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Sponson BOX ©

Voice of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

Featured Stories:

SEATTLE 2019

It's official, the 2019 VTA reunion in Seattle, Washington will be **October 31 – November 4, 2019**

We will be staying at the Hilton Double Tree Suites Hotel Seattle Airport – Southcenter.

The special reunion room rate will be $129 per night which includes a Free full, hot breakfast. There is a Free airport shuttle that runs 24/7. Free Wi-Fi. Free use of the hotel Fitness Center and the Business Center. Free daytime parking and discounted overnight parking.

The hotel is two blocks from one of the largest shopping malls in the metropolitan Seattle area.
It features over 200 assorted retail stores and there are over 20 restaurants nearby.

Room reservations will not be accepted by the hotel until October 2018.
Toll-Free reservations assistance: 800-222-8733. Please provide our group code ("VTA") and please let the reservation agent know what hotel you are staying. Make sure is it indicated as the "Double Tree Suites on Southcenter Parkway in Tukwila, Washington."

We feel that one of the best parts of this gathering is going to be our planned visit to the Military (Tank) Museum that is located in the town of Everett.

See the article below...

Attention VTA Members, this is the feature venue that we are planning to tour during the 2019 reunion in Seattle.

New moniker for growing Paine Field museum

By Dan Catchpole
Herald Writer

EVERETT — The Flying Heritage Collection is expanding and has a new name. It is now the Flying Heritage & Combat Armor Museum.

The planned addition of a third hangar at its Paine Field location and the name change are both driven by the museum's evolution since opening in 2008.

The museum started with a handful of war planes — nearly all painstakingly restored to their original working condition. Its collection, which is owned by Microsoft co-founder Paul Allen, has more than doubled since then. Today, it has 45 war machines: 26 aircraft and 19 tanks, vehicles and guns. Most are from the World War II era.

The new hangar will allow the museum to put even more artifacts on display. Currently, a P-38 Lightning fighter plane is being restored for the museum and is expected to be ready to go on display as early as this year.

"Since its opening in 2008, our mission has been to offer visitors unique ways to explore and examine history, which we've accomplished by providing firsthand experiences with the world's finest collection of flying aircraft," said Adrian Hunt, the museum's executive director. "We're thrilled to evolve the brand to reflect our ever-growing collection of planes, tanks and artifacts."

The museum plans to break ground this year on a 30,816-square-foot hangar. Its two current hangars occupy about 57,000 square feet.

The museum plans to show off one of its new finds in May during its annual Tankfest event: a restored Churchill tank. The vehicle was used by British forces during World War II.

Dan Catchpole: 425-339-3454; dcatchpole@heraldnet.com. Twitter: @dcatchpole.

As we have done in the past, this issue of our quarterly magazine is dedicated to a central theme. This time we decided to feature the US Marine veterans who became Officers of the Law. We asked several of our members who served (or are still serving) in law enforcement to write a story about their experiences and we are proud to include their personal stories in this issue. We hope that our readers enjoy this slight departure from our norm.

As an aside, we want to do a special feature in a future Sponson Box magazine on Fire Fighters and other First Responders. Please call John Wear at 719-495-5998 or Michael Giovinazzo at (Home) 845-225-7151 or (Cell) 845-216-5498 to discuss this plan.

Aspire to inspire before you expire.

This paragraph was written about the 5 million WW2 veterans:
Military historians, of course, lament the loss of their first-hand recollections of battle. The collective memories of these veterans were never systematically recorded and catalogued. Yet even in haphazard fashion, their stories of dropping into Sainte-Mère-Église or surviving a sinking Liberty Ship in the frigid North Atlantic have offered correctives about the war otherwise impossible to attain from the data of national archives.

QUESTION: If you chose to read the above, how can you not realize that your own story, no matter how insignificant to you, will be lost and forever laid to rest with your cold dead body ... especially if you do not spend the time or make the effort to write it down and share it with your family and your Vietnam veteran brothers.

With regard to the members who do write a story (or two) to share with the brotherhood, Thank you! The other day I was listening to a radio interview of a very prolific author who writes mystery and "life experience" books. When the interviewer asked the author if she thought that she'd ever run out of stories to write, her comeback was classic.

She replied, "There are 88 keys on a piano but they never seem to run out of music so why would I stop writing stories?"

I read an interesting fact in the *Marine Corps Times* newspaper: The total value of Military Payment Certificates (MPC) that were converted to a brand new version of MPC on October 28, 1968, which was the very first "C Day" of the Vietnam War per a 1975 report by Army Maj. Gen. George C. Days, was $277 million. The activities on "C" Day made non-converted MPCs worthless and were designed to discourage black market activity. As an aside, I was in-country on that day in 1968 and remember seeing South Vietnamese civilians standing at the gate at Dong Ha waiving their worthless MPC at the passing Marines and crying

–John

"Peace is that brief, glorious moment in history when everyone stands around–reloading!"

Unknown

Looking For

Stories from Firefighters, Paramedics, EMT's.

I have been ordered by the commanding officer of the VTA (John Wear) to write a story and to coordinate any and all stories about being a firefighter, paramedic or an EMT. As a good Marine. I said, "Aye, Aye, Sir" and commenced writing. I completed a story about my nearly 35 years as a New York City firefighter, which will be used in a future issue of Sponson Box. Hopefully it will be accompanied by several other stories from VTA members. I was informed that this Marine-to-Police issues will precede this.

From the time I entered the fire department, only a little more than one year from when I left the Marine Corps, and one and a half years after leaving Vietnam, I knew I made the right move for my future. I was again associated with ordinary, but real men, who were capable of extraordinary accomplishments when called upon. When considering the command structure, uniform, rules and regulations, I had a good substitute for the Marine Corps in a civilian world. The activity of first responders is many times life and death. This can be for a victim and/or sometimes the first responder. One never knows what the next response will bring. This should sound familiar to combat veterans. Working with your peers in such an environment has a way of making you dependent on each other, which bonds people together. Again, this should sound familiar.

I would suggest, in writing this, start at the beginning, likely when you left the Marine Corps and then how you came upon one of these careers. As you write, you will see the Marine Corps in the background as to how it shaped your life in a positive way to fit into such civilian work. It would be interesting to cite all the things Marine Corps that helped you in your job.

What about those who were not first responders? This would be the great majority of Marine veterans and of the VTA. I wouldn't think, for one second, that you did not take some of the Marine Corps to your civilian job. What was it, of your Marine training and discipline that sustained and helped you and others around you. It has always been my experience that there is usually a Marine veteran somewhere out there in the woodpile. There is usually something about his mode of operation that points him out. It may be the squared away appearance, the attention to detail, or some other qualities that are so common among all Marines.

Whatever you do, just write something so that John will stop harassing and threatening me. I will coordinate all of the First Responder stories, so please send them to me at mgiovinazzo@gmail.com or give me a phone call at (Home) 845-225-7151 or (Cell) 845-216-5498.

Michael Giovinazzo
3rd Plt., "A" Co., 1st AT–VN '66

New Members

Canulette. Patrick J
2610 Carey Street
Slidell, LA 70458
Cell Phone: 985-710-3545
Email: katcan116@bellsouth.net
Alpha Co, 3rd AT, '66 – '67
MOS: 0353
DOB: 02/01/48
Wife: Kathleen
Recruited by: Returning member

Kilgore, William K
9405 Old State Road
Chardon, OH 44024-9258
Cell Phone: 440-286-4473
Email: kedrick101@roadrunner.com
C and H&S Cos, 3rd Tanks, '67 – '69
MOS: 2841
DOB: 10/31/46
Wife: Lola
Recruited by: ???

Needham, Richard L
412 Chattooga Place
Wilmington, NC 28412-4257
Cell Phone: 417-699-4595
No email
C Co, 1st Tanks, '69 – '70
MOS: 1802
DOB: 09/17/42
Wife: Debbie
Recruited by: Ron Knight

Monaghan, Dan J
640 Magnus Lane
Coraopolis, PA 15108-3473
Cell Phone: 412-436-6200
Email: 640cookiedan@comcast.net
C Co, 2nd Tanks, Camp Lejeune
MOS: 2141
DOB: 11/30/49
Wife: Cookie
Recruited by: "Praying for Slack"

Member Info Changes

Steve Arnone
Email: cap1steve4@rochester.rr.com

Marty Steele
Email: mrsteele46@aol.com

Jerry White
4290 N Grand View Beach
Deckerville, MI 48427
Phone: (928) 302-6486

Charles T. Riehl
5611 Cedarmere Drive
Winston Salem, NC 27106
Phone: (216) 214-1295

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

St Louis Reunion

Pete Ritch writes: It was great getting together with y 'all at the VTA reunion in St Louis. "Hef" and I went through OCS, together. Bob, Hank, "Hef" and I went through TBS, Tracked Vehicle School and Vietnam together. I wonder how many Marine Officers who enlisted in the mid-late '60's can say that? The stories were better than ever and they filled many gaps in my muddled memory. Jay Miller is a piece of work and can you believe he was our adult supervision back in the day?!!!

Bob Skeels replied: Ditto to all that, Pete! Yes, we have a truly unique connection especially with our strong shared experience in the Vietnam War in 1968–69. These reunions just keep getting better thanks to you, John Wear and the rest of your USMCVTA dedicated team allowing the bond, remembrances and some really good times to continue for us.

It was such an honor to once again see our commanders of Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Bn in that war and freshly talk about our many heavy combat experiences together there under their command. I could never have envisioned once again seeing "CO" Jay Miller, "CO" Bill Davis and our "XO" Dave Ralston again. Moreover, to join them in a five star dinner and very good time at the Kobe restaurant in Saint Louis ... and then to have them not make us pay for it or get a severe azz chewing if we didn't. Again, thanks to Dave Ralston for picking up that tab!

What a great team of Marines we had over there and it's great to continue to be able to honor all of them at these reunions that the USMC VTA has thankfully provided for us.

John "Hef" Heffernan added: I don't have the words to describe the elation caused by the chance to spend time in the company of "my people" ... and heroes from my youth. This was certainly one of the best weekends I can remember in a long time. Be well my brothers, see you in June.

Remembering Sgt Howard

Editor's Note: The other day I got a really nice note from Jim Coan that included a story about an Unforgettable Character that Jim had met while on Active Duty. As I read the story, I thought that I has seen it once before so I looked in past issues and sure enough, there it was. I noted the duplication to Jim and this is what he said:

I had a kind of brain fart on this. I vaguely remembered writing something about Howard in the past that was published in the S-Box, but I thought it was maybe three or four years ago. What happened here is that I wrote some stories about Howard that went into my new book coming out next spring. Last week, I thought, "these Howard anecdotes would make a good S-box story." Half of what I sent you is new material that went into my 2nd book, but the other half I see is almost word for word in the "One Top-Notch Sergeant" article. Plus the photo I sent was already used. So, let's forget about printing "Sergeant Howard Remembered," as he's already been remembered.

I will never forget that Marine. We worked together for 5-6 months, me as 1st platoon leader and Howard as acting platoon sergeant (while an E-5). We were on the same wave length, almost an ESP thing. We went through the siege of Con Thien together, hit mines at the same time at the Washout, then spent the night in a muddy grunt foxhole with rainwater up to our ankles, the three of us group-hugging to try to get warm. We both depended upon each other, and I never thought for a moment that either of us had ever left the other one hanging. An example of the ESP thing . . . In late September of '67, several of Gunny English's tanks that had been stuck in the mud and abandoned outside the Con Thien wire got towed back later inside our perimeter. One of the abandoned tanks sat just inside the wire by the south gate. Knowing how the grunts could be depended upon to see if there was anything worth stealing off the tank, I walked over to Howard's position to tell him to keep an eye on that tank. Before I could open my mouth to tell him, Howard said he had already passed the word to the nearby grunts that the tank had been booby-trapped and we were waiting for some experts from Division to come out and disarm it. Nobody ever messed with it.

Esau Whitehead Remembered

From Leatherneck Magazine: I'm writing in regards to Micheal Walsh's "The New Guy" story. I was touched by the story and very surprised when Esau Whitehead's name was revealed at the end of the article. Esau and I were in boot camp together at Parris Island in Platoon 342 from June until September 1965. Two years ago, all of the men from 342 that we were able to locate gathered at Parris Island to celebrate the 50th anniversary of our graduation. Thanks to the reunion, I was able to send 17 copies of Esau's story to my boot camp buddies.

Welcome home and rest in peace, Esau.

Ray Kelley
USMC 1965 – 67
Worchester, MA

The author of "The New Guy," Mike Walsh also writes: Today's mail had a nice surprise–a copy of the latest issue of the Sponson Box magazine. (I had no idea what a tank's "sponson box" is until a Wikipedia search.) It's a great little publication; thanks so much for making it available to me. I think all combat Marines have had >>

experiences similar to the story of "The New Guy."; it may resonate with many. Warm regards, and, again, thanks for the thoughtful gift.

My Grandfather's Eagle Globe and Anchor

Roland Castanie writes: Packing for our move I found my Grandfather's Marine Corps Eagle Globe and Anchor. It wasn't lost but in a special place for safe keeping. My Grandfather served in the Navy as a young man and as a Marine in the South Pacific during WWII. After months and months in the Pacific he turned 43 on Bougainville and was told he needed to return to the States because they said that he was too old. Upon arrival he promptly joined the Navy Sea Bees and returned to the Pacific to build landing strips. He was one of the founders of the Marine Reserve Battalion in Galveston, Texas in 1936. He was most proud of his service with the "Corps" and spoke of representing them in shooting competitions for many years. The only time I cried when he passed was at his grave site when the US Marine burial detail fired their 21-gun salute and played "Taps." I know he was standing at attention and saluting the flag he loved so much. He was indeed the epitome of "Once a Marine...Always a Marine".

Beer Here!

John Hunter writes: I'm feeling good today. I had my annual checkup at the VA in Escondido, CA. The LVN told me I had the vital readings of a young athlete, 120/80/49, and no prescription drugs.

About your beer story that was in the last magazine: I remember my MT buddy, Jesse Salinas, asking me if I wanted to go with him to pick up some beer. The Navy LST's were delivering beer at the beach on the north end of Chu Lai. There was Carling Back Label, Red Cap ale, and Rainer ale, also San Miguel. I truly believe that warm San Miguel was nasty.

We loaded a 5 toner and delivered it to the EM club at Chu La. I think we kept a few cases for the 3rd Platoon. Then a few years ago in Manhattan Beach, CA in a Whole Foods Market, I ran across some "33" just like the stuff in VN but it tasted a lot better. I remember having a bottle in VN and getting sick to my stomach. I also remember having Miller High Life in the clear bottles at Subic Bay on one of our stops there when we did a "float" on the USS Pt. Defiance.

While I was stationed at Le Jeune, I knew Coors was not available west of the Mississippi River but that did not stop me from acting like an ass and asking for it everywhere we would go. When I got back to the West Coast, I drank some Coors and decided I didn't like it. The beers that I drink now, as a retiree, are PBR, Miller Light, and Bush Light. I really believe that one-a-day keeps you healthy ... plus a little red wine.

Beer is a great subject, I am sure you will get some great stories from the membership. One of my best memories of beer is when we went up to Camp Pickett, VA, for gunnery practice and being able to buy 16 oz. cans in the Army EM Club for 10 cents per can. That was in the good old days before inflation!

Chuck Garrison writes

With regard to our reunions, it seems as if they were being held at times that bumped into my Veterans Day road trips. While St. Louis reunion was in my hometown, my wife, Karen, and I were in transit to and from California via Amtrak. In 2013, I survived a heart attack where Agent Orange struck again. While we were there, Karen and I enjoy Seattle and most of the Northwest very much ... so depending on the dates of the Seattle gathering we may be there.

As to stories for the Sponson Box: With me being one of the members of C Co, 1st Tanks, the "Last Tanks out of Dodge" on the USS Denver (LSD -49) when we left Vietnam on Sept. 1970, I believe we got back to the West Coast and Camp Pendleton around October. The last operation that Marine tanks where involved, as far as I know, was "Operation Green Baron" in the Arizona Territory in June or July of 1970 (?).

In the last S-Box issue one of our members had written about 8 guys being assigned to one tank at Le Jeune, I don't think things where as bad at Pendleton but during one morning company formation at Delta Co, 5th Tanks, we were asked if anyone wanted to go to Nam because they had two openings. Vance (his last name?) and I were both from the same 1811 class at Tank School and newest FNG's to 5th Tanks so we kept our hands up high along with 99% of the morning formation ... until the rest of the story came out. As it turns out, for the all-expense paid trip of a lifetime (back to Vietnam) ... all you had to do was extend (ship over) for two more years in the "Green Machine." Vance and I remained with our hands held high. The folks who were in Nam, '65 – '68, some serious shit went down but after that, strange stuff happened in the way that warfare was allowed to be conducted by those of us representing the visiting team.

LOOKING FOR...

Maybe one of our members has seen the black and white photo image of an M-48 that was taken from 100 yards away and was facing towards the rear of the tank. In the distance of the photo is a range of hills. The caption to the photo is "Four Man Sniper Team." For the past three years, I have been involved in extreme long range rifle competition (1500 yards plus). Now the gun manufacturing factory teams have moved in ... and you know the rest of the story. Some of the teams have shirts with names and sponsors so I want to find that picture of the M-48 and have "USMC and Vietnam" etc. printed on the shirt. Very few of these folks have been in the military, even if they are all really good shooters ... but you know!!!

