the Freedom Bird back to the World. That was when Sgt. Howard told me that his dream job was to be a Marine Corps recruiter some day. I hoped that it worked out that way for him, but hearing stories of how the Corps worked, I figured the odds were against him.

As inevitably happened, 1st Platoon had a new platoon sergeant assigned and Sgt. Howard reverted back to tank commander. Just before Operation Thor in July, 1968, Howard was sent back to Dong Ha and he never returned to 1st Platoon. I never saw him again.

Many years later, I happened to be thumbing through a Marine Corps recruitment brochure when I turned to a page that showed a photo (above) of Staff Sergeant Howard "advising" a young Marine. Howard's dream had come true of being a Marine Corps recruiter. ♦

*Editor's Note: This story was written by a U.S. Marine grunt company commander who spent most of his in-country time in the hills around Khe Sanh.*

## Getting Saved by the Doggies

(Also known as: The aftermath of "Operation Pegasus")

The NVA (Charlie) must have said, "Hey, let's watch the U.S. Army embarrass those little fuckers at Khe Sanh." When the doggies get there, everyone else is pulling out. The Marines feel it is just about over. Khe Sanh and everything around it for 6 miles is now a moonscape.

A doggie general drives up outside the base. He has some of his guys trample down some wire, and he positions a film crew inside. Then he starts doing a MacArthur number. Instead of

wading ashore, thought, this general is coming over the wire. Over and over he films it, mugging for the camera.

Marines are sitting around laughing their asses off. I wonder if the lifer son of a bitch shows that as part of his prize war story? I'll bet that doggie sends that film all over the Army, worldwide. General so-and-so rescues the battered Marines at Khe Sanh.

I love the cocksucker's timing. To think you get my ass out of a clean bed to fly back here to see this. His men

show up in straggling groups – tired little doggies. As if each man carried an axe, they hold their rifle barrels and rest the stocks on their shoulders. If I ever saw one of my Marines do that in the field, I'd have my foot so far up his ass, it would hit his heart. The doggies look like a bunch of woodcutters dragging their asses home from work. I get saved by the 1968 version of MacArthur and his woodcutters? ♦



# IT'S A SMALL WORLD

BY BOB PEAVEY

During 1968, I filled out a college application while at a little outpost on the DMZ called Oceanview. It was northeast of Gio Linh right on the South China Sea and the DMZ. A couple of months later, I rotated back to the states in March of 1969. It was May when I received an acceptance letter from the Rochester Institute of Technology; I was out of the Corps by June. Three months later, in September 1969, I was attending my first day of school.

The college was located in Rochester, New York, which was also the home of Eastman Kodak Company where I would, oddly enough, retire after 30 years. The school's campus was rather spread out and I was trying to find my way around. Being my first day on campus, I felt like an FNG once more. The card I had in my hand said that the class was in an auditorium, the name of which escapes me. I had to stop several people to find the building. The first course of my four-year "enlistment" was titled, "Photographic Science and Sensitometry".

I entered the building from the bright of day. Once my eyes adjusted to the room, I realized I was in a large foyer; it took a minute for my eyes to adjust to the darkened room. There were several more sets of doors leading into the auditorium. I picked one set and it quickly became apparent I was in a very large curved auditorium; it had very steep aisles. It reminded me of a medical school amphitheater less

the cadaver. There were at least 200 people seated down front. The stairs were as steep as any sports stadium and the chairs equally as uncomfortable. I chose an aisle seat several rows above the mass of students. I knew I couldn't sit in the middle of a crowd, I mean, how could I exit in a hurry? It was an early and yet to be diagnosed symptom of PTSD.

A few minutes after taking my seat, I realized there was someone next to me struggling down the aisle. I turned and the first thing I became aware of was a pair of silver crutches followed by a military issue field jacket. I looked up from my seat to see the individual who had no one helping him. He was trying to get into the chair just in front of me. He was precariously perched on the edge of the steep stairs, struggling with a book bag, and trying to get the seat to flip down. I leaned over to help him by taking his book bag and holding the seat down. It was then I noticed the black Marine corporal chevrons on the jacket's collar.

Naturally, upon seeing a Marine field jacket the immediate question was, "Who were you with?" wondering if the bad leg had something to do with Vietnam.

"Two-Seven," he replied (2nd Battalion, 7th Marines).

"I worked with Two-Seven," I said.

He wanted to know when I was in Vietnam.

"February 1968 to march of '69," I said.

He told me he was there from 12/67 until May of '68 when he was medevac'd out.

"May of 1968," I asked? "You were on Operation Allen Brook!" I immediately got his attention.

"That's where I took one in the knee," pointing to his right leg, "on that frickin' island. I just got out of the hospital a few months ago."

His reference to "the island" was known by anyone who served in the 1st Marine Division TOAR. Goi Noi Island was a very unhealthy piece of real estate; it was the southern most area of "Dodge City" (south of Hill 55) about 20 miles southwest of Da Nang. But Allen Brook lasted some 3 or 4 months, so I had to ask him when in May he was wounded.

"During the second week," he said, "before the op even had a name."

"That's when I was out there," I said. "I was with the tanks supporting you guys!" I was amazed at just how small the world actually got . . . but it was about to get a lot smaller.

He said he had a fondness for tanks because one of them had several 5-gallon water cans and shared the precious liquid with the grunts; temperatures had hit 120+ degrees. I began to wonder if it could have been us, for there were six tanks out there at the time, but three of the tanks were from Bravo Co., 5th Tanks, and we had brought with us several extra cans of water. The other three tanks were from 1st Tanks.