Please contact me if you have the photo image that I am looking for.

Charles "Chuck" Garrison
Binghamton, NY
Email: phuloc6@icloud.com
Phone: 607-372-9495
Cell Phone: 607-773-4854

Bobby Joe's Buddy

Bobby Joe seems to be in very good company...

From Street Without Joy

John Wear writes: During our most recent reunion in St Louis, Bob Peavey presented a most outstanding "Fallen Heroes" program that involved historical material from the book Street Without Joy. For those of you who have not read it, this classic history book details the 1950's French colonial war in Vietnam. To me, Bob's portrayal of the French struggle against the communist-backed Viet Minh army in the area north of Hue City was so profound that I had to get a copy of the book and read it for my first time. I found a passage in the book describing French tanks in battle and it compelled me to share it with you-all:

"But the northern (French) strongpoint was to be given no respite. At 0300, five battalions (of the Viet Minh) threw themselves against the 200-odd men (French soldiers) of Tu-Vu. The tanks of the (French) armored platoon, guns depressed to minimum elevation, fired into the screaming human clusters crawling over the parapets into position. Their heavy treads crushing heads, limbs and chests by the dozens as they slowly moved like chained elephants in the little open spaces left in the post. But soon they, too, were submerged by the seemingly never-ending human wave, with scores of hands clawing at their turret hatches trying to pry them open; stuffing incendiary hand grenades into their cannon, firing tommy gun bursts into their driving slits; finally destroying them with point-blank bazooka bursts which lit up their hauls with white-hot metal. The sweetish smell of searing flesh rose in the air. All the five tank crews died to the last men, roasted in their vehicles."

Remembering "Marty"

Enclosed is a small donation for all that the USMC VTA does. My late husband, Otis E Martin, Jr. loved reading the Sponson Box. His sergeant. James Johnson, joined the organization not long ago. I thank Sgt Johnson for pulling my husband, Marty, to safety, even though they thought that he was dead at the time. He was terribly wounded but alive ... and he returned to duty later.

Carolyn Martin–Wife of Otis E Martin Jr

Clyde's Trumpy Bear

Clyde Hoch and his loyal service dog, "Cooper," enjoy their brand new toy.

FISH TANK

■

Letter Home

A Letter From Vietnam

May 1967- The following letter was sent by my son, a Marine now in Vietnam, to one of his former high school teachers. The teacher had it reprinted in the high school paper and we thought it was worth sending to you. We think that it has something to say, a sort of message from our men fighting the war in Vietnam. Mrs. L. De Gennaro, Brooklyn, N.Y.

Well, as you can see by the return address, Uncle Sam has decided to send me on a 13-month, all-expense paid vacation to the sun and fun spot of Southeast Asia, Vietnam! What a wonderful feeling it is to get up in the morning and hear the sound of rain beating on your tent. And when you retire in the evening that same wonderful sound is still with you. As a matter of fact, it follows you around all day. Monsoon season is supposed to be equivalent to our winter. Just between you and me, the guy who equated them must have been stoned.

The other night I wrote a little something and am passing it on to you. Let me know what you think of it. (Please don't get carried away and grade it with a red pencil.)

As I sit here, I can't help but think how lucky we are to be Americans. OK, so you laugh and say, "Listen to the big, bad, patriotic Marine and his flag waving pitch." Yes, I may be a Marine but that is just a small part of it.

Stationed where I am, I don't have too much. I sleep in a tent, use candles to write by at night, put up with all sorts of strange insects, live and work in the field. But most of all, I am ready to take the life of another, or give my own instead. With all of this, you may think that my making the above statements and listing numerous hardships somewhat hypocritical. No, it just straightens my convictions.

For the last 20 years, I have lived in the United States and loved every minute of it. Now I live in a new and different country where there are no soda shops, record stores, movie theatres or even high schools. Where the people walk everywhere, wear anything they can get their hands on, eat what is available and live a life of ignorance.

But you, you are home in your soft easy chair, watching your favorite television program. You make your one hundred dollars a week and somehow need more to live comfortably. You open your refrigerator and eat a chocolate bar or some ice cream and when you are finished, you wish you had more.

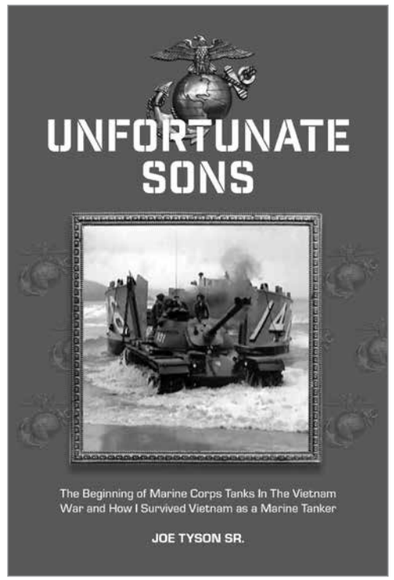
Yes, we are very fortunate to be Americans and have all we do. But, if we help these impoverished people get the ball rolling, a Vietnamese boy may someday write home and say, "How lucky we are to be Vietnamese."

As of today I am located about 3 miles outside of the Chu Lai airstrip. Sometime during the week I am going up to the demilitarized zone. I am sure that I will have no trouble at all with the Viet Cong or North Vietnamese with all the experience I have gained in high school, dodging teachers and the like.

The "Rice Paddy Kid"
Eddie De Gennaro
FPO San Francisco, Calif.

Editor's Note: This article was republished in the Leatherneck magazine in October 2017

Book Review



Unfortunate Sons

The Beginning of Marine Corps Tanks In The Vietnam War and how I survived Vietnam as a Marine tanker by Joe Tyson Sr.

Unfortunate Sons is a compelling story. It will draw you into Joe Tyson's world as a young Marine Tanker, full of fun and enthusiasm. You will share the daily routines of patrols and combat situations as if you were right there with him. You will learn about the deadly toll the war had over the 3rd platoon as they participated with line infantry for seventeen straight months. Now combat veterans, they have become bitter and angry over the effects of the war. Never knowing when they were going home had a deep, profound effect on these men, leaving them to believe they had been forgotten by their superiors. So, mount up and feel and see with your mind's eye what it was like to be a Marine Tanker in the Vietnam War.

The author, Joe Tyson, was born and raised in the Lawndale section of Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. USA. He now resides between a home in Bucks County Pennsylvania and one in the Pocono Mountains of Pennsylvania. A portion of the proceeds from this book will be donated to Veterans organizations.

To purchase an autographed copy, please give Joe a telephone call at (215) 514-1791

CREATE YOUR OWN LEGACY FOR TOMMOROW ...

By simply making a gift to the VTA through your estate plans.

Some of you have told us that being part of the USMC VTA is one of the best ways to heal old wounds. You tell us that you look forward to the next reunion and that you love receiving the Sponson Box magazine every quarter.

Well how about if you help protect and ensure the VTA legacy? How about if you show your dedication and loyalty by getting on board with *VTA Legacy Donation Program*?

It's really simple to do. Just visit our web site www.usmcvta.org and select the "Legacy Donation Program." Print out the pages that are there and then set up a meeting with your own lawyer or your financial advisor. If you have neither and if you feel that you need advice, then please contact Rick Lewis for help. Let's ensure your and the VTA legacy together.

Call Rick Lewis, Vice President USMC VTA, via phone at 858-735-1772 or email: ricklent@aol.com

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

"To live in hearts we leave behind is not to die"
Thomas Campbell

Justin "Salty" John Donnelly

July 6, 1941–January 5, 2018. Captain Justin John Donnelly, USMC, lived his life as a proud American, Marine, brother, husband, father, grandfather, friend, coach, lawyer, farmer, and friend of Bill W. He was born in Waterbury, Conn, on July 6, 1941 and died on January 5, 2018 in Suffield, on his farm. Justin proudly served his country as a captain in the US Marine Corps as a tank officer during the Viet Nam War from 1965 to 1966. Justin worked hard his entire life, holding many jobs right until his death, and instilling a tremendous work ethic in all his children. Justin took God's words "Go forth and multiply" to heart, leaving his nine children. He was a proud member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association as well as numerous other veteran organizations.

From Jake Donnelly (his son): At exactly 10:05 on January 5, 2018 my pops, Justin Donnelly, was pronounced dead. I don't say "passed away," or "moved on," because I always felt like those phrases kind of half-assed someone dying. My pops did not half-ass anything in life, so he sure wouldn't appreciate me doing something half-assed when it comes to his death (you don't get the nickname "Salty" from other Marines because you were an easy-going guy who let things slide off of your shoulder).

Any remarks about the life of Justin Donnelly need to start with the United States Marine Corps. He was prouder about being a Marine than just about anything else he did in his life. He joined the Marines because he thought it was the right thing to do, immediately volunteering for The Corps after graduating Fairfield University. His older brother Tom was a chopper pilot in the Marines, my pops, with his ubiquitous glasses, was decidedly not. The Corps looked at his putrid eyesight, and his marksmanship ability (he was fond of saying, "the safest place on a battle field was anywhere within 100 yards of me and my rifle, but if you give me a grease gun I can do fine"), and decided there was one, and only one, place to put Justin Donnelly—in a tank.

He was born to be a tanker. His personality was hard-charging, loud, and could at times be the scariest and safest thing to be around. He protected and helped others, even to the point of his own detriment. He was a tank personified. Even after leaving the service, he plastered his (always military green) cars with USMC Tanker bumper stickers. If he was reading this right now, he'd be pissed at me saying he died; as his favorite bumper sticker proclaimed, "Old Tankers Never Die, They Just Lose Track." My pops loved, LOVED stupid humor. My childhood of Laurel & Hardy, the Three Stooges, and endless car rides listening to the Jack Benny Program can attest to this… and I loved my childhood for it

Dace Robert Smith

FORT WORTH–Dace Robert Smith went to be with the Lord on Sunday, Jan. 14, 2018, in Fort Worth. Dace was born June 18, 1947, in Richland, Wash. He was a lifelong resident of Fort Worth, where he attended Paschal High School and TCU. He was a decorated US Marine Vietnam veteran and he enjoyed riding Harleys and being outdoors. Survivors: loving wife of 29 years, Carol Smith; daughter, Brandi Bassett and husband, Jeff; her children, Joseph and Sarah Beth of Rowlett; and sister, Cynthia Brown of Portland, Ore.

From Cpl. Joe Tiscia: You most likely never heard of Cpl. Dace Smith. He is the real hero on 7 Feb. 1968, Tet 68, "Road to the Graveyard." Our Convoy of 18 Vehicles and 50 Marines was ambushed by 2 battalions of NVA (818, 804) and a cadre of Viet Cong that was leading them into Hue from Laos). Cpl. Dace Smith was the commander of the lead Ontos. Our CO, Capt. Ron Brown, jumped on his Ontos and ordered him out of the ambush site. When they arrived at the safety of Hwy 1, Capt. Brown was killed from the break out. Dace and his driver, Cpl. Foley, made the decision to return to the ambush instead of heading south to the safety of Phu Bai Combat Base. Dace got off two 106 rounds knocking out a concrete block house where most of the NVA rocket fire was coming from. His Ontos was hit by rocket fire killing Foley and badly wounding Dace. Dace crawled out of the burning Ontos and continued firing his .45 cal. grease gun (though partially blinded). We were in the same ditch together.

That was the start of a lifelong friendship. We ended up at Yokosuka Naval Hospital and our families became lifelong friends. After Vietnam, it took a while for me to find Dace, but I did. Both Dace and I received tainted blood transfusions at the 3rd Med in Phu Bai and have suffered the same problems ever since (liver and kidney). Dace's medical problems have been a lot worse than mine, magnified by a hard life which worsened the effects of the diseases on his organs. As I write this, Dace is in Baylor Medical Center Hospital (Dallas, TX) on the Hospice Floor. His fight is almost over. I have talked to his wife Carol, and plan to be there when I am needed. Please remember Dace and his wife Carol in your prayers. Dace is the real hero on 7 Feb. 1968; and he will be my brother forever. All the valor awards should have gone to him. I plan on presenting him with a Silver Star (that he rightfully deserves and earned) on my next and last visit.

James A. Haines

November 11, 1946–January 11, 2018. Honor, Hard Work, Pride, Straightforwardness, Courageous, Relentless, Heart, and Loyal Friend, are a few of the characteristics that make up James A. Haines Jr. In the early morning hours of Thursday, Jan. 11, 2018, it was time to say goodbye to Jim and hello to his spirit. After 71 years, we handed Jim over from time to eternity. Jim was born in Bristol, Pa., and was raised in Burlington on Haines Brothers Farm. He loved working on his family's farm. Early on, it seemed as though Jim was born to play baseball, as he earned the moniker "Big Timber" for his ability to knock the cover off of a baseball. This talent led to a scouting visit by the Kansas City "A's" while playing for Burlington Senior High School, but another road was calling. While attending High School, Jim enlisted in the USMC upon graduating from Burlington Senior High School, he departed for basic training at Paris Island, S.C. He served his country honorably and courageously in the Vietnam War as a Marine Ontos crewman earning various medals. Ultimately, Jim was promoted to Staff Sgt. (E6). As a result of his service, he became classified as a "One-Hundred Percent Disabled Veteran." Jim became the owner of the family farm known as "Haines Tree Farm."

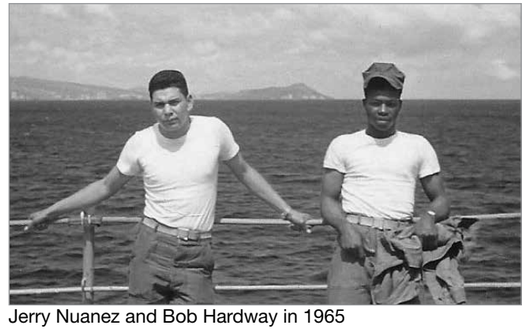
Robert Claude Hardyway

February 2,1946 – December 19, 2017. Robert joined the US Marine Corps on May 29, 1964 and released from active duty on May 28, 1967. He served one tour in Vietnam as a tank crewman on tank B-21 with Bravo Company, 1st Tank Bn., 1st Marine Division. He participated in the amphibious landing in Qui Nhon, Vietnam in June 1965. After his tour in Vietnam he was relocated to Camp Lejeune, North Carolina where he finished his active duty.

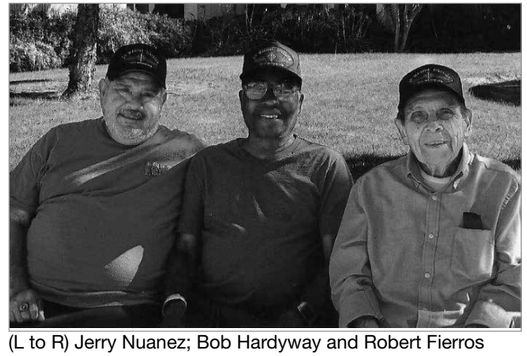
In March 2017, Robert thought he had a heart attack and was admitted to the VA hospital in Long Beach, CA. After a series of tests they found he had a brain tumor, similar to the tumor that John McCain has. After undergoing chemotherapy and radiation, Robert passed away on December 19, 2017 and entered the Great Tank Park in the Sky.

He is survived by his brothers, Charles L. Hardyway, Denver, CO, and Ellis R. Hardyway Sr. from Wichita, KS, and sisters, Mavies J. Cooper, Wichita KS and Vergie N. Lobster, Lacy WA.

He also leaves behind his two Marine buddies that he connected with after 50 years, Jerry L. Nuanez and Robert "Bob" Fierros. He will be missed.



Jerry Nuanez and Bob Hardway in 1965



(L to R) Jerry Nuanez; Bob Hardyway and Robert Fierros

Stories of Marines to Law Enforcement Officer

Editor's note: We asked several of our members who served (or are still serving) in Law Enforcement to write a story about their experiences and here they are.

UNLIKE MANY VETERANS WHO LEAVE MILITARY SERVICE WITH NO IDEA WHERE THEIR NEXT JOB IS COMING FROM, SOME VETERANS HAD IT ALL FIGURED OUT. THE NOTION OF TAKING MILITARY SKILLS TO A CIVILIAN AGENCY THAT HAS A SIMILAR STRUCTURE CAN BE APPEALING, AND THAT'S A TWO-WAY STREET. AS ONE VETERAN PUT IT, "THERE IS A HUGE COMFORT LEVEL. IN THE ACADEMY MY BEST FRIENDS WERE OTHER PRIOR MILITARY. WE KNEW EXACTLY HOW EACH OTHER'S BRAINS WORKED. WE COULD JUST LOOK AT EACH OTHER. WE DIDN'T EVEN HAVE TO COMMUNICATE."

A Note From A Policeman

SUBMITTED BY GUY EVEREST

...I have pulled dead, mangled bodies from cars...
I have lied to people as they were dying.
I said you are going to be fine as I held their hand and watched the life fade out.
I have held dying babies.
Bought lunch for people who were mentally ill and haven't eaten in a while.
I have had people try to stab me.
Fought with men trying to shoot me.
Been attacked by women who have had the shit kicked out of them by their husband as I was arresting him.
I have held towels on bullet wounds.
Done CPR when I knew it wouldn't help just to make family members feel better.
I have torn down doors, fought in drug houses.
Chased fugitives though the woods.
I have been in high speed car chases.
Foot chases across an interstate during rush hour traffic.
I have been in crashes.
Been squeezing the trigger about to kill a man when they came to their senses and stopped. Waded through large angry crowds by myself.
Drove like a mad man to help a fellow officer.
Let little kids who don't have much sit in my patrol car and pretend they are a cop for their birthday.
I have taken a lot of people to jail.
Given many breaks.
Prayed for people I don't even know.
Yes and at times I have been "violent" when I had to be.
I have been kind when I could.
I admit I have driven to some dark place and cried by myself when I was overwhelmed.
I have missed Christmas and other holidays more than I wanted too.
Every cop I know has done all these things and more for lousy pay, sucking hours and a short life expectancy.
We don't want your pity.
I don't care for your respect.
Please just let us do our jobs without killing us.

...Thank you...

GOOD DECISIONS, BAD DECISIONS

BY: STEVE CURTI

Not long ago in an issue of the Sponson Box, John Wear asked for Marines who went into law enforcement after the Corps to comment about how their time in Corps influenced their career in L.E.

I'll start by saying my time in the Corps will never be documented in a static display at the Marine Corps Museum in Virginia...but I did learn a lot about leadership. I've heard it said that the knowledge to make good decisions comes from making bad decisions. I totally agree.

To begin with, I learned that every breach of the rules doesn't have to be met with official on the books discipline. My first experience with that concept occurred in ITR while on mess duty. Three or four of us made a giant mess throwing eggs at each other. The Mess Sergeant who caught us gave us the choice of official write up or we could clean up our damn mess and each suck down a raw egg; we all went with the egg. Seems simple, but think about it, lots of bosses would have went the official route without hesitation. I'm still thankful for that break, even if it was a minor one.

The opposite happened while I was in Nam, while I was in a T.A.D. assignment at a small outpost. The boss there, an E-5, didn't like me at all and I'm sure I gave him some reason to feel that way. One day, I was waiting by the gate for my weekly ride back to 1st tank battalion to clean up and get stuff. This sergeant's bunker was located right by the gate where I was standing. He comes out and tells me to move away from his bunker. I asked him why and he says he is leaving and doesn't want me hanging around because he has money in there. Now, I may have been a problem child, but I know I never gave him a reason to think I was a thief. Needless to say I told him to eat shit and refused to move. He wrote me up and I had to go through all that official crap, which by the way ended in my favor. I'll never forget what a dick he was.

Throughout my time in the Corps there were leaders who didn't lead, or even think of mentoring to younger troops. Then there were the ones that made you want to do a great job just to feel good about doing a great job. Even when that job was something you didn't want to do. I didn't realize it at the time. but I learned a lot about leadership from both types of bosses.

I was stationed at the Brooklyn Navy yard towards the end of my time in the Corps. Scheduled for an early release, I had just two days left and I was just dying to get out. Unfortunately, things would take a turn for the worst when I was informed that I would have to run a PFT. I had two damn days left! I was in transient barracks with all my gear packed and ready to go. I pleaded with the boss, a young Lt. with no real time in, to just let me disappear for the day but he just smiled (and I'll never forget that smile) and said you are running the PFT.

We did all the strength stuff and went out for the 3-mile run. During the run, one of my buddies fell out with a sprained ankle, so I used that as an excuse to fall out and help him. This Lt. grabs me and says you are running. Of course, this is where that saying about bad decisions comes in. I refused and told him where he could shove his PFT, or something like that. To make matters worse the IG (a colonel, I believe) comes by and asks us why we fell out. Again, here comes that knowledge from bad decisions. My bud says, "Sprained ankle, sir." I say, "Well, I'm just tired." That colonel didn't say a word, he just looked at the name inked on my utilities and walked away.

Well, they gave me a summary court-marshal. The colonel in charge of the Marine Barracks was so pissed! The IG must have said something to him about me. He called me in and said, and I quote: "You thought you were getting out of this Marine Corps; well you've got a summary court-marshal tomorrow at 0800."

I about shit myself! Fortunately for me, my neighbor was an attorney and a former Marine. I called my dad and he got him working on it right away. He got them to put it off for a few days (I sadly watched my out date come and go) so he could build a case. The outraged colonel wanted to put me in jail and give me a dishonorable discharge! Even the colonel who held the court thought it was bullshit. He convinced the colonel to go with busted from E-3 to E-1, honorable discharge, and 45 days restricted to quarters. Yes, I made some bad decisions there, but it all could have been avoided by just letting me disappear for a day. Who would it have hurt?

There is a bright side to this story that is just the opposite of the beginning. That Lt. went on to other things and was replaced by a captain who had just returned from Nam and had a lot more experience. He talked to all of us and found out that I had some minor typing skills from a class I took in high school. He made me his clerk, a job I never thought I would like to do, and for the remaining time (two or three weeks) it wasn't so bad. I did the best job I could for him.

After the Corps I had lots of jobs that were just a paycheck. It took ten years for me to settle into a career. That career was in a sheriff's office here in Colorado. The guy that hired me was a Marine, he was one of those guys that just inspired people. He was also one of those guys who gave great advice.

After a few years I became frustrated with the politics of the job and was talking to him about trying a different agency. He just looked at me and said, "Just remember, the faces may be different, but the assholes are all the same." Wise words from a man taken too soon by cancer.

So what did I learn from the Corps that served me well in my law enforcement career? Mostly, don't be a dick. Every troop needs a different type of grease to make his wheels turn smoothly. The most important thing you can do is listen to the squeaks they make. If you don't want to figure out what they need, don't try to be their boss because you will suck at it. This doesn't mean kiss anybody's ass, it means that your actions as a leader will directly affect their ability to do the job they need to do.

In Nam, failing to lead cost lives. That's usually not the case in law enforcement, but failing to lead ends up, in my opinion, causing piss poor performance. Maybe not body bags, more likely law suits.

MARINE TO POLICE PROGRESSION IT DIDN'T STOP BY COMING HOME

BY: JAN "TURTLE" WENDLING

For a lot of Marines, leaving combat in Vietnam led to "Walking Beats" on Police Departments all over the United States. They had the same dangers in both places.

Mom and dad had five children in five and a half years. John was the oldest, then Joe, Jim, Jan and a daughter Renata Jean. By the math, we are all a year apart in age. We grew up like any other kids as a typical American family of the 1950's and 60's with Roy Rogers and the Beatles.

When we graduated from high school, we all joined the Marine Corps. My Father was in the Army in WWII. His division was mostly made up of men in my hometown of Mansfield, Ohio. My father served in the Pacific Theater along with the Marines, and was on Guadalcanal and Bougainville as an artillery man. Later when we were kids, Dad's friends would come over to the house and talk about their experiences in combat. They would always talk about how bad the Marines had experienced combat and how brave the Marines were. Dad always "Talked Up" the Marines that he served with, so it seemed only natural to join the Corps. My two oldest brothers, John and Joe, both signed waivers to go to Vietnam. They got there in 1966. John was a sniper with 2/7 and Joe was a machine gunner with L/3/5. They got to see each other several times on different operations. Both were Purple Heart recipients and Joe was awarded a Bronze Star. Our Cousin, Tommy Esson, joined the Army at the same time that John and Joe joined the Marines, and they sent him to Korea. We thought, "Thank God Tommy doesn't have to go to Vietnam." Tommy got killed in Korea on March 15, 1967.

After graduating from high school, each of us brothers joined the Marine Corps. When Joe went through boot camp, John was stationed at the Brooklyn Naval Yard. Both Joe and John got orders for Vietnam at the same time. My mother sent a letter to the Commandant of the Marine Corps asking why two of her sons were being sent into combat and, as a result, their orders were changed so that neither one had to go. When John saw his orders, he signed a waiver thinking Joe would eventually have to go anyway. When Joe saw what John had done, he also signed a waiver to go. They both got to Vietnam in 1966. John was attached to the sniper platoon of the 1st Marines on Hill 55 while Joe was attached to Lima 3/5 as a machine gunner.

John went through Carlos Hathcock's Sniper School and then he was attached to 2/7 and was teamed up with Thomas "Moose" Ferran. Both were advised that they had to go to the Khe Sahn area to find and kill an NVA sniper who was doing a lot of damage to the Marines in the area; however, they were called back because a grunt unit had found the enemy sniper and had killed him themselves.

John's unit got hit pretty hard one night as John was sleeping in a ditch with a throbbing thumb. A gook mortar had hit him with shrapnel and he was in some serious pain. That evening, one of the Marines passing by John's foxhole stopped in front of him. When John looked up, it was his brother Joe. Joe said, "Hi" and just kept walking past. They saw each other several times in Vietnam but only briefly.

Joe was on "Operation Union II" in May of 1967 when they were dropped in the middle of a very hot LZ. Joe's helicopter was the first one in and, as it was about to land, it got shot down. Everybody on the chopper got out okay but they were in an intense firefight. They set up a hasty perimeter, but no one else could land because of the intense enemy fire. Joe saw a Marine machine gun team get hit and he ran across the perimeter to help them. Two other Marines were assisting him when they too were cut down. Joe kept pulling the Marines back out >>

of the line of fire until he collapsed. The next thing he remembered was that he woke up and everything was "dark green." He tried to move when he heard someone say: "This one is still alive." Joe had been zipped up into a body bag. Everyone that he had been with in the firefight was zipped up, too.

John and Joe went through unfathomable hardships during their tour of duty. They both got back from Vietnam in 1968. Joe was awarded the Bronze Star with combat "V" for his actions on May 26th, 1967, and he has two Purple Hearts.

My next brother, Jim, went to boot camp in June of '67 and got to Vietnam in April of '68. He was attached to 11th Marines as an artillery man and he later became a Forward Observer with Bravo 1/7. It was neat to get letters from him from Vietnam when I was going through boot camp in June of '68. When I got out of boot camp, I was given an MOS of 1800. I asked my DI what that was and he said, "Tanks or Amtracs."

I didn't realize that the Marine Corps had tanks or amtracs. I went through Tank School at Camp Delmar at Camp Pendleton, California for a month, and I ended up in Vietnam on January 17, 1969. I found out that I had to sign a waiver so that my brother Jim could go home. I sent him the form to sign and told him that if he wanted to, he could have left the next day. He wrote back and asked, "Are you Crazy? I could never leave knowing you are here. I'll come and see you before I leave."

I was attached to 1st Platoon, Alpha Co., 3rd Tank Battalion. I was the only member of my family who was not in the 1st Marine Division. When I got to Dong-Ha, I was assigned to tank A-14 ("The Bleeding Eyes") and I eventually would become the tank commander in June. The day I got there, I was trucked out to the C-2 arty base, a dirt hill south of Con Thien. What a desolate place it was! We ran road sweeps and security patrols while we were assigned there. We had to sit in a tank slot on the side of the road just south of C-2 to guard the convoys traveling the MSR going up to Con Thien.

On February 26th we were sitting in one of the tank slots as our resupply truck was coming up the road. All of a sudden I noticed that my brother, Jim, was in the back of the truck. We had not seen each other for over a year. I jumped off of my tank and ran through a mine field to get to him. Jim spent the next five days with me. At the time we didn't have a gunner on our tank, so I was trying to show Jim what to do when he said, "If the shit hits the fan, I'm going to be out on the ground where I belong."

The NVA were supposed to be moving two full-strength regiments into the south and we were expecting to get hit that night. We had a 50% watch every night Jim was there. We received night defensive fire from Dong Ha almost all night, every night. We had 44 people at "C-2" at the time. Thank God the gooks didn't hit us.

One morning we were taking our resupply truck up to Con Thien and, as soon as we entered the base, the enemy started shelling us. I spun the tank around and headed back to C-2. Jim went back to the World on March 3, 1969, and I just figured I was going to die, since I was the only Wendling brother left in-country. The good Lord blessed our family for sure. Our cousin, Tom Esson, went in the Army about the same time as John and Joe but he got sent to Korea. We were happy that he didn't have to go to Vietnam. Unfortunately, he was killed in Korea on May 15, 1967.

I was pulled out of Vietnam in October of '69 when the 3rd Marines got sent back to Okinawa and I got out of the Corps on February 19, 1970, which was one week after by brother Jim got out. When I got home, there were plenty of factory jobs to work, but both John and Joe had joined the Mansfield Police Department when they got back. They had a nice write up in the local newspaper on how returning US Marine Vietnam veterans had joined the force. I had just turned 19 before I got home and I was not old enough to get on the police department, so I had to work in the factories for a while, and after my wait I got on the Department in November of 1971, after I turned 21. Jimmy got on in 1975.

The Mansfield Chief of Police, John Butler, was a WWII Marine who had fought on Iwo Jima. He was definitely a man's man. At the time he was only hiring veterans, mostly Marines, who were returning from Vietnam. Milt Burton and his cousin, Cecil, who were both Vietnam Marines were hired. Chuck Oswalt, a grunt and former Drill Instructor and John Arcudi, who was with the Marine Air Wing in Da Nang was also hired. Don Smallstey, who went to boot camp with me on the Buddy System, was hired. He worked in supply at the ammo dump in Da Nang. Joe Schokatz, who worked in Motor-T and at Graves Registration in Da Nang, was hired. We all grew up together and went in the Corps after high school. My cousin Gordy Wendling and his best friend Frank Parella went in the Army together and both were hired on as cops. I turned 21 on September 6, 1971, and was hired on with the police department on November 13. Jim, who had to think it over, had received a college degree in Civil Engineering, came on the department in 1975.

Being a police officer in the early 70's was a rough, tough job. There were plenty of guys getting out of the military and joining police departments all over the country. My former tank commander, Eddie Miers, got on a sheriff's department in Texas. Virgil Melton Jr. got into law enforcement. Larry Parshall became the Chief of Police in a city in California. Dave McKee, who was with 1st Platoon, Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks and only 15 at the time, was on a police department in Colorado when he got shot up and ended up on disability. Those were tough days.

My hometown, Mansfield, Ohio had a population of about 70,000 people in the early 70's. We had about 100 bars, mostly in the downtown area. Working night shift was the best time to work because you didn't have to worry about the "Bobby has been running through my yard" calls. As police officers, we had to walk beats at night. Two officers on each beat. It was rough and tough. And you took your life in your own hands being out and about around the drunks, dopers and felons. One thing that you could count on was that every night was different. Night shift had major calls: shooting, stabbings, robberies. We didn't have a lot of "gun" calls back then like they do today, but we always had a lot of homicides. It never ceased to amaze me why people killed each other. A bullet going past your head on a call was no different than one going by your head in Vietnam. We had to put up with drunks, dopers, felons, hookers and burglars. It was great to be out and among them though. I personally loved catching burglars and robbers. We had to walk beats back then to check all the bars. Nobody had cell phones or body cameras back then, and it was a completely different society. Most people back then knew that if you messed with the police, the cops messed back. It was nothing to walk into a bar and have somebody start a fight with you. You could knock somebody out and go back to walking your beat and nothing would be said about it. Back then you fought with your hands and not with your gun.

Jimmie was on an Alarm Off call on January 18, 1979, and was shot twice—once in the chest and once in the groin. He walked up to a guy trying to go through a window and the guy shot him. Jimmy killed him and ended up taking a disability. He is doing great today and is in charge of the 7th Marine Reunions.

My brother Joe responded to an alarm that went off at one of our local car dealerships. He found a group of guys trying to drag the safe out of the back door. They all ran into the woods behind the dealership. Joe and several other officers gave pursuit. Joe came up from behind one of them getting ready to shoot one of the officers, when Joe told him to drop the gun. The gun was later traced back to a homicide in Cleveland where the guy who owned the gun was killed with an axe.

We had a "TROUBLE" car that worked nights. It was a two-man car and only handled serious calls. Jim and I were in the trouble car one night and heard John's radio that he was in pursuit of a vehicle. We were running parallel to him on another street. The guy turned right, coming toward Jim and me. We then saw John wreck his car making the turn. The bad guy was driving a high-performance Camaro and, as he drove over some elevated railroad tracks, he went airborne. When he landed, all four mag wheels broke. His vehicle slid up to our cruiser and stopped. He jumped out of his vehicle, so Jim and I both hit him and knocked him out. John was okay.

On January 18, 1979, Jim responded to an alarm going off at one of our stores. Just so you understand, that store's alarm went off at least once a day. As Jim walked around the building, he saw a guy trying to break in. Jim told him to give it up and that he was caught. The guy turned and Jim could see he had a gun in his hand. He shot Jim in the heart and in the groin. Jim's "Second Chance" bullet proof vest stopped the heart shot but the groin shot went below the vest. Jim shot the perp five times in the heart killing him. Jim went through several surgeries and came back to work to see if he could still do the job, and it turned out that he could. He did go out on a disability though, and he had to fight Hepatitis C for 30 years because they didn't screen the blood for transfusions back then. He took the medicine "Harvoni" last year and he is now Hepatitis C free.

We all worked in the Patrol Bureau, Drug Unit, Major Crimes Unit and we were all on the S.W.A.T. team when they first started the unit. Jim had five years on when he took his disability. Joe and I both retired in 2009. Joe had 40 years on and I had 38 years on. We tried to get John to retire but he >>

said if he retired he would die. We told him he was nuts. John finally retired in June of 2014 with 46 years of service. He died December 15, 2014.

My brother John had 2,000 attend his funeral. A lot of the people he had arrested came to pay their respects. During the funeral procession, people had lined the streets and saluted him as he passed.