I asked, "Did the crew say anything

to you while giving you the water?"

He smiled and said, "Yeah, they wanted us to watch out for gooks in spider holes with RPGs and they warned us not to get too close to the rear of the tank if the shit hit the fan and they had to back up."

I smiled remembering the lecture we gave each grunt while pouring water into their helmets, canteen cups, empty C-rat cans and just cupped hands. My tank commander and platoon sergeant, S/Sgt Bob Embesi, made it a Salvation Army-like meeting; you had to listen to the preachin' before you got fed. Naturally, being the gunner

who was trapped inside the tank all day, I looked for any excuse to get out of the turret when the tank stopped in position. I always volunteered to be the water boy.

My new friend smiled and asked, "Do you remember the night in front of the railroad berm?"

"More than I want to," I said.

"Well, I dug in next to a tank that night. I will never forget the name on the gun tube; all us grunts thought it was funny."

"Better Living Thru Canister!" I said, before he could get it out.

His eyes locked onto mine.

"That was your tank?" he asked.

"Yes, and I was the one issuing the water," I said.

He immediately reached out his hand and said, "Thank you. I don't know if I would have made it without that water." Still holding my hand he said, "John McQuaid."

"Bob Peavey," I answered back.

I couldn't help but think, what were the odds of such a chance meeting? And yet, . . . happen it did. It was my most memorable small world experience of my life. Needless to say, we became very close friends during our school years. ♦

## A word from your Treasurer...

I have completed closing out our finances for 2015 and, as promised, wanted to provide you with a brief of how the VTA is doing. Let me first provide you with some basic information. (1) The annual financial report has been accepted by the President and is now a formal part of the VTA's records. (2) The accounting practices used for the VTA are that of a cash based corporation in accordance with guidelines proved by the Financial Accounting Standards Board. (3) The VTA is required to file an annual report with the Internal Revenue Service and that has been accomplished.

Yes, we did finish the year with a positive balance in our checking account. The main reason that we did is because of your continued generosity.

The dues are just enough to keep VTA going so it is the extra few bucks almost everyone sends along with their dues that make the difference. Other than dues & donations our other income is minimal, normally from the sale of patches and stickers.

Our largest expense is the printing and mailing of the Sponson Box. Personally I think it is the gold standard for a newsletter about the members of a Veteran's organization and provides a record of our service.

Other operational expenses include the planning for the reunions, scholarships, administration and the funding for items to go on sale in the VTA Store. Those items sold via the VTA Store, such as the book "Forgotten Tracks I", 50th Anniversary Medalion and Challenge Coins are normal-

ly priced close to the cost of each as they are expensive.

The final item is the reunion itself. The cost per person is established to cover the estimated cost of the reunion. The auction helps to ensure that all costs of the reunion are covered without using VTA funds. The past reunion was covered by per person fees, funds from the auction and the sale of donated items such as books in the Torsion Bar.

Our record keeping practices allow us to identify where each cent came from and how it was spent. If you ever have a question about the financial operation of VTA feel free to contact me or the President.

Semper Fi,  
Bruce Van Apeldoorn

# A JEEP FOR 3RD TANKS CIVIL AFFAIRS

BY SGT. JAMES E. "JIM" "SAUSE" SAUSOMAN

It was 1966 and it had been a year since we left Camp Pendleton, and most of Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks was getting ready to rotate home to the "World." I had seen my previous platoon leader, 1st Lt. Robert E.T. Mattingly, when he stopped by the platoon area. He told me that he was in charge of 3rd Tanks Civil Affairs and asked if I would like to join him. Well, it didn't take me long to decide, so I requested a transfer and an extension of three months to get this new duty. I went to work for Lt. Mattingly at H&S Company, 3rd Tanks Civil Affairs, on 5 Aug 1966. Right away, I got my military driver's license to include all the vehicles up to the 5-ton truck. I took the training from the Motor Pool NCO and he presented

my updated license.

On a daily basis, I would have to go over to see what vehicle was available for us. Many times, I would need a 5-ton for the different duties in the village, and I checked out the same truck most of the time. And some of the time, I could check out a 4 x 4 and we would use it. When it came to checking out a Jeep simply to run errands for the Lt., that was a different situation. If I wanted a Jeep, I would have to get one assigned to us the previous day. This went on for some time.

By October, Lt. Mattingly was getting transferred up to Division Civil Affairs, and when he was assigned to Division Headquarters I requested a transfer also. I was even ready to extend for another six months. I went to see the

Commanding General to plead my case and he turned me down. I figured if I couldn't get the transfer then I would just finish out my tour and head back to the World. Then, in the door came our new OIC, Lt. Willard F. Lochridge III, or "Lurch" for short. Our staff included Gunny Anderson NCOIC, S/Sgt. James J. Biedrzycki, Sgt. Enos S. Lambert Jr, ARVN S/Sgt. Hoang Dinh Lac, S/Sgt. Khuu Phuoc and me, Cpl. James E. "Sause" Sausoman.

We would work hard with the villagers and had done a lot to assist them. By using good old Marine know-how, we taught them how to fish (using hand grenades) and then take a good catch to sell in the market. This was just one of the many duties that we performed.

It was on one of the many trips that Sgt. Lambert and I went; we were near the Main PX on Liberty Hill when we were "awarded" the brand new jeep that was "presented" to us by an Army captain. If you will visualize it, the road made a large loop with many shops located in Quonset huts up to the theater and down by the PX building just outside of "Dog Patch" that was across from the entrance to the Da Nang Air Base. I was driving up the road and Lambert said, "Stop!" so I did it real quick. He then said, "Back up!"

Well, I saw what he was up to and backed up to the shiny, brand new jeep. Lambert jumped out of our vehicle and into the new jeep faster than a blinking eye. He started it and backed it up as fast as he could, heading out on to the main road. I proceeded up to the theater and down the other road where I saw a man running across the parade ground yelling at the top of his lungs. I came up to the intersection and turned right to head back to our area. I had just made the turn when running up out of the drainage ditch comes the yelling man, and he shouts for me to stop. I figure my ass is in trouble when it turns out to be a captain who runs up to my jeep, jumps in and yells, "Follow that jeep!" I proceeded to head down the road thinking, now what will happen to me, not knowing if he saw me with Lambert or not.

I drove to the intersection in Dog Patch and "we" looked left and right for the jeep. It was at this time that the captain spoke to me about how his colonel would really be pissed at him if he loses the colonel's jeep. I looked over and almost felt sorry for him when I noticed he was not only an

Army captain but he was also a chaplain. Well he told me he just saw the jeep enter the air base and for me to proceed through the gate. The guards let us in and we hot footed into the base. Now, I'm thinking that Lambert is far away by now and that I am safe. The captain and I cruised around the base area for a while and we don't see his missing jeep.

We pulled out of the main gate and he said, "Turn left and head down the road." This is toward our company area. I continued down the road and bypassed the turnoff to our company area at Hill 10. We came to the bridge and got stopped by the Marine guards. They told us that it isn't safe to continue. I handed my "grease gun" to the captain and told him, if he would like to go, we will. Well, he thinks it over for a bit and then tells me to return to the PX area. I drove back to the PX area thinking that I am going to catch hell now. However, when we got to the PX, he told me to just drop him off and he would get a ride back to his area.

On the drive back to our company area, I was laughing like hell that we pulled off this caper. There wasn't any planning on this one; it just happened. Upon returning to the area, Lt. Lochridge, Gunny Anderson and Sgt. Lambert thought that I got caught and they were wondering what had happened to me. When I told them the story of my getting in on the chase for the stolen jeep, we all had a good laugh. The jeep was one of the new-style jeeps that the Army had just received. We figured that all we needed to do was to paint it and add some Marine logos, and the jeep was changed to all the correct Marine markings. As Paul Harvey would say: "Only (then) Lieutenant Lochridge would have the

rest of the story." That is, only the Lt. would know what eventually happened to the jeep, since I rotated back to the World in mid-December, 1966.

And now the rest of the story from Lt. Bill Lochridge:

After Sgt. Lambert brought the jeep back and parked it right next to the S-5 hooch, I came out and couldn't believe what you guys had done. The Army jeep was one of those new ones. Marines had them down to the Bn. level only for COs and Bn. Com Officers. We took the jeep over to the Bn. repair shop. They re-painted it in Marine green and added Marine TAC numbers to it. Since these new jeeps had radios on their rear ends and whip antennas, I went over to our Bn. Com officer and he gave us a whip antenna. Next, it was back over to the repair shop where they created a wooden box size radio and covered it in green canvas. We were now ready to use it...and we did daily.

I think you had left country a few weeks after this caper. However, about eight weeks later I was called into the Bn. XO's office – Major Larson. Standing in front of his desk at attention, he said, "Lurch, you are in big time shit".

I said, "How's that, sir". He told me that the Bn. had received a message from an Army Col. up in Phu Bai demanding that we return his Chaplain's jeep within three days or he was going to go to Gen. Cushman, CO of III MAF, who was a personal friend of his, and he was to have me brought up on charges. Apparently, the Army Col. had been on R&R in Bangkok, and one night in a bar he overheard a couple of Marine sergeants talking about this Lt. Lochridge from 3rd Tank Bn., >>



## Fish coming up

SSgt. James J. Biedrzycki blocks his ears as an explosive goes off in the Cau Do River south of Da Nang. He is head of the 3d Tank Bn. civic action team, which uses explosives to help fishermen of Phong Bac hamlet with their catch. The fish are sold at the local market, with the proceeds going into a community development fund. (Photo by Cpl. N. B. Call)



## Sorting the catch

Marines of the 3d Tank Bn., advised by Vietnamese youngsters, sort the day's catch of fish near the Cau Do River south of Da Nang. Sorting the fish are SSgt. James J. Biedrzycki (left), and Sgt. Enos S. Lambert, Jr., members of the battalion civil affairs team.

who stole an Army jeep.

Major Larson said, "Lurch, your ass is grass if you don't get that jeep back to him."

I replied, "Sir, isn't our Alpha Company up there near this Colonel's HQ? Let's send them a radio message and have them take a look to see if the Army had 'acquired' any Marine stuff."

Major Larson said, "OK," and we did. About four hours later, Alpha Co. came back and said they had found a Marine generator - repainted - that was powering the Colonel's base camp.

Upon hearing this info, our Bn. CO, LtCol Bill Corson, sent the Army Colonel a short message that said, "The price of electricity comes high . . . 3rd Tank Bn." So, we kept the jeep and the Army Colonel kept his generator.