Turtle's Post script: Marines had a tendency to seek out Police Departments when they came home from Vietnam. Larry Parshall was the Chief of Police in California. My old tank commander, Eddie Miers, was a deputy sheriff in Texas. Virgil Melton, Jr. was in law enforcement. Dave McKee got into law enforcement after the Marines (He was only 15 in Vietnam – we posted his story a few magazine issues past). Dave got shot up and had to take a disability also. We also have Fred Kellogg, Guy Everest, Howard Blum, Jimmy Didear, Jake Mahoney, Armando Moreno, Bob Vaxter, Ed Hiltz, Charlie West, Joe Liu, and a whole host of our Vietnam Tanker Marines who were law enforcement officers. I may have missed some names and I am sorry if I did.

John, this is the article that you asked to have from Marines who turned law enforcement. If you want more, I can be more precise with some of the events which affected me over the years. I don't mean embellishing; I do mean more detailed. However, I've always been a man of principle and I feel that the values I addressed for the most part in my article that were instilled into all of us in boot camp were the ever-lasting values that have helped every Marine throughout his or her career, whatever it is or has been

WAS MY MARINE CORPS TRAINING MEANINGFUL?

BY: CHRIS VAIL

While all Marines are trained to be 0300's, the fact is that about one out of ten wind up in infantry or other units that engage in direct combat. For instance, before I left for Parris Island, I was told that we would be asked what our three preferences for duty were, but the Marine Corps would sort of reverse that; therefore, make sure your real choice is the third one. My three choices were tanks, sea duty, and military police with tanks being my third choice. What did I get? – supply clerk. At least, luck was with me to a degree as my first duty station right after supply school was the 2nd Tank Bn. The lesson learned from this experience was that there is truth in the adage, "when given a lemon, make lemonade." The skills I learned as a supply clerk carried over into a later career in law enforcement as I had learned how to type, file, write legibly and concisely, and maintain accurate files and reports. Of course, in my first job as a civilian police officer, there was a minor drawback to having this skill. Too many other officers called upon me to type their reports, as they didn't know how to type, and I found myself working a lot of overtime to help my buddies. But then again, wasn't teamwork a strong part of our boot camp training?

During boot camp, I expect all Marines felt like I did – they hated their DI with a passion. We alighted from the bus on The Island (there were no yellow footprints in 1952 when I arrived at PI), following a miserable bus ride from Yamasee, S.C. to PI with a DI shouting at us and using totally unheard of names and terms in a voice louder than a jet engine. There had to have been a common thread among us young recruits by this time as we all thought, "My God, what have I gotten into?" We were a motley crew of scared youngsters from farms, cities, big families, little families and probably in some cases, no families. Some of us were high school graduates, a few college students and perhaps graduates, and some who never completed their formal education. In retrospect, looking back on those first frightful hours, I realize that the concept of teamwork was beginning to be instilled in us. We were scared of the DI, scared of such strong and vile language. Therefore, a strong sense of teamwork and determination was being developed within us from the get-go. The Korean War was still being fought and the majority of us had volunteered for duty in the Marine Corps and we were going to prove to them that we could take anything they threw at us. That alone was the sort of training former active duty Marines turned blue coat relied on for survival on the streets.

This development of determination and perseverance carried me through boot camp and well into my later career in law enforcement. How well I remember double-timing from Main Side at Parris Island to the rifle range as well as to other field training exercises on the double. While running with full combat gear and the accordant verbal admonishments from the DI, my mind would go back to one of the favorite children's stories my mother would read to me: The Little Engine That Could. I would think quietly to myself, "I think I can, I think I can, I think I can." This developed a strong sense of self-discipline that kept me going, not only on these runs, but throughout all of the rigors of boot camp and life in general, particularly in a law enforcement career fraught with dangers and difficult working conditions.

It wasn't only during boot camp that I learned a lot, but also during later years in the Corps. Boot camp established the base line from which another personal and professional attribute arose—that is pride. Pride in what I accomplished. Pride in what I achieved. (Remember that feeling of pride when you first attached the Eagle, Globe and Anchor to your uniform?) That self-pride grew into professional pride, both of which took me from walking a beat as a police officer to retiring as a Congressional Investigator and opening two of my own police training companies. I could not have had a successful law enforcement career had it not been for the self-confidence, self-determination, self-discipline, reliance on teamwork and the pride that results from the proper usage of these characteristics of a Marine.

I confess that long after being a street cop and criminal investigator for many years, I continue to have recurring bad dreams about many of my police experiences. The frightening pursuit chases on both foot and patrol car (including my one and only shootout during a "normal" traffic stop); the neverending emergency calls for service, frequently during rush-hour traffic. The many, too many, fights with people showing strong determination to stay out of jail. The sickening smell of death and mutilated bodies. Having people die in your hands and not being able to save that life. Maintaining utter silence and non-movement while awaiting the opportunity to conduct a raid, such as 45 minutes of the crouching position. Working under weather conditions, often inclusive of tornadoes (of which Georgia has its share). Long hours of patrol time followed by 12 more hours of stand-by duty in the event of anticipated riots.

Was my Marine Corps training meaningful? A resounding, "Yes!" to this! Was I proud of being able to survive so many years of so many harsh conditions? Another big, "Yes!" All Glory to the Corps!

MY CAREER

BY: LARRY PARSHALL

I joined the Marine Corps at age 17 thinking that I knew everything that I ever needed to know. How wrong I was. My mother signed for me. I think her motivation was more to get me out of the area and away from the people that I was hanging around with. I enlisted in October of 1967 and started USMC boot camp at MCRD San Diego as a member of platoon 3306 on November 1, 1967. My introduction to Recruit Platoon Commander SSgt. Aguilar, Sgt. Basilone, Sgt. Newman and Sgt, Stanley was an event of epic proportion. 0400 found me flying off the top bunk and hitting the floor with a large ugly man standing over me shouting at the top of his lungs, "That would be the last time you will be last at anything in this platoon."

The ensuing ten weeks were a blur of marching cadence, double timing and making it "rain" between the Quonset huts. I was selected, I am sure because I was one of the smallest recruits in the platoon, to be the "House Mouse." God! I hated going to the duty hut to clean, shine, and make drill instructor's racks. Of course, nothing I did was ever good enough. But, by the time Graduation Day rolled around, there was no one in the platoon that could match my shined brass and spit-shined leather. After graduation on January 8, 1968, it was on to ITR and then Track Vehicle Repair School at Del Mar. Afterwards, I then got PCS orders to Camp LeJeune, North Carolina and 2nd FSR. In no time I received orders to WESTPAC, arriving in Vietnam 54 days after my 18th birthday. I was assigned to H&S Company, 3rd Tanks, as a mechanic on the tank ramp at Dong Ha. In September, I was transferred to Bravo Co. where I remained until August 1969. I rotated back to the World with orders for Fort Meade, Maryland.

Two weeks into my leave at home, I received a change of orders from Ft. Meade to Weapons Battalion, Recruit Training Regiment, Parris Island, South Carolina. Ah yes! Parris Island in the summer! I was assigned as a rifle range coach for recruits. A few months later, I was promoted to sergeant and became a Primary Marksmanship Instructor. I began training 12 recruit platoons in marksmanship with the M-14 rifle. In 1970, I was released from active duty and returned to California. What a letdown going home!!! Everyone seemed to be completely against the military and there seemed to be no jobs ... unless you wanted seasonal work in the fruit canneries, so I visited a recruiting office and re-enlisted for six years and returned to something that I was comfortable with, the US Marine Corps.

After a short stay at Camp Pendleton, I was sent to MCRD San Di- >>

ego to attend Drill Instructors School. I graduated as a DI just two months short of my 21st birthday. I completed a successful tour on the drill field as a drill instructor and recruit platoon commander during which I was promoted to SSgt. I then received PCS orders to H&S Company, 3rd Tanks on Okinawa. I spent six months as the Ramp Chief and later Charlie Company Maintenance Chief. I was then transferred to Camp Fuji (Japan) where I was the Maintenance Chief for Bravo Company, 3rd Tanks. In March 1975, I received orders to 1st Tanks at Camp Pendleton and was assigned to be the Quality Control NCO during 1st Tanks acceptance of the M-60A1 tank.

During the summer of 1976, I became interested in law enforcement and applied for an early release from active duty to attend college. I left the Marine Corps in September 1976. As a side note: I went into the National Guard and reserves retiring as a master sergeant. After graduating from the Police Academy, I was hired by the Stanislaus County Sheriff's office and began working in the county jail. I left the sheriff's office and was hired by the Oakdale Police Department where I spent the next 30 years as a patrol officer, corporal field training officer, sergeant watch commander, detective, lieutenant division commander and later in my career, I was the interim Chief of Police on three occasions. I retired from the Oakdale Police Department in 2007 after 30 years if service.

My time in the Marine Corps molded me into the police officer and the man that I am today.

THE LAW AND THE KITTY

BY: BOB VAXTER

I was discharged from the Corps in August of 1971. I moved to Phoenix, Arizona from Maryland, where I had been stationed at Fort George G. Mead. I had several jobs before I was hired by the City of Glendale Arizona Police department in 1973. In June of 1973, I graduated from the police academy and began working the night shift (11 PM to 7 AM) with a training officer. I rode with the training officer for just over two weeks. One night at the start of the shift, the shift commander asked if I would be willing to ride by myself for a week. A couple of officers were on vacation, one was away with the National Guard, and two were in the hospital. Of course, I said I would.

I was assigned to the northern-most district at that time. It was all subdivisions and 7-11 (stop and robs). Half of the subdivisions were still being built, so there was not a lot of trouble for me to get into. The shift commander told me to just do patrol and write tickets. For the next week I drove around the district teaching myself the streets and businesses. I wrote a few tickets at the start of each shift, but by 2 AM it was me and the street lights. As I recall, it was the sixth night of my riding by myself. Around 3:30 in the morning, I turned onto Crescent street, just off of 45th Ave. The block had about twenty houses that they had just put appliances into, so the houses were now locked up. As I drove down the street with my lights off, I noticed the front door of one of the houses appeared to be open a few inches. I stopped the patrol car and called the dispatcher, reporting where I was and what I was going to do. Back then we did not have portable radios. As I approached the front door I could see that it had been broken open. I went back to the patrol car and advised the dispatcher what I had found and advised that I would be checking the house. I slipped in the front door and turned on my flash light. The stove and the refrigerator were gone, they had been ripped out. As I started to check the rest of the tri-level house, I heard what sounded like someone walking around upstairs. I went to the bottom of the stairs and said in what I hoped was a loud and commanding voice, "This is the Glendale Police, come down, now!"

I could hear running around, and as the noise came closer to the stairs, my flashlight went out. At the start of my shift I had checked the flashlight and put new batteries in it. I flicked the on/off button and nothing happened, no light. It is pitch black in the house. Not even street lights for help. I could not see my hand in front of my face. There I stood, my pistol in one hand and my flashlight in the other; pushing the on / off button trying to get the flash light to work. The noise upstairs was getting closer. "Glendale Police don't move!" The flashlight was still not working as I pushed the on/off button like crazy. I was beating the head of the flashlight against my leg. Anything to get it to work. The noise was just a few feet away on the stairs. The flashlight started to work again. I took a couple of steps to my right so that I was no longer where I was while speaking. Pistol pointing at the noise and the now working flash light pointing at the large orange tom cat coming down the stairs, I said, "Cat, you are under arrest for scaring the stuff out of me."

I went back to the patrol and advised the dispatcher of the theft and obtained a complaint number. I put the number on my business card and stuck it to the front door of the house and went back to patrol. As for the cat, he was charged with felonious moping and doping with intent to gawk. I gave him a stern warning and sent him on his way.

LAW ENFORCEMENT / THE MARINES

BY: GUY EVEREST

John had asked me if I could relate some of my experiences as a law enforcement (police) officer in New Jersey, then as a deputy sheriff in San Diego, and my meeting up with other Marines in law-enforcement. I think the best way to start is to write how I ended up in Uncle Sam's Misguided Children (the USMC). The year was 1966 and I was about to graduate from high school. Virtually everyone knew that the Selective Service was drafting quite heavily at that time due to the war in Vietnam. The sick joke at my high school was: When they give you your diploma, as you step off the stage, they will hand you your draft notice.

Prior to graduation, they allowed the recruiters of all the military branches to come in to an assembly for the senior class. You might have seen a similar scene in the movie, "Born on the Fourth of July." I do not think you would see this sort of thing going on in high schools now, but back then, each recruiter had time to explain why you should join his branch of the service. I have to say, I had no idea what the US Marines did other than what I saw on TV. The Marine recruiter was quite impressive. In fact, many years after I left the Marine Corps, he and I became pretty good friends. And even later, that same recruiter retired from the Marine Corps and was working as a railroad cop.

Back to what I was saying: My high school friend Walt S. said that he was going to join the Marine Corps. His dad had been a Marine, his brother was a Marine, his uncle was a Marine ... etc., etc.; so, three of my buddies and I signed up for the Marine Corps. There was Walt S., Karl S., Phil C., and me. After the Marine Corps, Walt went on to become a police officer in Raleigh, North Carolina, while Karl went "on the job" in North Plainfield, New Jersey Police Department, and I went on to a police department in Clark, New Jersey. Our buddy, good old Phil, became a plumber. Then, for me, in 1981, after about 12 years of working as a cop in New Jersey, I was offered a job as a deputy sheriff in San Diego, California.

I will start with the job on the Clark Police Department in New Jersey. At the time, the only people who seemed to be taking police jobs were veterans. So, virtually all of the rookies that I started with as a cop had been in the service. As this story is about US Marines, I will refer to one former high school graduate, who, with me, was a Marine and a patrol officer. Billy W. served in Vietnam prior to coming on at the department. Unfortunately, Billy was killed in the line of duty on July 4, 1971. While working patrol on the midnight shift, he and his partner, Richard R., noticed some type of commotion in the parking lot of the Howard Johnson Motor Lodge. Believing that it was just a lover's quarrel between a young couple who had just checked into the motel (keep in mind this was the early 70's and it was 4 o'clock in the morning). Billy went over to contact who he thought was the male half of the incident. Without saying a word, the male suspect pulled out a pistol and shot Billy a number of times in the chest. Billy died shortly thereafter.

Another great person that I met on the police department was Big Al. He was one-of-a-kind and a US Marine veteran. He was a big – big, strong Pollack. He had been my partner for a while before he moved on and became a patrol sergeant. When I got assigned to his squad I was quite happy. He seemed to like me quite a lot because I'd been in the Marine Corps. And my wife, at the time, was Polish. Sgt. Al was a good supervisor because he would always show up on the scene of a major incident and would contact the patrolman handling the incident. In most cases, if he was satisfied with who it was, he would allow them to continue with what they were doing, without stepping in. In 99% of the cases, the patrol officer at the time was quite capable of handling the incident. Back in those days, almost everything was handled by the patrol unit on that beat. That included fatal accidents, etc. Once in a while you might get a detective to respond, especially if it was a homicide. As I said, back in the early days, the patrol officer was the traffic accident investigator, the robbery investigator, etc.

Back to Big Al. Al used to have an inspection where he'd line us all up before we went out on patrol. Sgt. Al would ask different questions while we were standing in formation. His favorite inquiry was either to ask for ID cards or our driver's license. Well, cops being cops, we all knew Sergeant Al, even though he needed them to see, he did not like to wear his glasses. So, what we would do in formation, was the first person would show him his license and pretend to be putting it away, and then pass it onto the next patrolman, and so on down the line while all the time showing him the original license. Everyone had a great time with this and Big Al was never the wiser!

I'm going to fast forward to July, 1981, when I moved to Southern California and joined the San Diego County Sheriff's Department. After completing the San Diego Acad- >>

emy, I had to do my time in the jail. While working in the jail, the first Sheriff's Dept. sergeant I worked for was Sergeant G.B., who later would turn out to be one of my best friends. Sgt. G.B. always gave me a hard time about being a Marine. He had served in the US Army in Vietnam, and then later, he joined the Army Reserves. He eventually retired as a first sergeant.

On a number of occasions, he and I would go down to MCRD San Diego. He would shop at the PX, get a haircut, etc. He would even buy his gasoline there. One day G.B., his wife, and I were on the MCRD SD parade deck watching the recruits practicing close order drill. As I said before, we were always ripping each other about the Army versus the Marine Corps. When Sergeant G.B. started in with me about the Marine Corps, stating, "Marines might not be able to fight but they sure know how to march." Then, right after that, his wife said, "Remember you tried to join the Marine Corps but they didn't take you?" Then I asked her, "He tried to get in The Marine Corps but he couldn't get in?" At this point G.B. started to try and deny what she had said. But like a good wife, she held her ground. I then asked her, "Tell me more." She told me that G.B. went to downtown San Diego in '67 to enlist in the Marine Corps, but, for some reason they wouldn't take him. That's how he ended up in the Army. G.B. then stated he didn't go in the Marine Corps cause they wanted to put him in the Reserve Tank Battalion in San Diego. While we are still good friends. I always have this big card to play with if he starts up about the Army versus the Marine Corps.