So, now you know the real ending, but thank you guys for the jeep. That was only one of the real fun times we had. The below article will verify that we had been doing our job. We were to be assassinated by the Viet Cong after catching one of their spies and we found a list with our names and ranks. Many times we would be in the village with only the PF platoon, and that was questionable. We had a price on our heads! ♦

## Wanted: Dead—any member of 3d Tank Bn. CA team

By: Cpl. W.L. Christofferson

DA NANG—Wanted: Dead. Any member of the civic action team of the 3rd Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division.

The Viet Cong haven't tacked up any "wanted" posters yet, but the word is out that there is a price riding on the head of each member of the team.

The bounty: 5,000 piasters (about \$42).

The reason: The unqualified success the tank unit's civil affairs team has had in working with the people of Phong Bac hamlet, three miles south of Da Nang.

The team, headed by First Lieutenant William F. Lochridge has tried a new approach in civic action, turning the hamlet into a laboratory for capitalism and encouraging the villagers to become economically self-sufficient.

It has been a long struggle. It is not finished yet. But the unit has shown marked progress since it began with what Lochridge calls the "soap and candy" stage.

The expressed bounty is just another example of how the program worries the Cong.

"What's happened," Lochridge said, "is that we've forced the Viet Cong to take their main effort away from the Vietnamese people and concentrate their attention on the Marines. Needless to say, this is one of our main goals."

"Before," he continued, "a villager of Phong Bac had nothing but his life. He was quick to change sides when the VC came along."

"Now, since we've given him an opportunity to advance himself, he has something worth hanging on to, and isn't so quick to be jumping from one side of the fence to the other," Lochridge said.

"Frankly, we're more flattered than frightened" by the reward, says Staff Sergeant J. J. Biedrzycki, non-commissioned officer in charge. "The reward is like getting a tribute from our enemies."

Staff Sergeant E. S. Lambert agrees. "This indicates we're taking the right approach," he said.

Lambert pointed to one tangible display of unity in the hamlet. During a previous national holiday, four Republic of Vietnam flags flew in Phong Bac. For the

first day of Tet, some 300 were in evidence.

If anything, the team has intensified its efforts since learning of the bounty from intelligence sources. One precaution now taken, however, is that the team moves tactically when in the village.

Otherwise it's business as usual: working with local fishermen, assisting merchants in setting up a shopping center, building pens for hogs to be purchased with proceeds from sale of the fish.

And as far as the Viet Cong are concerned, business as usual can be nothing but bad news.

## Roving squad finds VC infiltration route

By: Sgt. Roger Ynostroza

DONG HA—A roving Marine squad—patrolling in densely-jungled mountains south of the Rockpile—discovered an important enemy infiltration route early this month.

The enemy trail, complete with handrails, presumably for night travel, was studded with chest-deep fighting holes spaced 30 to 40 yards apart. Trenches were heavily fortified with logs, and steps were installed at steep inclines.

When the squad first discovered the trail, they also found what appeared to be a way-station for groups traveling over the trail. There were two small grass huts, one long shed that could house up to 100 men and an observation post farther down the river. All the buildings were well-kept and tracks appeared fresh.

"The day we found this trail we tried time and again to make them fire on us," said Gonzales. "But they wouldn't return our fire, they simply were trying to avoid contact."

"Maybe they thought we'd forget about this trail and go on

ing runs.

Several days later, the squad returned for another look, but this time they brought the rest of the 2nd platoon with them.

The Marines and Regional Forces South Vietnamese troops were given the order to destroy and burn the enemy positions. While they were destroying the buildings, several enemy soldiers were sighted and sporadic firing broke out.

During their second foray to the resupply route, light contact was made. The platoon casualties were light while signs indicated several enemy soldiers had been hit or killed.

## Viper snake

DONG HA—The Marine cautiously picked up the discarded Viet Cong pack to check it out

## SHORT STORIES

### The CO's New Ride

BY: RICK LEWIS

Charlie Company, 1st Tanks was located within the Battalion CP of 3/1, northwest of Marble Mountain off the MSR. The "heavy section" of Second Platoon was in for a Q-service. While there, Greg Auclair and I got the green light to make a PX run to Freedom Hill, home of the 1st Marine Division HQ. We solicited a list from the three tank crews for good stuff like sardines in mustard sauce, boxes of crackers, hot sauce, cookies and Snickers bars.

There was a 6-by heading back to the battalion CP, which was about halfway to our destination. Little did we know we would have to share the bed of the truck with a tank's power pack (engine/transmission. We had to sit on top and hang on for dear life. The truck stopped at an intersection where the road went up to Hill 55 Battalion Maintenance. We got off to take the road to the PX. We arranged with the truck driver to pick us up at the PX once he dropped off the power pack.

Getting a ride to the PX wouldn't be a problem on what was the busiest road outside Da Nang. Marine truck traffic flooded the road in both directions. We had a ride in minutes and made it to Freedom Hill and the huge PX in 25-minutes.

Once inside, we grabbed the list of stuff and more. We paid for it with "funny money" (MPC), which we had collected from our platoon members. Once outside with all our goodies, we began looking for the truck that was to pick us up. This was not an easy

task since the parking lot was larger than any Walmart you typically see today, and most all the vehicles were either 6-bys or Jeeps. Trying to identify our truck took some time but we never found it. We must have missed it during our glorious shopping spree. We sat and waited, hoping it was our driver who was late. We watched every 6-by that came into the parking lot. More than an hour passed and it was getting late; our company gunny is going to have our asses for lunch!

We begin asking every truck and Jeep driver leaving the PX where they were headed, hoping to get a lift, but to no avail. We were stranded and time was not on our side. It was then that something caught our eye. It stood out like a sore thumb in a sea of green. Sitting in the crowded lot was a shiny blue Jeep unlike any we had seen before; it looked brand new. I looked at Auclair, he looked at me, and we both smiled and in unison said, "What the fuck?"

The white USAF letters on the hood didn't bother us at all and, like most military vehicles, no key is required to start them. I got in and started it up when Auclair turned to me and said, "What are they going to do, send us to Vietnam?" Then I saw the light bulb go on over his head and he yelled, "Wait! I got an idea!" and he ran back inside the PX shouting over his shoulder, "Pull around the back and I'll meet you there!"

Now, understand, we were just a pair of snuffy lance corporals, dressed in dirty utilities, needing a bath, shave and haircut. A few minutes later, Au-

clair comes out the back of the PX wearing a set of gold officer's oak leaves on his collar!

I said, "Are you freekin' crazy Auclair? You want to be a major?"

He said, "Hell! We already stole a jeep! We're going to the brig anyway; what more can they do? They just might help us."

We took off and we were having no problems until we came upon a checkpoint.

"Oh, God!" I said, "They are wearing white helmets!" The closer we got I see it is the worst possible situation . . . they are Air Force MPs!

"Were they looking for the Jeep already?" I thought.

We stopped. They looked us over with a puzzled look and proceeded to walk around the Jeep. Our asses are cooked! One of the MPs turns to Auclair and snaps off a salute and raises the barricade! We never uttered a single word during the stop. A mile down the road, after the adrenalin wore off, we broke out in raucous laughter. We were on our way back to our unit. Before getting there, Auclair removed the oak leaves.

We sailed through our tank company's entrance in our bright blue machine; it had to have turned some heads. It was during the Jeep ride when we came up with a plan on how to get rid of the Jeep; we would pull it under the Motor-T maintenance tent and leave it.

We no sooner entered the tent when we were greeted by a mechanic and the company maintenance >>



chief. They both stood there with their mouths open.

The Sgt. asks, "What the hell is this and where did you get it?"

We told him the PX story and how we couldn't find our truck and this here pretty blue Jeep was just sittin' there!

He told us to get the hell out of the tent and not say a word to anyone. The next day our tank section was mounting up to go back into the bush. Looking over at the motor pool we noticed our CO with his hands on hips admiring his brand new "green" Jeep with yellow serial numbers. That maintenance chief must have been up all night.

Auclair and I smiled at each other. We were both thinking the same thing, "What did the face of the Air Force Jeep driver look like when he came out of the PX and found the jeep gone?"

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## The NVA Bush

BY: JIM COAN

In September, 1967, I was the new platoon leader of 1st Platoon, Alpha Co., attached to the 3rd Bn., 9th Marines holding Con Thien, a much contested firebase only two miles from the Demilitarized Zone. The Hill had been under siege by the North Vietnamese since the end of August, shelling us daily with mortars, rockets and artillery.

My tank, A-11, was stationed on the western portion of the perimeter. One dark, overcast, moonless night, PFC Minch woke me up for my 0400-0600 watch and informed me to keep an eye on a lone, dense bush about 100 meters to our left front. He swore that he had observed the bush creeping towards our perimeter during his watch.

In the shimmering light from another flare fired by an 81mm mortar crew, Minch pointed out the suspect bush. We deduced that it had to be an NVA sapper trying to creep up closer to the perimeter wire. I told him to sack out and I would keep a watchful eye on it. Later, when another flare burst over our section of the perimeter, I realized that the bush had moved. It was closer than before. "Maybe it's a sapper planning to toss a satchel charge at my tank," I worried.

I got on the tank radio and called the battalion CP to report an NVA sapper creeping closer to the perimeter and requested permission to open fire. By now, my entire crew was wide awake. After a few minutes, the CP response was to go ahead; no friendlies were out there. I swiveled the turret until our 90mm main gun was pointed at the lone bush. I considered turning on the tank searchlight, but was advised not to by the other crewmen—"The grunts don't want us to pinpoint their location." I was too new in country to know for sure one way or the other, so I agreed.

"Be ready," I told the crew. Moments later, another flare went up and there was that bush, even closer than before. "Fire!" I shouted. We sprayed the bush with the tank's .30 cal. co-axial machine gun until I was certain nothing could still be alive out there.

At first light, I focused my binoculars on the NVA bush, expecting to see a body lying next to it. To my chagrin, what I saw instead was a denuded bush, totally shredded of foliage, only a stump remaining. I heard about it for days afterwards: "Thanks a lot, Lieutenant, for takin' care of that bush creepin' around out there." And the Army "Duster" crew next to us was es-

pecially tickled. I sure hated those doggies for a while.

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## My Longest Day

BY ROD HENDERSON

(AKA LT FUZZ)

It's hard to believe that it's been 49 years since the day I learned a very valuable lesson—that even Marine 2nd Lt's are NOT immune to bullets! May 21, 1966, was undoubtedly my "longest day"! Not a year goes by that I don't recall the events of that day and the ultimate sacrifices made by so many men, on both sides of the battle. Several years ago, I learned of a web site put together by the University of Texas that has all of the Marine Vietnam War "Command Chronologies" available in pdf. For those interested, just do a search for Marine Command Chronology and the site will pop up. I have attached a page for 21 May '66. The section of tanks from 3rd platoon were commanded by Mal Garland, my tank school roommate. I know he remembers it well.