Editor's note: I thanked Guy for his story but then wondered if he had a Vietnam story to blend into his cop story. Here it is:

OK John, here is how my experience in Vietnam affected my cop life: It led me to meet a very nice Vietnamese woman. There was only friendship there. The job I had with the San Diego County Sheriff's Department in the late 90's was a position where I had a lot of contact with some of the local hospitals. One of them was University of California San Diego (UCSD) Hillcrest. One of the people I got to know at the hospital was the receptionist. Her name was Laun. She was a very attractive Vietnamese woman and, as our platonic friendship evolved, we started talking about her past and my past. I asked her how her family survived during the '68 Tet uprising. She informed me that, in 1968, her father was the South Vietnamese Ambassador to Germany and that her family was out of the country at the time. We had many more talks about her life in Vietnam. As you can guess, her family were not the everyday villager peasant farmers. One day we talked about the fall of Vietnam in 1975. She told me how her family was one of the last groups of people to leave the country. She relayed that when Saigon was about to fall, an NVA tank was just about to crash down the gates of the South Vietnamese President's compound, her family left for safety. They were supposed to take off in a helicopter. Her father had given somebody a suitcase full of gold to ensure the family had a ride out but, like most things, that so-called "trusted person" took the gold but never arranged for a ride. She finally got out on one of the last South Vietnamese Navy ships heading down the Saigon River and they were under enemy fire. Some years later in the Vietnam magazine that I was receiving, they published her story (without the names in it).

I also asked her, how is it that her family stayed until the tanks were just crashing through the gates of the capital. She said that everyone knew that it was pretty obvious that, with the fall of the mountains to the west, it was the sign that the end of the Republic of South Vietnam was underway. And when the North Vietnamese Army just came straight through Dong Ha without a lot of resistance, that any other major bases up north were a lost cause and that the war was over. She told me, at the time, her father was the number two or three head persons in the South Vietnamese government. He told his family that he really believed that the Americans would come back as they promised and save them from the North. She told me her dad believed this until the NVA tanks came crashing through the gates. Sadly, he kept telling them, "We will be all right. Any minute the Americans will be here." As we all know, that did not happen. The good thing is that she was able to escape.

During this same time, I had a partner named Jeff W. And, as I told you, Laun was quite an attractive young woman. One day, Jeff asked me if I would put in a good word for him with this Vietnamese beauty. To which I told him, "No." He then asked me if I knew any phrases in Vietnamese that would help him impress Laun. He added that he did not want "bad" phrases. I told him, "Let me think a minute." Then I replied, "Oh I know one that will impress her. Tell Laun, "Boo Koo Dinky Dow." Well, when we got to the reception desk the next day, I started talking to her and then let Jeff join in the conversation. All of a sudden, Jeff says, "Laun, I think you Boo Koo Dinky Dow!" For those of us who do not know what that means, it means "crazy." Right then and there she gave Jeff a face I'll never forget. A little later Jeff told me, "I knew right after I said it to her that you had set me up!" So, I then told Laun, "You are Boo Koo Dep Wa." (beautiful).

FROM JARHEAD TO COP

BY: HOWARD BLUM

I was born in the Bronx (NY City) in 1943 and moved to Washington, DC when I was ten. Like most boys growing up in those days, it was just natural to play Soldiers and Cops & Robbers. I never thought that either or less likely both, would become my reality. After high school, I attended college and in 1966 enlisted in the USMC. After Tank School, I was assigned to Alpha Co, 5th Tanks (Okinawa) to learn / operate flame tanks. Then, I was sent to Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks (Dong Ha, Vietnam) and subsequently, I became the TC of the flame tank called "The Cremator" where we operated in and around the firebase at Con Thien. In February 1968, I rotated back to CONUS, and after my 30-day leave, I was assigned to the Track Vehicle Company at MCB Quantico, VA, where we demonstrated/instructed flame tank operations to the OCS and The Basic School student officers.

In April, 1968 Martin Luther King was assassinated and major riots broke out in Washington, DC. Since we were so close to DC, Quantico was at the top of the list to respond to the riots with troops. I found myself in charge of a fire team that was equipped with only the basic 782 "battle" gear. We had an M-14 rifle, ammo, a helmet, canteen and the basic web gear. We got trucked into the city and started routine patrols. We were given orders to protect persons and property in the area of the Marine Barracks at 8th and Eye. That area of responsibility subsequently expanded outward. After three or so days, the National Guard took over the street patrols and we returned to Quantico. The following month I was discharged.

I returned to the civilian world as I had left it. I got a job as an assistant manager of an appliance store. I returned to college part-time and few months later I married. In the ensuing year, I changed jobs (in the same field) a couple of times, but then I came to realize that I was not happy doing that sort of work. My wife and I discussed starting a family, but I didn't feel my job was financially secure enough at that time. In August, 1970, I was driving to work and by sheer coincidence I saw a sign on a trailer (that was parked at RFK Stadium) that read "Metropolitan Police Hiring–Walk In Examination." Mostly out of curiosity, I decided to find out more and I wound up taking the entrance exam. I did quite well and realized that the Washington, DC, Metropolitan Police Department (MPD) offered me much of what I wanted. So, I discussed it with wife and we decided to give it a try. A month later I joined the MPD. After twenty-one years, I retired as a sergeant. I had been a detective / investigator for eighteen years and assigned to a wide variety of criminal investigations. I also had five years in supervisory positions. With the help of the GI Bill, I was able to attend The American University where I received AA and BS degrees in Administration of Justice and completed MS course work in the same curriculum.

When I retired from the MPD, I thought my government service had ended, but in 1994 I was offered a position with a federal law enforcement agency and that was the start of yet another career. In 2010 I retired a second time. During those years, I worked for nine federal agencies involving law enforcement, investigations, security operations and anti/counter terrorism assignments. Looking back, I see how it all evolved. The few but intense years I spent in the USMC helped prepare me for the rest of my life both personally and professionally.

FROM ONTOS CREWMAN TO COP

BY: ARMANDO MORENO

My name is Armando Moreno, my MOS was 0353, Ontos crewman, from June 1966 to July 1969. I was in-country in 1967 and was assigned to Bravo Company, 3rd Mar Div. based out of Camp Evans. I live in Santa Maria, California and have been a resident here since 1960. I made a career in Law enforcement and joined the Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Dept. in 1975 to 2004. I have been married to my wife, Esther, for 45 years and have a grown daughter, Danielle, and a son, Matthew. They have given us grandkids, two each.

I was asked about putting some thoughts on paper as a result of earning the title of US Marine, and later, while serving 30 years as a Deputy Sheriff with Santa Barbara County. I am humbled by this project because I have been on the membership roster with the USMCVTA for a number of years and I learned early on how tight the tanker community was and continues to be. I have kept almost every copy of every issue of the "Sponson Box" magazine that I have received in the mail and I continue to read each issue from covet to cover. On the other hand, when I look for friends that I served with, I have found only one other Ontos crewmen that was in our platoon. That was Mike Maldonado, who lives nearby in Nipomo, California. We see each other every year for the Marine Corps Ball. >>

My boot camp was MCRD San Diego, ITR at Camp Pendleton, and then Ontos School at Del Mar. I received orders for WESTPAC and jumped on a "cruise ship" on December 7th, 1966. The USS General Leroy Tinge was on its last legs when we (3,500) other Marines sailed across the Pacific, in route to Okinawa. I remember there was one tank crewman on our ship who was going back for another round of "fun and games" but his name escapes me. If anyone else in the tanker group was on that ship, please feel free to contact me and assure me that it was not my imagination when about 3,000 Marines got sea sick immediately after leaving the breakwater in San Diego. The puke in the heads, the showers, the wash basins and the smell throughout the ship lasted over a week. I guess I don't have to say how terrible the food was. I particularly remember how bad that recombined milk was. It is no wonder I don't like cruises today.

We finally arrived in Okinawa on December 24th, which was 17 days after leaving San Diego, and I hooked up with my platoon (3rd Plt, Bravo Co., 3rd ATs. 3rd Mar Div.). The platoon was refitting after coming back from "Operation Hastings." I then found out that I was a replacement for somebody going home. We trained in the Northern Training Area, fired and bore sighted our guns, and I got to familiarize myself with my "pig" and my new crew. Sgt. Justice was the OC (Ontos Commander) and Kent Fish was the driver, and I was the unlucky loader. Over the years, I have tried to look up and find these two guys with no success. Our platoon was part of BLT 1/4 (Battalion Landing Team of the 1st BN, 4th Marine Regiment) and so we loaded up all our vehicles on "Mike Boats" and floated into the hold of the LPD, the USS Vancouver. We participated in several operations, "Deckhouse 6" and "Desoto" come to mind. We were in direct support of 1/4. To me, it was totally a surreal experience as we hit the beach on "Deckhouse 6." It was just like the stories that I heard about from WW2, except we weren't opposed by the enemy. The boat's ramp dropped, the beach master directing the traffic, and off we went. The jets flying close air support, the helicopter gunships, the grunts being choppered in, the smells, the sounds, the fear of hitting mines and, by the end of the day, we had run out of 106 mm rounds. Totally unforgettable memories.

In April we came ashore in Hue City and our platoon was assigned to Camp Evans that was just north of the city. We were again replacements. One of our Ontos that was carrying Captain Canby (our company CO), Lt. Egan (our platoon leader), three Ontos crewmen and two grunts were all KIA after the Ontos they were on hit a mine. They think that it was a 500-pound bomb that took them all out. So, for everything that was part of my tour, I consider myself lucky that I didn't go to Con Thien, Khe Sahn and basically did my "work" south of Quang Tri. We were assigned to do security for a section of US Navy Seabees working a rock Quarry outside of Hue City in September 1967. It was quiet. Eerily quiet for the two whole months that I was there with the exception for the lights at night moving around a cemetery around the tombs across the road from the rock quarry. No one took note and no one had any idea that Tet would explode as it did in late January 1968. I will always have a feeling of sadness for the city of Hue because I remember it in all its beauty before Tet and for the carnage that took place there. I rotated back to the world on Dec 31, 1967 from Okinawa, on a Braniff Airlines commercial flight. It was totally different than the WW2 troop carrier that transported me to Okinawa.

I then spent six months at Las Flores on Camp Pendleton with the Ontos Battalion at 5th Tanks and then took a billet at the Marine Corps Barracks at Adak, Alaska. The highlight of that year was the Marine Corps Birthday with 80 drunk Marines, three open bars, eleven round-eye females, and fights galore; each drunken Marine trying to get favors from the young ladies. After the cake was cut, the Major's Mameluke sword went missing amidst the insanity, and it was never found. Martial law ensued with orders for everyone to leave their wall lockers and foot lockers unlocked or they'd have their locks cut off. Such was my year at Adak, Alaska, with M-1's issued and second-rate gear all around. Oh, Vietnam seemed so inviting in 1968!

I came home and took an 11-month early out since the Ontos were now obsolete. Good-bye US Marine Corps on July 25, 1969. I bought a car and got a job making records at CBS in my hometown of Santa Maria, CA. I also spent a lot of time chasing women, drinking all the beer I could with my buddies, and I swore that I would never ever wear a uniform again. All that changed after the famous SLA (also known as the Symbionese Liberation Army and Patty Hurst) shooting and gun battle between the Black Panthers and LAPD. I was smitten. I wanted a piece of the action. My brother-in-law was working for LA County Sheriff's and he encouraged me to apply. I applied to State Corrections and The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's ... even though I knew nothing about law enforcement. I passed the test for Santa Barbara, went through their basic academy, and I was on my way. The Academy was very hard academically, but I believe the fact that I could wear my hair high and tight, and spit shine my shoes, helped me tremendously. At the time that I hired on to law enforcement, I believe that 60 % of all personnel had prior military experience. About 30% were also Vietnam vets. I truly believe that because of my experience in the Corps, I was able to endure and continue to be motivated in whatever assignment I had in law enforcement.

I worked with narcotics officers, major crimes, custody assignments and, finally, the courts as a bailiff. I came to find out that the best and the worst cops were all Marines. The worst were those that were overtaken by alcohol and life. I worked holidays, birthdays and stayed the course. I had my ass handed to me a few times, a gun pointed at me as I got out of a unit, and been pissed off enough to want to fight other cops who had never been in the service because of their attitudes toward drunk Marines on leave. My attitude was to take the drunks home, if they were cool, while some of the other cops would see them as stats to get promoted. I retired in 2004 and in 2005. Michael Jackson was tried and acquitted in our court room. I had more fun with that trial than I did with anything else I did. While I was retired and still working, the extra money was great. While "double dipping," the wife got a new car and I got to see all my old buddies again.

One of the most memorable situations occurred on November 14, 1995, while I was on routine patrol in the unincorporated area of Santa Maria; it is outside the city of Santa Maria city limits. On that day, as I remember it, it was a crisp autumn day, no wind, temperatures in the low 70's. I remember cruising around and I remember that day particularly well because it was my Mother's birthday. I can look back on that day with a sense of sadness because earlier in the year, July 25th, she had passed on. So, as I drove around the county area, my thoughts and emotions were like a roller coaster. But, mostly good, because my mother had been ill for some time and I had accepted the fact that she was in a better place. Sometime in the early afternoon, I received a call for service from dispatch about a man disturbing neighbors. The address was provided and off I went. I was familiar with the address and the subject's name. The man in question, I will call him Charles C. for purposes of this article, was a Vietnam vet and had served in the Army. He was known to be violent and had assaulted other deputies in the past. I can't say I was prepared for what happened next because things happened so fast as I arrived on the scene, and I hardly had time to unbuckle my seat belt. I stopped my unit and, as I looked directly in front of me, there was Charles C., pointing a rifle directly at me. He had me dead in my tracks, and I will never know why he didn't pull the trigger. I didn't have time to pull my side arm, least of all my shotgun, and by the time I could say, "Oh shit," he ran into his house directly to my left. I put the car in reverse, gave myself some working space, and pulled out my shotgun. I don't know how other cops operate in other parts of the country, but we don't take kindly to people pointing weapons at us here in Santa Barbara County. I immediately put out the call and asked for assistance since I didn't know if he was going to come back out and get down to business.

I received assistance almost immediately, as anybody within a 5-mile radius responded to help clear the area and, more importantly, to contain Charles C. in his residence. I was asked to talk to him, since I was a trained hostage negotiator, and as much that I tried reasoning with him, all his responses were totally incoherent, indicating heavy use of alcohol or drugs. I was allowed to continue my efforts for about two hours and a standoff ensued. All communications came to an end, and by this time a trained SWAT sniper had stationed himself on the roof across the street. It became a waiting game for another hour. The standoff came to roaring conclusion as Charles C. came out of his house shooting. He saw movement across the street where several detectives were situated, and they exchanged gunfire at a distance of about 75 feet. The sniper opened fire, using a .308 caliber round. Charles C. was hit twice, once by one of the detectives and once by the sniper. He staggered inside his house and died. I had several close calls in my career, four car accidents, got my ass handed to me several times by drunks. But this incident I will remember as the day some ass-hole tried to ruin my memory of mother on her birthday. I think about her every November 14th, and always wonder why I was so fortunate to not have been seriously hurt or killed on that beautiful, pristine day. I was just lucky, I guess. Semper Fi, Armando Moreno/ Deputy retired.

Finally, my wife Esther and I celebrated 45 years of marriage this past August, and she has been a rock in my life. She put up with drunk cops in her house, putting up with lousy work schedules for me and helping me with decorations for the different Marine Corps Balls that we held with our Marine Corps League. We have two grown kids, Matt and Danielle. Matt is married to Carey; they have two children, Riley and Jayden. Matt followed me in my career field and he is employed by The Santa Barbara County Sheriff's Dept. My daughter, Danielle, is married to Dave Corry, and they live in Walnut Creek, CA with their baby, Blake; they are expecting a second child in September. My retirement is about grandkids and lots of gratitude for putts made and putts missed. I have a friend, Captain Rich Horner, who was wounded at Hue City. Rich has set up a golf date on July 16. His story is much more interesting than mine will ever be.

Again, I am humbled by John's invite to do this. I have never been arrogant or egotistical, obviously, I am not officer material. So, there is a part of me that many times I wish I had been a tanker, I envy you guys. Semper Fidelis. Carry on!

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MARINES WHO TRAVELED ON SAME SHIP TO VIETNAM MEET DECADES LATER

BY: ABBY HAMBLIN–OCT 4, 2015

It didn't matter whether America was at war or peace, John Contos had planned to join the Marine Corps since as early as he could remember. "I enlisted on the day I turned 18 years old, and that was six months before I graduated high school," he said. "I graduated, and 15 days after, I was in Marine Corps boot camp scared to death. I felt pride. I knew what I was getting into."

Contos was sent straight to the demilitarized zone — the line that separates North and South Vietnam — to participate in endless days in combat, particularly in what is known as the hill fights. He described it as "The Wild, Wild West" of Vietnam. We lived in holes in the ground, we dug trenches, we set up ambushes, we ran patrols, we were involved in numerous firefights," he said. "We did what a grunt is supposed to do." And while the vicious battles in that region could be considered as some of most dangerous combat missions of the war, Contos said war is war. "As far as my combat experience, I don't find that any more significant than any other grunt who was in combat. If you've been in combat, it doesn't matter where you were, it changes you and it affects you for life. My experience is no more significant than any other soldier or Marine no matter which war it was."

Contos preferred to tell the funny stories he has from Vietnam rather than the gory ones.

"One night I wake up and I've been sleeping in a hole and there's a rat on my chest sniffing my breath," Contos said. "Squads have areas within a perimeter and four of us squads strung up lines, and in the mornings we would hang up the dead rats that we caught, and whoever got the biggest and most would get the other squad's beer rations." Though after the war he had what he describes as some dark times, Contos said it's being a Marine that gives him the drive to live beyond them. He lives for the guys who didn't make it through the war and to help other veterans know that they don't have to dwell on the dark times either. He worked for years for the California Department of Corrections and Rehabilitation and is now Senior Vice Commandant of Marine Corps League Detachment 1340. It's there that he met his friend

Armando Moreno, whom he found out just recently was on the same transport ship as him to Vietnam. "The reason I joined was not to service or enhance myself, but to help others, especially the newer vets, to help them understand that they're not alone and that we've all been through it and that there's nothing to fear going through," Contos said. "You'll make it through just fine."