Upon my return to RVN in '67, while with C/1/7, I went on a patrol that was going thru the Dong Phu (3) area—looked the same a year later—but I didn't want to linger there! I have often wondered what the area looks like now, but I think I'll be content to just wonder!!! In the write-up of the battle, a diagram with coordinates, arrows drawn of attack routes, etc., giving the impression that it was a well thought out and planned attack. Trust me—there was no plan—we made it up as we went! The "Sparrow Hawk" chopper insertion landed Marines right in the middle of the VC—horrible casualties! I got medevaced about 6 PM and remembered that after I got "cleaned up", I felt totally exhausted—longest day of my life!

On my present condition—have

improved greatly. Energy level near normal, able to go about normal life—resting several times during the day. Still on the feeding tube at night, appetite improving, 4–5 small meals a day. Maintaining my weight at 185 (lost 30#—that's a good thing). Having some problems with swallowing. Will be at the VA Denver tomorrow for tests to see what the trouble is. No pain, and no complaints. Thanks again for all your thoughts and prayers.

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Rod's sister Mary replied: As the "little sister" I can remember SEVERAL longest days! The days between the first telegram from the Marine Corps informing us you had been "wounded in action – further details to follow," and when those "further details" arrived. What was once a household filled with non-stop chatter at meal-times, was silenced throughout those days while we waited to find out just HOW WOUNDED our brother/son was. I thank God everyday He saw fit to keep you here to give me smack all these years! You, the MUCH OLDER brother, me the MUCH YOUNGER baby sister! Love ya, Big Bro!!!

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John Wear replied to Mary: Thank you. What a wonderful and poignant memory to share with us old phart Marine veterans. All too often, we tend to focus on the here & now of combat and we have nary a clue how our time over there impacted the friends and family back home.

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Mary replied: Your words are so kind and sweet, John. Thank you! And such true words. Our immediate families (the Henderson's, Leigh's and Hafenrichter's) were fortunate that all our brothers/sons came back alive. Rod

and his current wife's 1st husband (our cousin) were both wounded but came back in one piece for the most part. As a teenager then, I still remember the impact on my life the war had. I lost very close friends/classmates in the final years of war. The Draft was still in effect at that time so many of them went in as privates and the first ones sent to the front line. There are so many things, over the years, I have forgotten about or only have bits and pieces of recollection. But the Viet Nam war is NOT one of those bits and pieces. I am so thankful every day of my life for all of you who then and now fighting for MY freedom and protection...putting yourselves in harm's way just so I can live free.

God bless you and THANKS to you for keeping me safe!

Mary Henderson—(Rod's little sister – and MUCH YOUNGER)

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## Remembering Max

BY LT. COL. JUSTIN "JERRY"

MARTIN, USMC (RET.)

Over the past 42 years, I have been asked many times, "How can you be so close to guys you served with for only a year of your life?" For all combat veterans, I imagine the response is similar: "Unless you were there, you wouldn't understand."

For United States Marines, the term "brotherhood" means more than just the men you served with – it has a meaning that is defined by a legacy of our 230 years of service to our nation.

"Brotherhood" evolved into a code of conduct and commitment to each other, mostly unwritten and unspoken, but ingrained in every recruit and officer candidate from their first day of training. It is sealed in the hardships endured by every generation of Ma-

rines that has come before and is expected of every generation that comes after. It is the basis for the silent bond that exists between all Marines.

I was inducted into that Brotherhood in the fall of 1967 and would meet the "brothers" with whom I would share the most memorable year of my life in May 1968. I was introduced as the new lieutenant and second platoon commander, and this was sufficient for acceptance into my new family. Two of us were joining the platoon as replacements that day: me and PFC Muriel Stanley Groomes – "Max," as he preferred to be called.

Our platoon and their rifle company had only days before been battered by a numerically superior North Vietnamese infantry regiment for 48 hours of vicious assaults reminiscent of WW2 and Korean War battles. A total of 57 Marines were killed or wounded in what became known as the battle for Foxtrot Ridge in the Khe Sanh area of I Corps, Republic of South Vietnam. It was into this Brotherhood of survivors that Max Groomes and I were thrust for our tour in-country.

Besides being new guys in the platoon, Max and I both came from the same area of the country: Max from Hampstead, MD and me from Manassas, VA.

There was only three years difference in our ages – he was 19 and I was 22 – yet he referred to me respectfully as "Lieutenant" or "The Old Man" (with a smile) when I later became the company commander. I referred to him as "Little Brother" because our interpreter had told me that the Vietnamese word for enlisted man was "ahn em," which means "little brother." It was appropriate; I was the big brother responsible for taking care of and watching >>

out for him and my other men.

However, Max was not the typical Marine. He was small in frame and, others later said, too kind and gentle in nature to be in combat.

My recollections of Max are of a Marine who was always willing to do more than what was expected of him. On patrol, even when suffering from both malaria and active dysentery, he willingly shouldered another Marine's heavy machine gun when that Marine complained of not being able to make it. Max willingly shared the contents of his packages from home and gave away his rations of beer and cigarettes. He often volunteered to carry the platoon radio when others balked at the task, even though he realized this made him more of an enemy target than his job as rifleman did. He was selfless in nature, always willing to do his job without complaining and usually with a shy smile. Seldom did he speak of home except an occasional mention of older brothers, a fondness for Maryland seafood, and a desire to get back to "the world," our slang term for the United States.

He was the quietest member of our small portion of the Brotherhood. There was no pretense of false bravado about him. Max listened more than he talked. His actions were more memorable than his conversations. He was just a damn good Marine.

As a combat leader, I learned to steel my emotions to the news of casualties in our unit. However, shortly after I left the rifle company and was awaiting reassignment, I was notified that one of my men had been killed in action. I ran to the landing zone to check on the casualties evacuated to the battalion aid station, and there was Max, his shattered remains wrapped in a poncho and guarded by the sergeant who had been wounded with him.

Both men had absorbed the blast of a command detonated claymore mine. One Marine had lived; the other had died. Max had volunteered to carry the radio that day. Typical of Max, he had helped someone else and then made the ultimate sacrifice.

Muriel Stanley Groomes is an unsung American patriot. His name

is but one of many listed on what Vietnam veterans call our "hallowed ground"- the Vietnam Veterans Memorial. His service and sacrifice are anonymous, except for the posthumous Purple Heart awarded in his memory to his next of kin. His courage and life are remembered only by those who knew him. His death was not heroic, but was selfless, like Max himself.

Max Groomes represents just one of the thousands who stand in silent witness to the devotion to duty displayed by a generation of Americans. When those who knew him are gone, who will speak for him? I hope that, in my lifetime, a Vietnam Veterans Memorial Education Center will be built to honor those like Lance Cpl. Muriel Stanley Groomes. Semper Fidelis, Max.

Reprinted with permission of: Scruggs, Jan C, *Dreams Unfulfilled: Stories of the Men and Women on the Vietnam Veterans Memorial*. Washington, DC: Vietnam Veterans Memorial Fund. 2010 ♦

### ***What Vietnam Taught Me*** *(Continued from page 18)*

You have an overwhelming sense of everything around you. I found myself not taking the same way to and from anywhere. The fireworks at Sea World had me looking for a bunker every night for months because we had an apartment about a mile from Sea World. When it rained at home, I did not have to worry if Mr. Charlie was using it as cover to crawl up on us, or the rain causing the tank stuck in the ugly red clay mud. Stateside food was right there; it was hot or any way that you wanted it. I craved fresh vegetables and a good thick steak.

The biggest thing that Vietnam teaches you is that everything you had learned about life is gone. Going to church

as a young man and praying to God to watch over you and others really means being lucky, in the right place, at the right time ... or the wrong place at the wrong time. Nothing drives this home faster than the first firefight you're in. When the smoke has cleared, you get yourself calmed down, you get out of the tank for some air, and then some grunts say, "Hey man! Give us a hand!" And you see that it's a dead Marine wrapped in a poncho and they want to put the body on the back of the tank. You help out as the wind blows the poncho off the body, and then up front and personal you meet your first dead Marine. You soon learn Vietnam will never leave you alone the rest of your life. ♦

# The Flaming Tank

BY JOHN WEAR

On Saturday, August 2, 2014, at 6:15 PM, I got an email from Jan "Turtle" Wendling reading: "Just a message to tell you that 45 years ago right now, your tank was burning at C-2." Since I had rotated by to the World in February of 1969, I was a bit confused so I looked up the date that

Turtle referenced in the 3rd Tank Battalion "official" Command Chronologies for that ill-fated day in August 1969:

**The illegible words are:** "...a trip wire was initiated which set off power bags causing the tank crewmen to be burned."

**2 AUG 1969** The initial spot report stated that a flame tank burning grass at C-2 had three friendly WIA's when the wind changed and blew napalm on the vehicle and crewmen. However, an investigation revealed that a trip wire was initiated which set off powder bags causing the tank crewmen to be burned.

I happen to know about this horrible incident because the tank commander was also my former driver, Tom Steffe. And two years after the accident, Tom traveled to my home in Denver and paid me a visit. According to Tom, the U.S. Army artillery soldiers who were deployed in mid-1969 to the artillery fire support base called "Charlie-2" had requested that the USMC provide a flame-thrower tank to burn the vegetation that was encroaching around the perimeter of the base so that they would have clear fields of fire. Tom's tank, Fox-trot-31, was dispatched to the fire base that was north of Cam Lo and south of the DMZ. Upon reporting in, the doggies indicated that it was safe for the tank to drive in a direct line from the south gate to the area to be burned. When the tank moved out, it ran over a large dirt-covered pit that was full of unexploded powder bags and mortar

increments. Against long-standing orders, the soldiers had not burned the excess power but rather had saved them and set up a large booby trap for the enemy. The tank set off the booby trap and the tank was completely engulfed in the ensuing fire ball.

My reply: God bless Tom Steffe, the tank commander of F-31, "Devils Disciples." He was alive, but not in the

best of health, when he and I communicated with each other via snail mail back in the late 90's. Besides his physical wounds, I am sure that he is still haunted by ghosts of Vietnam. Since we last wrote to each other, I have no clue as to whereabouts. I am pretty sure that Tom told me that the ill-fated the tank's gunner was KIA ... but I don't recall what Tom told me about the driver. He may have been KIA as well.

Turtle: Was Steffe the Commander when it blew up? I don't know why, but I thought that it was you.