RETIRED SGT. DON NIX RELATES HIS HARROWING EXPERIENCE

FROM THE "COUNTY LINE" WEBSITE

How are you doing? I hope, Ok. I wanted to let you know, because it has gone to several news stations already, that I was attacked here in Colorado while checking my neighbor's property last night. I heard yelling down the road and thought someone might need help out here in the country. I looked out and saw a vehicle in my neighbor's driveway, so I walked down the road to check it out. A guy started yelling at me to leave saying that he was with the government and that they were in control of the property while running a "black ops" program, and that he had authority to remove anyone by any means. Luckily, I had put my pistol in my pocket before walking down there. I asked him for ID and he refused. I asked him for papers to which he said he didn't have any. I told him I watched over the property and house for the owner and that I was retired law enforcement. I added that my wife was calling the Sheriff's Office as we spoke.

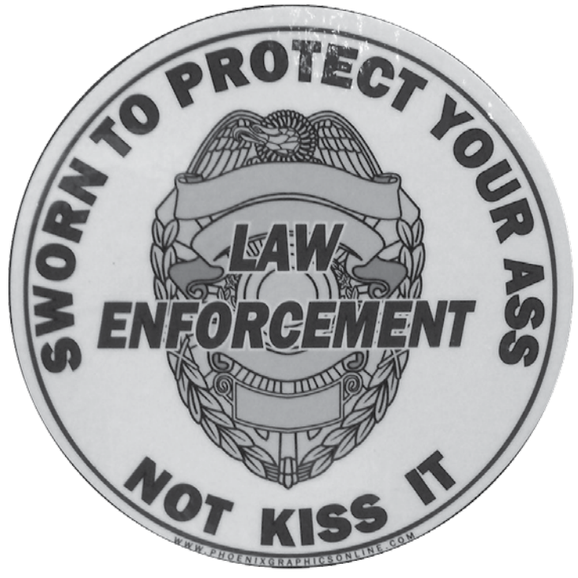
He then said, "Let's be friends" and showed me his hands. He said, "Let's shake on it" and wanted to shake with his left hand as he put his right hand behind him. I refused to take his hand and in the blink of an eye he came out with a knife and stabbed at my throat. I blocked that thrust and the blade hit my breast bone but it did not go through. Before I could reach for my gun in my pocket, he stabbed again to my chest. I blocked that one also but took another cut on my arm. He then hit me in the chest but I deflected the blade and he hit me with the butt of the knife in the solar plexus. He hit me full bodied and we tumbled over the bank, all the time he was yelling he was going to kill me. He landed on top of me and cut me a couple of times, one puncture was on the right breast but it did not go in very far. He then put both hands on the knife to push it into my chest. At that time I hit him in the side of the head with my flashlight which caused him to let go of the knife with his support hand and which then allowed me to get the gun out of my pocket. He screamed one more time "I am going to kill you MF!" The last thing he heard was me saying ... "Not today."

I killed him, rolled him off me and walked a hundred yards in the dark back to my house where my wife was driving to rescue me after hearing the shots. The suspect was a transient and had a history of drugs. Most likely, the postmortem drug test is going to come back with meth in his system. After the EMTs came and checked out my wounds, the S O taking charge of the body and closing the major highway for 16 hours, it was a long day.

Don Nix, is a US Marine veteran and retired San Diego Service Officer Sergeant.

Lee Dill: I was always impressed by Marines going into law enforcement When I got off of UMC Active Duty, they handed me an application for Baltimore City Police Department and I said, "No thanks. I am tired of being shot at." My career was warm, clean, safe and dry. I guess that I wimped out. ■

COP JOKES



DICKEY CHAPELLE

The First US Female War Correspondent to Die in Combat Named 'Honorary Marine'

BY: ANDREA SCOTT

September 10, 2017 for The Marine Corps Times

When mortar shell shrapnel exploded from a booby trap that hit Marines close to Chu Lai, Vietnam, a combat photographer was near the front. A civilian buried with full military ¬honors, Wisconsin native Georgette "Dickey" Chapelle was the first female war correspondent to die in combat. Recently she was celebrated with the title of honorary Marine at the United States Marine Corps Combat Correspondents Association banquet in San Diego. In October 2016, Commandant Gen. Robert Neller approved the title for the ¬award-winning war correspondent.

She was a five-foot-tall trailblazer who covered conflicts from World War II (she was on Iwo Jima with the Marines), to the Cold War (she photographed Castro during the Cuban Revolution), and finally, to Vietnam. A writer and photographer, Chapelle's photos had been featured on the covers and pages of Life, National Observer, ¬Cosmopolitan, Reader's Digest and National Geographic magazines.

One of her photos, which originally appeared in National Geographic in 1962, shows Vietnamese children responding to mortar fire. Another, which won the 1963 Photograph of the Year Award from the National Press Photographers Association, depicts Marine crew chief Nelson West and South Vietnamese soldiers on patrol near Vinh Quoi, Vietnam.

Iraq veteran and Coast Guard Reserve commander John Garofolo "heard about Dickey Chapelle completely by accident," and was enticed by her story. Chapelle was with Marines on Iwo Jima and Okinawa, and met Gen. Lemuel C. Shepherd, "who allowed her to travel with a Forward Marine Medical Unit, until the Navy realized she wasn't on the hospital ship she was assigned to and pulled her off the island and withdrew her military press accreditation," Garofolo said. Ten years later then-Commandant Shepherd "helped her regain her military press accreditation." In his book "Dickey Chapelle Under Fire," Garofolo shares stunning photos — comprised after 24 years of digging and research — taken by Chapelle during her time as a combat photographer embedded with U.S. troops.

It follows the story of how she "abandons her studies at MIT, marries, and persuades the Navy — despite objections from every side, and at the time, meager credentials — to let her cover the front lines from the Pacific."

"Chapelle overcame gender bias, a cheating husband, and ultimately earned the respect of the military and her media peers ... in pearl earrings and cat-eye glasses, no less," according to a media release.

The Wisconsin Historical Society houses some forty thousand photographs and written letters and works from Chapelle. It includes a series of personal letters from then-Commandant Gen. Wallace Greene, whom she was quite close with — Greene had once given her an Eagle, Globe and Anchor pin from his uniform, Garofolo said. At times, Chapelle even talked Vietnam strategy with him. "Imagine a

reporter today writing the commandant of the Marine Corps and giving him advice on military tactics."

The commandant sent Chapelle a letter after she was hospitalized for an injured knee after a parachute jump with Army Airborne troops: "I'm delighted to hear this and to be reassured that you will soon be 'fit for duty' and in condition to try to outrun my Marines again. Meanwhile, I want you to know that I and the many other Marines who claim you as a special friend are thinking of you and wishing you the speediest recovery."

The night before her death, she had dinner with Lt. Gen. Lewis Walt, Marine Commander in Vietnam, Garofolo said, and "told him that when she dies, she wanted to be on patrol with the Marines." She was near the front of a patrol as part of Operation Black Ferret with the 7th Marine Regiment when a Marine ¬activated a tripwire. Shrapnel went through Chapelle's neck and hit her carotid artery.

French Associated Press photographer Henri Huet was there to capture a hallowing image of a Navy chaplain delivering her last rites. Huet was later also killed in Vietnam. Chapelle died on November 4, 1965, at the age of 47. On that day, Gen. Greene sent a ¬Marine-wide message, "She was one of us, and we will miss her." In her last few moments on Earth, Chapelle reportedly had murmured: "I knew this was bound to happen." After her death, Lt. Gen. Walt placed a plaque near the place of her death, Garofolo said. Her body was returned to the U.S. by a six-Marine honor guard. Her photos live on — and finally she has her official title of 'Marine'.

Published with permission from the Wisconsin Historical Society Dickey Chapelle Collection from "Dickey Chapelle Under Fire."

CATHY LEROY

This is a remarkable story about a remarkable woman, Catherine Leroy. She was born in Paris in 1944 near the end of the Nazi occupation. To impress a boyfriend, she got a parachutist's license at the age of 18 and three years later she headed to SE Asia (and eventually to Vietnam) with a one-way ticket; her Leica M2 camera and $200 in her pocket. She met photographer Horst Faas then bureau chief of the Associated Press. A year later she became the first accredited journalist to participate in a combat jump, joining the 173rd Airborne Brigade in Operation Junction City. She had her press credentials temporarily suspended after she swore at a Marine officer whom she felt was condescending in denying her request to jump shortly after Operation Junction City. Two weeks after documenting the battle for Hill 881 near Khe Shan she got her photography published in Life magazine, She was wounded with a Marine unit near the demilitarized zone on May 19, 1967. Leroy would later credit a camera with saving her life by stopping some of the shrapnel. After convalescing for six weeks aboard USS Sanctuary, she returned to the field.

During the Tet Offensive of 1968 she was captured by the North Vietnamese Army in Hue City. One of the NVA soldiers knew French and so she managed to talk her way out of captivity and emerged as the first newsperson to take photographs of North Vietnamese Army Regulars behind their own lines. The subsequent story made the cover of Life.

The following is a quote from her. "When you look at war photographs, it's a silent moment of eternity. But for me it is haunted by sound, a deafening sound. In Vietnam most of the time it was extremely boring. Exhausting and boring. You walked for miles through rice paddies or jungle-walking, crawling in the most unbearable circumstances. And nothing was happening. And all of a sudden all hell broke loose." —Catherine Leroy, *A Window on the War*, L.A. Times, Dec. 8, 2002

Leroy returned to Paris from Vietnam in 1969 and covered conflicts in several countries, including Northern Ireland, Cyprus, Somalia, Afghanistan, Iraq, Iran, Libya and Lebanon. She swore off war coverage after her experiences in Beirut. Leroy originally sold her work to UPI and AP. She also co-authored the book "God Cried" about the siege of West Beirut during the 1982 Lebanon War. Later in life she started and ran a vintage clothing store, "Piece Unique." She died in Santa Monica, California in 2006, following a battle with lung cancer. ■

It's a small World

BY BOB PEAVEY

It was mid-1968 in Vietnam when I filled out a college application. I was at a U.S. Marine outpost on the DMZ called Oceanview. It was located on a beach where the South China Sea met the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) dividing North and South Vietnam. It was the northern most outpost in all Vietnam, just a mile from North Vietnam. I was a tank commander and tank section leader with two tanks assigned to help protect the little outpost. The purpose of the little base was for naval forward observers to call in gunfire from the USS New Jersey.

I was due to rotate back to the states in March of 1969 and, just before I left Vietnam I received an acceptance letter from Rochester Institute of Technology; I would start in the Fall of that year. I was out of the Corps by June; three months later I was attending my first day of school.

The college is located in Rochester, New York, which was also the home of Eastman Kodak Company from which, oddly enough, I would retire some forty years later. The school's campus was spread out and I was trying to find my way around that first day; I felt like a Vietnam FNG (F#*king New Guy) once more. The card I had in my hand said the classroom was in the Gleason Auditorium. I had to stop several people to find the building. It was the first class of my four-year "enlistment" and was titled, "Photographic Science and Sensitometry."

I entered the building from a beautiful Fall day, and once my eyes adjusted I realized I was in a large foyer. Fifteen feet into the foyer was another multiple set of doors. Opening the closest set found me facing a steep incline. I was in a very large curved auditorium that reminded me of a medical school amphitheater albeit much larger and cadaver-less.

There were at least 200 people seated down front, which was but a fraction of what the auditorium could hold. There were no stairs, only ramps, which were as steep as any sports arena with seats equally 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, after all, how would one get out in a hurry? It was an early symptom of a yet undiagnosed PTSD (Post Traumatic Stress Disorder) problem.

A few minutes after taking my seat, I realized there was someone next to me on the aisle side. I turned and immediately noticed a pair of silver crutches surrounded by a pair of arms wearing a military issue field jacket. I looked up to see a guy struggling to get into the row just in front of me. He was precariously perched on the steep ramp trying to get the first 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 corporal chevrons with crossed rifles on the jacket's collar.

Naturally, upon seeing the Marine emblems I had to ask, "Who were you with?" I was wondering if his bad leg had something to do with Southeast Asia.

"Two-Seven", he smiled, realizing he had a fellow veteran greeting him. What only a fellow Marine would know was that he meant 2nd Battalion, 7th Marine Regiment.

"I worked with Two-Seven", I quickly responded.

His comeback was, naturally, when was I in Vietnam?

"February '68 to March of '69," I said.

He told me his tour was from December, 1967 until May of '68 when he was medevac'd out.

"May of 1968?" I asked, "then you were on Operation Allen Brook!" That suddenly got his attention.

He turned in his seat with a smile, "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 understood by anyone who served with the 1st Marine Division. Goi Noi Island was a very dangerous piece of real estate surrounded on all sides by rivers. It bordered the southern edge of another bad area called "Dodge City" (south of Hill 55) about 15 miles southwest of Da Nang and "The Arizona" to the west. But Allen Brook lasted 3 months, so I had to ask him when in May he was wounded. I was only out there for two weeks.

"During the second week," he said, "before the op was given a name."

I was thrilled hearing those words. "That's when I was out there!" I said. "I was with the tanks supporting you guys!"

I immediately thought, "Man what a small world! What were the odds of such an encounter?" I couldn't imagine but, unimaginably, it was about to get a lot smaller.

He said he had a real fondness for tanks because some of them carried several extra 5-gallon water cans and shared the precious liquid with them. I remembered when the temperatures had hit 120+ degrees and the grunts were losing as many men to heat exhaustion as they were to combat with several dying.

I began to wonder if I could narrow him down to a specific tank. We had six tanks on the sweep but only three had bothered to load up with extra water cans. These three tanks were from Bravo Co., 5th Tanks; the others were from 1st Tanks.

"Did the tank crew say anything to you while giving out the water?" I asked.

He smiled again and you could see his eyes light up for I had struck a nerve. "Yeah," he said, "they wanted us to watch out for gooks in spider holes armed with RPGs. They wanted us to stay even with the front of the tank and they warned us not to get bunched up at the rear should the shit hit the fan and the tank had to move."

I smiled, distinctly remembering the lecture we gave each grunt while pouring water into their helmets, canteen cups, empty C-rats cans or just dirty cupped hands. My tank commander and platoon sergeant, S/Sgt. Bob Embesi, wanted it to be like a good old Salvation Army-like meeting; you had to listen to the preachin' before you got to the drinkin'. I was the gunner of our tank, trapped inside the turret all day; I looked for any excuse to get out when the tank stopped. 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?"

"How can I ever forget?" I said.

"Well, I dug in next to a tank that night that had a name we grunts loved . . ."

"Better Living Through 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 pouring the water," I said.

He immediately reached out his hand and said, "Thank you. I don't know if I would have ever made it without that water. You saved a lot of guys out there." 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 small reunion? And yet . . . happen it did. It is my most memorable small world experience of my life. Needless to say, we became very close friends during our four years together.

THEN: Tank School 1967

NOW: St. Louis 2017

Photo from Vietnam

1968 - Listening for NVA digging tunnels under Khe Sanh

US Army or USMC?

BY CLYDE HOCH

It was my intention to join the Army after high school just like my big brother. I played army with my neighbors since I was a young boy, and I felt it was my duty to serve the people of my country.

I heard about the Marines from a neighbor and read as much about them as possible. I was hooked. Three months before I graduated high school, I joined knowing I would be sent to Vietnam. Three days after graduating, I was on my way to Parris Island South Carolina, Marine Corps boot camp.

After boot camp and infantry training, I was sent to Second Tank Battalion in Camp Lejeune, North Carolina where I was made a tank driver.

We were told we were going on a Med cruise. The US has a fleet of ships and a battalion landing team of Marines at all times in the Mediterranean Sea to do a speedy recovery if an embassy had to be evacuated or American civilians needed protection. What a great time in the Med for a 19-year-old.

I spent six months on the Mediterranean Sea with our tanks. We came back for six months and I was again sent on a Med cruise for six months. Soon after that I was sent to Vietnam. I arrived in the middle of Tet of 1968 and left after Tet of 1969. As soon as I arrived in Vietnam, I was made a tank commander.

While I was in Vietnam, I found out my best friend growing up was killed in Vietnam. He was wounded trying to save another.

I would never be able to count the amount of "close calls" I had. Being hit by our own artillery, having creases in my flak jacket from rounds hitting it, shrapnel in my arm, and sniper fire was common. I remember a rocket propelled grenade fired at me. I saw it coming in slow motion and I thought for sure it would hit me in the head. I never thought I would live to come home. I believe now God had a purpose for me and that is why I was spared.

I was at the pinnacle of my life, having received so many promotions I didn't even want them anymore. The guys would come to me for everything. At times I felt like a priest. I was very proud I was leading men into battle while barely old enough to drink in my country. It was a great responsibility to oversee two to three tanks and the lives of the people in them in combat.

Sergeant Clyde Hoch, Vietnam 1968

The event that changed my life was when we were on an operation with two tanks and a company of Marines. We were sent out as a blocking force for a much larger operation. We had a lieutenant with us, but he was new in country, so he let me run the show. After sitting there for hours, we were told by radio to return to company headquarters. Having expected to sleep on the ground beside the tank and eat cold C-rations, happily we were heading back to cots and a warm meal as an unexpected surprise.

I was sitting on the tank commanders hatch feeling very relaxed. The infantry was riding back on the tanks. Suddenly, I took a deep breath of air and it was very hot air, things started to get fuzzy and I remember thinking to myself, "oh, oh, this is it!"

The next thing I remember, my life was like a brown blob. I remember talking to myself saying "you can't let this happen, you have to come back, you can't let go!" It seemed I repeated this for about 20 minutes, I really don't know how long it actually was. I started to see a light and it reminded me of drinking water from a glass and looking through the bottom; everything was all distorted.

I've heard many accounts of people having near death experiences meeting some supreme being, but to this day, I wonder what it means that no one was there to meet me in the state I was in.

I didn't understand what happened when I slowly began to function again. It was eerily quiet. One minute I was riding on a noisy tank the next minute everything was still, and deathly quiet.

People's mouths moving but I couldn't hear a word. There was wounded infantry that were riding on the tank, some had to die, and others lost legs. I should have jumped down and helped them, but I just stood there. For weeks following, I was in a daze. Never hearing an explosion, I wasn't aware in that moment, that we hit a large anti-tank mine.

The first three road wheels were blown off, along with the track. The tank was lying in a hole about five feet round and three feet deep. The mine was estimated to be between 30 and 50 pounds of explosives. I was 11 feet away, on top of the tank on the same side as the explosion.

When my company commander came to see what was going on, unfortunately, my hearing had improved enough to get a good tongue lashing from our captain. He felt this was all my fault and the lieutenant's. I live every day with the fact that some of these guys lost legs and their lives because of a decision I made.

This incident changed my life, I was never the same person after the mine. I became very distrustful of people, I was in a hurry to do everything and I didn't know why. I had a hard time making decisions and I couldn't remember things. I got very angry at almost nothing, I couldn't help it. At times I couldn't remember how to do the simplest of things.

I received orders for Drill Instructor School. I knew with my memory failing and my inability to make decisions I would never be able to complete the program, so I opted to get out of the military.

Coming home was the worst time in my life. I was more comfortable in the war in Vietnam than I was my own country. I wanted to isolate myself from everyone. I could not stand to be in large crowds or loud music or loud noise. I had a very hard time with conversations. I had to think to myself what do I say next. I avoided people because of this. At times, when people asked me things, my mind just went blank, like once someone asked me about Michael Jackson. I just couldn't think of who he was at the time. The person just stared at me as he walked away. I became angry very quickly. When people joked with me, I took it personal and got angry.

I had a very hard time dealing with people, plus I had a very hard time hearing. I was OK one on one, but if there was background noise or more than one person talking, I couldn't understand the conversation and just said "yes" to everything. The severe ringing in my ears has never gone away.

I drove a car for a few years. I pulled into someone's drive and I could not remember how to put the car in reverse. I judged myself as being the stupidest person in the world. Once we were at a bar. Someone spilled a drink and we all moved down one person. I let about eighty cents lay there. Later, I said to the woman sitting there, "you know that is my change." She said, "no it's not" and I got very angry over eighty cents.

I started to drink way too much, that was the only time I didn't care. I started working way too much. I worked seven days a week for 20 years. It probably made my situation worse. I hated myself and my life.

I just didn't fit in anywhere. I contemplated suicide almost every day. It seemed it took four times the effort to do something than it took others to do the same thing. I felt life is not worth the effort. I was existing, not living, I was never happy. I even thought out how I would commit suicide. The only thing that prevented me from following through with suicide was an innate belief that God put me here for a reason, and it would not be right to cut that reason short. Life was nothing but one depressing day after another, I saw no end to it. My work suffered because I could not remember the simple things that others easily remembered.

Something about hating yourself and your life for too long gears you up for a real necessary change. I spent hours in quiet time in the woods where I found peace the easiest to come by. I quit hanging out in bars and tried to look at positive things in life.

After a life of working, my retirement gave me the opportunity to put my military experiences down on the computer as they came to me. Considering the possibility that someday my family may be interested in them, I sent the chapters to my daughter to proof read for me. She suggested I make this into a book. I told her to go for it and she did.

To my surprise, I was selected as one of the fifty great writers you should be reading by the author show. I continued to write seven books in all. My fourth book won a bronze medal at an international awards contest in Miami. I donated all my profits to veteran's organizations.

I produced a documentary on tanks called, "Tanks: a Century of Dominating the Battlefield."

The research I did for my fourth book was alarming. I wanted to do something about the high rate of veteran suicides. I founded an organization called the Veterans Brotherhood whose main purpose is to prevent suicides and help veterans to resettle back into society. I didn't want anyone to have to go through life like I was.

I was a member of Rolling Thunder and I asked them if I could start up under their umbrella of non-profit status, and they agreed. A gold star mother got involved and she wanted to separate the Veterans Brotherhood from Rolling Thunder. She filed for a 501 C3 status for the Veterans Brotherhood.

We were off and running. Because of our gold star mothers fundraising, we now had funds to work with. We took 18 veterans off the streets who had absolutely nothing and nowhere to go in our first year.

We put them up in a hotel for a few days and evaluated them as to the best place to place them for their future, long term. One veteran was before a large snow storm and he said, "I was so run down from living on the streets. I would not have lived through the snow storm if the Veterans Brotherhood had not stepped in." We gave grocery gift cards to two families who had no money for food. We got a veteran's car inspected so he could go to school.

We found an elderly veteran who was in danger of losing his home for back taxes. We took a collection and paid his taxes.

Some of our beneficiaries whom we've taken off the streets now have apartments, jobs, and cars of their own and are going to school.

We offer veterans mentoring, with four people certified through the Lehigh County District Attorney's Office in mentorship. Because veteran to veteran is sometimes the best way to mentor, we have a member who is a therapist for the Veterans Administration as well.

There are many organizations out there that help veterans; most take several days to process the veteran. We are first responders when it comes to assisting veterans; we get involved immediately when they are at their lowest.

We are in the process of making a documentary on Post Traumatic Stress

(Continued on page 35)

Seven of the Best Called to Heaven

Killed in Action on February 12, 1967

BY: JERRY BILLITER

2d Platoon, Company "B", 3rd Antitank Battalion, USMC

We were running operations out of a base north of Hue, south of Dong Ha, west of Hwy 1. This base was established in December, 1966, by 3/26, and our Ontos platoon was attached for support. 3/26's mission was to block the supply route from North Vietnam on the Ho Chi Minh trail. Further, they ran Search & Destroy missions, from the South China Sea to the border of Laos. This base was named Camp Evans in honor of L/Cpl Paul Evans, who was a hero under fire and one of the first Marines killed in action at that location.

On February 12, 1967, my Ontos was coming off the lines where we were standing perimeter watch all night. After securing the Ontos, I entered the platoon tent and found PFC Roger Niemi frantically looking for something. He was nervous and upset, and this was not normal. I asked Niemi, "What's going on?" He said, "I'm going out on a Search & Destroy. I feel like I'm going to die today. We're going to hit a mine or something." Stunned, I asked him, "Why would you think that?" and he said, "I can't find my St. Christopher's medal my mother gave me, and I just know something bad will happen."

I told him that oftentimes we have these kinds of feelings, but usually they pass without incident. I also told him if he felt strongly about this, I would switch positions with him for the day and he could repay me later by taking one of my missions. He said he just couldn't do that. Then he said, "If something happens to me, would you contact my mother and let her know that, I am right with God." I said, "Okay, sure, I will, but don't worry, you'll be fine." Again, I tried, "Let me take your place today, Niemi." At about that point, our Platoon Commander, Lt. Egan, slid the canvas tent door back and told Niemi, "Come on, we're moving out." Niemi said, "Yes sir." I spoke up and told Lt. Egan, "Niemi isn't feeling well. Would it be okay if I took his place today?" Lt. Egan said, "Sure," and turned to Niemi and asked, "Is that okay with you?" Niemi replied, "It's okay, sir, I will be right out."

I walked out of the tent and stood in front of the Ontos as Niemi started the vehicle. I looked straight in the eyes of my friend, trying to give him the opportunity to change his mind and let me take his place. However, I know the way he must have felt. He couldn't let someone else take his place. Being a Marine, we go when called.

Feeling exhausted after standing 50/50 watch all night firing H&I's, I laid down for some much needed sleep. I could vaguely hear the chatter on the radio we kept in the tent monitoring transmissions from the active Ontos field operations. Half asleep, groggy and tired, I thought I was dreaming when I heard the KIA (killed in action) reports coming across the radio. I opened my eyes, I saw my other crewmen huddled around the radio..... NOT A DREAM!

The Viet Cong used one of our un-detonated 500-pound bombs to lay a landmine. Niemi's Ontos, the lead vehicle, drove across detonating the mine. The Ontos was totally destroyed and the seven Marines on board were killed. Our whole platoon was devastated. We had trained together for months, traveled by flotilla with 3/26 to Vietnam, and served on several missions together. WE WERE BROTHERS.

Operating and riding on the Ontos were: driver, PFC Roger Niemi; gunner, Cpl Allan Butler; loader, PFC Santiago-Vasquez; our Platoon Commander, Lt Eagan, Jr.; our Company Commander, Captain Camby; our field radioman, L/CPL Sylvanoviz; and with them, Sgt. Morris Burns, K/3/26. The Ontos was totally destroyed. Niemi predicted it, but could not prevent it; some things we cannot change.

Later that day, their bodies were brought out of the field in body bags, placed in the back of a truck to be transported out by convoy the next day. That evening, while moving my Ontos back in position on the lines to continue firing H&I, I stopped to see for myself the bodies of my buddies, but as much as I wanted to see them one last time, with the body bag zipper in my shaking hands, I could not bring myself to open the bags.

I did keep my promise contacting Niemi's mother and we arranged to meet at Niemi's grave site on Memorial Day, 1977. I told her what Niemi wanted her to know, that on the day he died, he was right with God. It took me 10 years to dig up that promise from my memory and do what I needed to do for my friend. I woke up in the middle of the night just before Memorial Day, 1977, and it hit me what I had promised. To this day I do not know why it took so long. What I do know is this, that upon my return from Vietnam, I chose to bury things as if they never happened, not to think about or talk about Vietnam. With the protests going on, the lack of support for our troops, the name calling, but more important than all of that stuff, the loss of our brothers in arms, this Vietnam Veteran did what we do best: dig-in and deal with it.

The intent of this story is to Honor: "Seven of the Best Called to Heaven" on February 12, 1967.

LIST OF
SEVEN OF THE BEST CALLED TO HEAVEN
KIA FEBRUARY 12, 1967
USMC ONTOS- VIETNAM

NAME	RANK	DOB	HOME	MOS
Steve Lewis Camby	Captain	2/9/1941	Spindale, NC	1802
Donald Jason Egan Jr.	Lieutenant	4/26/1942	Troy, NY	0302
Allen Leroy Butler	Corporal	4/3/1945	Pittsburgh, PA	0353
Roger Lyle Niemi	PFC	3/31/1946	Detroit, MI	0353
Bernardino Santiago-Vasquez	PFC	5/20/1947	New York, NY	0353
Casmir Sylwa Sylwanowicz	L/Corporal	2/26/1947	Flint, MI	2531
Morris Eugene Burns	Sergeant	7/8/1945	Monticello, IN	0311

This story recounts one day of a 13-month tour in one Ontos platoon. We must never forget the sacrifices of these seven heroes and the sacrifices of all our troops by honoring the 58,220 killed and 303,644 wounded in Vietnam.
Semper Fi,
Cpl. Jerry F Billiter, USMC
0353 Ontos Crewman
See 3rd ATs KIA maps @ http://mcvthf.org/Maps/3rd_Anti_Tks_KIA.htm ■

US Army or USMC?
(Continued from page 33)

Syndrome. It is very hard for a veteran to talk to family members about their experiences. We want a film, so family members can somewhat understand what their son, daughter or family member may be going through and look for warning signs of suicide. A gold star mother said, had she known of organizations like ours, her son would be alive today.

The film will bring awareness of a misunderstood issue to police, EMTs, hospital staff, the public and veterans themselves who don't fully understand PTSD.

No one in the organization is paid and our only income is from our generous donors who want to help veterans. We do more with less than any other organization.

I am so very proud of the people who work in the Veterans Brotherhood. They are the greatest people ever. What can bring you more pride than helping those who sacrificed so very much for us.

Our motto is "honor, integrity and strength." With honor and integrity comes strength.

If you would like to contribute to an honest organization that really helps veterans, please contact us at:

Veterans Brotherhood
313–4th St.
Pennsburg, PA. 18073
Phone: (267) 424-4162 ■

Editor's Note: This may be of particular interest for the USMC VTA members who were in-country in 1968 and 1969, and if you may have witnessed the awesomeness of a fire mission by the US Navy "battle wagon," the ***USS New Jersey****.*

The battleship *USS Missouri* fires its main guns during an exercise in 1990. U.S. Navy photo

THE BEST-DESIGNED BATTLESHIPS EVER BUILT

There were bigger warships, but USS Missouri and her sisters brought speed and firepower

BY: ROBERT FARLEY–5 MARCH 2017

The *North Carolina* and *South Dakota*–class battleships were designed with the limits of the Washington Naval Treaty in mind. Although much more could be accomplished in 1938 with 35,000 tons than in 1921, sacrifices still had to be made. As had been practice in the first round of battleship construction, U.S. Navy architects accepted a low speed in return for heavy armor and armament. Consequently, both the *South Dakotas* and the *North Carolinas* had speeds a knot or two slower than most foreign contemporaries. The Montana's, the final battleship design authorized by the Navy, would also have had a 28-knot maximum speed.

In any case, Japan's failure to ratify the 1936 London Naval Treaty bumped the maximum standard tonnage from 35,000 to 45,000 thousand, giving the designers some extra space to work with.

The result was the Iowa class, the most powerful and best-designed battleships ever built.

USS Missouri, the third laid down but last completed of the Iowa class, carried a slightly heavier main armament than the South Dakotas and could make five extra knots. The Iowa's were the first U.S. Navy battleships to make speed a primary value, and achieved the speed through a longer hull and more powerful machinery. Indeed, the Iowa's are the fastest battleships ever built, outpacing even the Italian Littorals by a knot or two. While no Iowa ever recorded a speed higher than 31 knots, rumors over the years suggested that the battleships might be able to make 35 knots over short distances.

USS Missouri anchored off Wonsan, Korea in October, 1950 during the Korean War

Part of the rationale for building the Iowa's was to have ships capable of chasing down and destroying the Japanese Kongo-class battlecruisers, themselves built in 1913, but the Navy also wanted to ensure that it had battleships capable of keeping up with the Essex-class carriers.

Missouri's guns were also a step up from previous classes. The 16-inch/50-caliber could fire a heavier shell at a longer range and with more penetrating power than the guns carried by the South Dakota class. While the 18.1-inch guns of *HIJMS Yamato* launched a heavier shell, the 16-inch/50-calibers had more penetrating power and could fire at a slightly faster rate. On the downside, *Missouri*'s great length and narrow beam—necessary for transit through the Panama Canal—made her a mediocre sea boat in heavy oceans. *USS Missouri* entered service in June 1944 and joined Vice Admiral Marc Mitscher's Task Force 58—a fast carrier task force—in January 1945. *Missouri*'s primary mission was aircraft-carrier escort, although she participated in the bombardment of Okinawa in 1945. On April 11, she suffered superficial damage from a kamikaze strike. Adm. William "Bull" Halsey took *Missouri* as flagship of the Third Fleet in May. As U.S. carriers destroyed what remained of Japanese air power and sea power in spring 1945, *Missouri* bombarded Honshu and Kyushu directly. On Aug. 29, 1945, *Missouri* entered Tokyo Bay and prepared to accept the Japanese surrender.

USS Missouri fires a broadside in 1988

On Sept. 2, Japanese envoys boarded *Missouri* and signed instruments of surrender with representatives from most of the Allied combatants in the Pacific. After the surrender ceremony, *Missouri* participated in Operation Magic Carpet and some occupation-related activities, then retired to the United States and training duties. In part because of the affection that president Harry S. Truman had for the ship—he hailed from *Missouri*, and his daughter christened the battleship—*Missouri* remained more active than her sisters in the immediate postwar period. This included a major show-the-flag cruise in the Mediterranean, reaffirming the U.S. commitment to the security of Greece and Turkey. Active at the beginning of the Korean War, she carried out shore bombardment missions along the Korean peninsula for the better part of three years. After the war, *Missouri* again served as a training ship before entering reserve in 1955.

Various proposals were floated for reactivating the Iowa's over the next 25 years. *New Jersey* returned to service in 1968 to bombard North Vietnam, but was soon sent back to mothballs. Some proposals in the late 1970s envisioned the replacement of the aft turret with a flight deck capable of operating helicopters and V/STOL aircraft, but these were rejected because of high cost.

At the beginning of the Reagan administration, however, funds began to flow more freely, and plans were hatched to reactivate the four remaining battleships. That the Soviets were putting into service the Kirov-class battlecruisers, the largest surface combatants in the world, helped the battleship advocates make their case. *Missouri* returned to service in May 1986, less eight five-inch/38-caliber guns, but with mounts for Harpoon and Tomahawk cruise missiles, as well as Phalanx point-defense guns and Stinger short-range surface-to-air missiles. In addition to the helipad—installed in the 1950s—*Missouri* was given the capability to launch and recover unmanned drones.