John: Yes, Tom was TC of the tank. He had been my driver for about six months before I rotated back to the World in Feb of 1969. After I went home, I don't know exactly what transpired as to who did what and when. I can see that, according to the 3rd Tank Bn. Command Chronologies, Charlie Company had already >>



Tom Steffe in Dong Ha, summer '68

been deployed back to the World.

Much later, in the summer of 1971, Steffe showed up in Denver while I was finishing up with college. When he got to my home, Tom told me about the flaming tank incident and his subsequent long convalescence in a "Burn Unit" of the Yokosuka Navy Hospital in Japan. It was a gruesome and sad story. He said that the initial blast blew him out of the TC hatch and onto the ground. He got up, jumped back up onto the tank, reached in to pull the gunner out by the scruff of the neck and then the main napalm bottle blew up in his face blowing him back onto the ground ... but this time his entire right arm was on fire and badly burned. That was the end of his story until he woke up in Japan.

His visit with me in Colorado lasted for a few days, and then he hitch-hiked back to Michigan. It was just a few months ago that I relocated another

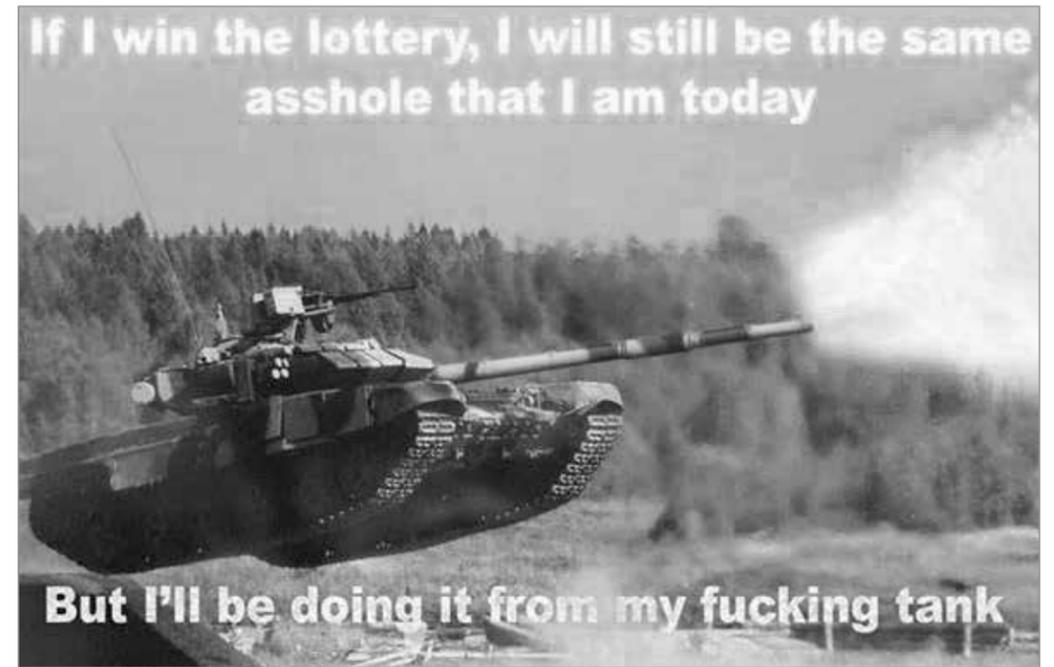
Charlie Co., Flamer, Mike Anderegg, Mike said that he had bumped into Steffe in the 80's. He said that Tom had moved to Florida to be with his long-time girlfriend who was attending college down there. I continued the story, telling Mike about Tom moving back to Michigan and living in a group home, smoking pot all day and not ever working in a real job all of those years. Then, Tom chose to move and not leave any forwarding address. Recently, Mike told me that he would try to find Tom.

Turtle: I knew one of the crewmen. We called him "Sherman." I don't know if that was his real name or because he reminded me of Sherman on the Mr. Peabody cartoons. He was a really nice kid and I know he got burned up pretty bad. Our tank was at the C-2 firebase when we heard a big WHOOSH! and saw the flames. The ammo boxes of 50's and 30's that were

in the gypsy rack started cooking off and it sounded like all hell was breaking loose. I never heard what happened to the crew but I know it was really bad. I think that Sherman might have been the gunner. We had the Memorial services for those that got killed on July 28th that same morning. Bill (Creech) Franker also got his 2nd Purple Heart that day.

Turtle: I talked to "Foxy" about the incident and he remembered it happening but that's about it. I also talked to Bob Niemann who advised me that he left C-2 right after the memorial service but remembered everybody talking about it later. I tried to get in touch with Ken "Tennessee" Metcalf in Greenville, TN and his wife told me he was having back surgery today. I told Bob Niemann to call you, as he wants to join the USMCVTA.

John: Bob has not yet called me. ♦



Radio Hanoi announces the death of Ho Chi Minh, proclaiming that the National Liberation Front will halt military operations in the South for three days, September 8-11, in mourning for Ho. He had been the spiritual leader of the communists in Vietnam since the earliest days of the struggle against the French and, later, the United States and its ally in Saigon. Chinese Premier Chou En-Lai and a delegation from China held talks with First Secretary Le Duan and other members of the North Vietnamese Politburo. The Chinese leaders assured the North Vietnamese of their continued support in the war against the United States. This support was absolutely essential if the North Vietnamese wished to continue the war. Many in the United States hoped the death of Ho Chi Minh would provide a new opportunity to achieve a negotiated settlement to the war in Vietnam, but this did not materialize.



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