In 1990, *Missouri* deployed as part of Operation >>

Desert Shield, and in January she contributed to the air offensive against Iraq with several salvos of Tomahawk missiles. When the ground invasion began, *Missouri* and her sister Wisconsin began bombarding Iraqi positions with 16-inch and five-inch guns. *Missouri* narrowly avoided an Iraqi anti-ship missile when the accompanying HMS Gloucester shot the missile down.

With the Cold War over, *Missouri* decommissioned in March 1992. The cost of maintaining the battleships in service, which required large crews and specialized training, was simply too much for the Navy to bear. She was struck from the Navy List in 1995 in anticipation for conversion into a museum ship. Her sisters Wisconsin and Iowa remained on the Navy List until early 2006.

The viability of returning the ships to service was debated for much of the 1990s and early 2000s. The Marine Corps argued that the battleships were necessary for the provision of amphibious gunfire support, a concern that the promise of the Zumwalt-class destroyers would only partially allay. In 1999, *USS Missouri* opened as a museum ship at Pearl Harbor, not far from the wreck of *USS Arizona*. She has subsequently appeared in a pair of terrible movies—the 2001 Michael Bay effort Pearl Harbor, in which she fills in for *USS West Virginia*, and the 2012 film Battleship, in which she fights aliens. *Missouri* was also the setting for 1992's Under Siege which was altogether better than either of the other two films.

All of the late American battleship designs combined a grim practicality with a streamlined aesthetic. Because of their length and narrow lines, the Iowa's were the pinnacle of the effort. They are truly beautiful ships, and it is fortunate that all four are now on display. *Wisconsin* resides in Norfolk, *New Jersey* in Camden and *Iowa* in Los Angeles.

The USS New Jersey in Vietnam

New Jersey's third career began 6 April 1968 when she recommissioned at Philadelphia Naval Shipyard, Captain J. Edward Snyder in command. Fitted with improved electronics and a helicopter landing pad and with her 40-millimeter battery removed, she was tailored for use as a heavy bombardment ship. Her 16-inch guns, it was expected, would reach targets in Vietnam inaccessible to smaller naval guns and, in foul weather, safe from aerial attack.

New Jersey, now the world's only active battleship, departed Philadelphia 16 May, calling at Norfolk and transiting the Panama Canal before arriving at her new home port of Long Beach, Calif., 11 June. Further training off southern California followed. On 24 July, *New Jersey* received 16-inch shells and powder tanks from Mount Katmai (AE-16) by conventional highline transfer and by helicopter lift, the first time heavy battleship ammunition had been transferred by helicopter at sea.

Departing Long Beach 3 September, *New Jersey* touched at Pearl Harbor and Subic Bay before sailing 25 September for her first tour of gunfire support duty along the Vietnamese coast. Near the 17th parallel on 30 September, the dreadnought fired her first shots in battle in over sixteen years. Firing against Communist targets in and near the so-called Demilitarized Zone (DMZ), her big guns destroyed two gun positions and two supply areas. She fired against targets north of the DMZ the following day, rescuing the crew of a spotting plane forced down at sea by antiaircraft fire.

The next six months fell into a steady pace of bombardment and fire support missions along the Vietnamese coast, broken only by brief visits to Subic Bay and replenishment operations at sea. In her first two months on the gun line, *New Jersey* directed nearly ten thousand rounds of ammunition at Communist targets; over 3,000 of these shells were 16-inch projectiles.

Her first Vietnam combat tour completed, *New Jersey* departed Subic Bay 3 April 1969 for Japan. She arrived at Yokosuka for a two-day visit, sailing for the United States 9 April. Her homecoming, however, was to be delayed. On the 15th, while *New Jersey* was still at sea, North Korean jet fighters shot down an unarmed EC-121 Constellation electronic surveillance plane over the Sea of Japan, killing its entire crew. A carrier task force was formed and sent to the Sea of Japan, while *New Jersey* was ordered to come about and steam toward Japan. On the 22nd she arrived once more at Yokosuka, and immediately put to sea in readiness for what might befall.

As the crisis lessened, *New Jersey* was released to continue her interrupted voyage. She anchored at Long Beach 5 May 1969, her first visit to her home port in eight months. Through the summer months, *New Jersey*'s crew toiled to make her ready for another deployment. Deficiencies discovered on the gun line were remedied, as all hands looked forward to another opportunity to prove the mighty warship's worth in combat. Reasons of economy were to dictate otherwise. On 22 August 1969, the Secretary of Defense released a list of names of ships to be inactivated; at the top of the list was *New Jersey*. Five days later, Captain Snyder was relieved of command by Captain Robert C. Peniston.

Assuming command of a ship already earmarked for the "mothball fleet," Captain Peniston and his crew prepared for their melancholy task. *New Jersey* got underway on her last voyage 6 September, departing Long Beach for Puget Sound Naval Shipyard. She arrived on the 8th, and began pre-inactivation overhaul to ready herself for decommissioning. On 17 December 1969 *New Jersey*'s colors were hauled down and she entered the inactive fleet, still echoing the words of her last commanding officer: "Rest well, yet sleep lightly; and hear the call if again sounded to provide fire power for freedom." ■

The Upside Down Tank

BY ROBERT PEAVEY

A story from 1967 finalized after 47 years–it was a fable that proved to be true

I checked into 3rd Tanks at Dong Ha in August of 1968 and within 12 hours I heard about the mystery tank, one that hit a huge bomb and the crew disappeared. I thought it was a Halloween story for certain because no one could provide any details about it. It also happened over a year before so no one would even be around to verify the stories. Oddly enough, I was assigned to "C" Co., which is all anyone knew of the tank's identity. It would be 30-years later before I learned I was in the same platoon. It was at our founding reunion in 1999 at Washington DC when I saw the first pictures; they were truly unbelievable. Dick Carey had the pictures and said he had seen it blow up just outside the gate of Camp Evans just off Rt. 1. Another 19 years later I began researching the incident for a "Fallen Hero" dedication. I found more than I thought possible.

I found exactly where it happened, the four crewmen's names, what remains were recovered, and three eyewitnesses. I also found the former driver of the tank that was in the process of checking out of 3rd Tanks to rotate back home. He would be at the Da Nang airport when he received word. The replacement driver had been on the crew for only two days. C-12 was the number of the tank and it was the fourth of five vehicles in line, always cautious to stay in the tracks of a tank retriever, "The Bodacious Bastard," was third in line and just ahead. They were supporting 2/4 on a sweep in the area called, "Street Without Joy" named by the French 15 years earlier. It was a sweep operation that was returning back to Camp Evans. It was 10 clicks out when the retriever hit a 50 lb. mine breaking the track and losing a set or two of roadwheels. As the retriever crew was examining the damage, C-12 moved up a little, when suddenly there was an earth-shaking explosion; C-12 was lost in a cloud of smoke and sand. The turret, which was later found upside down, was discovered to be 75 feet from the upside-down hull; the cupola was another 100 feet further out.






I was able to track down the names of the crew. The TC was Sgt. Joseph Hallas; the gunner was L/Cpl Richard Smith; the loader was L/Cpl Kenneth Spohn. The two-day-old driver was L/Cpl Anthony Bennett. I also discovered there was also a grunt killed on the ground as well, but my biggest surprise came from Cpl. Bob Gulbramson, the driver who had rotated home 2 days before the explosion. It has been repeatedly said that the tank hit a 500 pound bomb, and I found nothing to change that. It was obviously a command-detonated mine, since 3 other vehicles had passed through the same set of tracks without triggering the device. ■

Free Fire Zones

BY LEWIS M. SIMONS

In the mid-1960s, when I was covering the war in Vietnam for the Associated Press, U.S. commanders were issued wallet-size cards bearing the warning to "use your firepower with care and discrimination, particularly in populated areas." Often, these cards ended up in a pocket of a pair of tropical fatigues, where they remained, ignored, for the duration of the bearer's tour of duty.

The intention of the Department of Defense in issuing the cards was to help prevent jittery U.S. soldiers from mistakenly, or intentionally, declaring a suspect village a "free fire zone," then destroying it and its residents. All too often, postmortem investigations revealed that such zones had been peaceful and should not have been assaulted. This type of incident with its attendant hostile publicity—My Lai was perhaps the most infamous, if not necessarily the most egregious—was a recurring nightmare of the military high command and a succession of U.S. administrations.

But the cards only served to accent official naiveté. In reality, U.S. troops in Vietnam seldom knew with any certainty which villages were friendly, siding with the Americans and their Saigon-based allies, and which supported the Hanoi-backed Viet Cong Communist guerrillas.

The practice of establishing free fire zones was instituted because many villages in what was then South Vietnam willingly provided safe haven to Viet Cong fighters. Some, by contrast, were forcibly occupied by marauding bands of guerrillas, who used the villages for cover. Many more were devotedly anti-Communist. Yet, the American forces often had fundamental difficulty in distinguishing among any of these villagers. The fact that the guerrillas commonly dressed in black cotton pajama-style outfits, like those worn by most Vietnamese peasants, served only to heighten the confusion.

But despite the GIs' confusion, international law enjoins armies to avoid targeting any but military objectives and assures protection to civilians, in almost any circumstance. Free fire zones as defined by Department of Defense doctrine and the rules of engagement are a severe violation of the laws of war for two reasons. First, they violate the rule against direct attack of civilians by presuming that after civilians are warned to vacate a zone, then anyone still present may lawfully be attacked. The rule prohibiting direct attacks on civilians provides no basis for a party to a conflict to shift the burden by declaring a whole zone to be "civilian free." And second, they violate the rule against indiscriminate attack by presuming without justification in the law that warning civilians to leave eliminates the legal requirements to discriminate in targeting its weapons.

Where the protection of the Geneva Conventions does not provide a mantle to civilians is when they take "a direct part in hostilities." There were, of course, occasions when Vietnamese civilians directly attacked U.S. troops, but those which drew the attention of news reporters were overwhelmingly those in which a village was labeled a free fire zone and innocent lives were taken in outbursts of indiscriminate fire and brutality.

Faced with this negative coverage and with severe difficulty in enforcing international laws limiting the imposition of free fire zones, as well as other elements of the rules of engagement, the Pentagon over time added more directives to its pocket cards: a village could not be bombed without warning even if American troops had received fire from within it; a village known to be Communist could be attacked only if its inhabitants were warned in advance; only once civilians had been removed could a village be declared a free fire zone and shelled at will.

According to an article by Maj. Mark S. Martens of the U.S. Army's Judge Advocate-General's Corps and a distinguished graduate of the U.S. Military Academy, Oxford University, and Harvard Law School, all these rules were "radically ineffective." Often, they were simply ignored. In some cases, illiterate peasants couldn't understand leaflets dropped to warn them that their villages would soon become a free fire zone. In other cases, hurried, forcible evacuations left large numbers of defenseless civilians behind, to be killed by bombing, shelling, small arms assaults, or burning. "The only good village," went one bit of cynical GI wisdom, "is a burned village."

Ineffective efforts to rein in the GIs' propensity to create free fire zones in Vietnam resulted in a sense among many Vietnamese as well as Americans that U.S. forces were undisciplined. More important, perhaps, the widely touted grand plan to capture the "hearts and minds" of the Vietnamese was immeasurably diminished by the perception—let alone the outbreaks of reality—that Americans did not value Vietnamese lives.

Toward the end of the 1960s, the term free fire zone itself was dropped from the U.S. military lexicon in no small part because that doctrine embraced actions that the United States today would regard as illegal. Subsequent U.S. military manuals and rules of engagement, whether for ground, air, or naval forces, tend to track quite closely with the central principle of international humanitarian law on civilian immunity and the prohibition on the targeting of civilians.

*John, received my copy of the #1 – **2018 Sponson Box** yesterday. Thanks for all you do. BTW, I was the 'Unknown author' of **A Tense Moment** (Page 18).*
Here is the follow-up to that story:

Monsoon Rains

BY: TOM FENERTY

Squad Leader "F" Co., 2/9

Every once in a while, when it rains for a prolonged period of time, I think back to those days, weeks, and months spent in the rain and mud in Southeast Asia. One remembrance occurred in maybe Sept. of 1968. We were out in the western section of I Corps (the northernmost part of South Vietnam) in the mountains when it began to rain, then it rained some more, and, after that, it rained again. We were unable to get resupplied because we were in the clouds and the resupply helicopters were unable to make any visual contact. We ran out of food quickly (were C-rats actually "food"?). After spending three drenching days sitting in poncho-tents talking about food ('my Mom used to make a pecan pie') and drinking coffee, the rain began to subside but the clouds continued.

Coffee was easy, just put your canteen cup outside the tent and push on the low spot in the poncho and ... Whoosh! Your cup runneth over. When there was a break in the weather and the clouds cleared, the first chopper in brought a very willing work party to assist in the offloading. As the wooden boxes of mortar rounds began coming off followed by more ammo for our rifles, there was disbelief. "Where's the chow?"

But wait! There's a second incoming chopper! Spirits lifted and we once again could almost taste those delicious green entrées. (It's hard to believe, but true). The second bird hovered just above the ground and began pushing off cans of... water.

I can still hear the shouts and curses from troops: "Where's the food? Where's the f*ckin' chow?"

Ahhh, the memories!!!

Foxtrot Ridge

BY BOB "LURCH" VAXTER

3rd Plt. Charlie Co.
3rd Tank Battalion
2/18/68 to 3/13/69

I have put off writing about this experience because I have never been sure of the date or the location where it took place. At the USMCVTA Reunion in St. Louis Mo., I came across several maps of northern I Corps. With the few landmarks I can recall, I was able to approximate the location.

It was sometime in late July or early August 1968 in the mid-afternoon. Two tanks from Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks were sitting outside the gate at LZ-Stud / Vandergrift Combat Base. Kurt Foster, the tank commander for C-33, received a radio call stating that a small convoy had been ambushed just a mile or so east. As the driver, I jumped into the compartment and started the engine. With a roar and a lot of smoke belching out the back of the engine, off we went.

While in route, Foster advised that a mighty-mite had run over a command activated mine or bomb and that a Staff Sgt. had been hit by the fly wheel and was decapitated. A couple of grunts had been injured and the grunts were taking sniper fire from across the river.

As we rolled up to the scene we began taking small arms fire from across the river. Foster had Donnie Bell, the gunner, fire a bee hive round and the small arms fire stopped.

At this point several of the grunts placed the body of the decapitated Staff Sgt. on the left front fender of the tank. One of the grunts told me that they looked and looked but could not find the missing head.

The grunts were milling around when we received a sniper round from across the river. All of the grunts I could see from the driver's compartment ran around to the right side of the tank, placing the tank between them and the sniper. A few grunts climbed on to the right front fender and squatted down. With the turret turned slightly to the left rear they were also protected from fire.

Foster told me to drive very slowly forward at a walking pace. He then told Bell to fire a beehive round across the river into the area that the sniper fire was coming from. So here we are moving at a walking pace with grunts walking in the road on the right side of the tank, grunts on the right front fender, and the main gun firing.

In order to hit the correct area across the river, Bell would traverse the turret towards the left rear. I guess that four rounds had been fired in this manner when I looked up to my right and realized the turning turret was forcing the grunts riding on the fender to move forward and it was about to force them off the front of the tank where, if the tank did not stop, they would be run over.

I keyed the intercom switch on my helmet and told Bell to stop traversing the turret. Then I hit the brakes on the tank. As the tank stopped the grunts PRC-25 radio fell into the driver's compartment and hit me on the top of my com helmet. The quick stopping of the tank also caused the body of the dead Staff Sgt. to fall into the driver's compartment. Without thinking I put up my left arm and stopped the falling body by putting my hand in its neck. There I sat, >>

one hand holding the PRC-25 that bounced of my com-helmet, the other holding the headless body trying to keep it out of my lap.

Some grunts took the body out of the driver's compartment and placed it on the armor plate on the back of the tank. I gave the radio back to the grunt who had dropped it.

The shooting had stopped, so all of the grunts that were not on the tank climbed on the back and we returned to LZ Stud / Camp Vandergrift. The grunts and the KIA were dropped at the front gate, and we proceeded to the tank park at the base for the night.

Several years ago, while I was going through therapy, I asked my doctor as to why there were such large gaps in my memory of my tour in Vietnam. He advised that at some point my mind decided to block out situations that it did not want to face. The incident on Foxtrot Ridge and the headless body being prime examples. I guess if anyone who is reading this story and who recalls the date and the location, let me know. I can't ask Donnie Bell or Kurt Foster as they are both deceased. I still don't recall who our loader was.

Got Lemons? . . . Make Lemonade

BY JIM COAN

On departure day from the reunion, I was scheduled for a 1430 flight to Phoenix on American Airlines. I got to the airport at 1130 to allow plenty of time to get through TSA. To my dismay, I learned my flight departure time was delayed an hour to 1530. I was told to move to gate C-18 to catch that flight. Fortunately, VTA member Greg Kelley was sitting there waiting to board his flight to LaGuardia. That occupied some of my wait, chatting with him, but then, too soon, he had to board his flight.

I had two hours to kill before boarding my flight. While sitting there, staring at all the rows of empty gate area seats, a man my age comes over and looks at my shirt with the USMC eagle, globe, and anchor on the chest. He introduced himself as a Marine who was also flying to Phoenix. Turns out, he served two tours in Nam as a grunt, the first in 1966-67 with 2/9, and the second two years later with 3/7. When he found out I was in 3rd Tanks, 67-68, he broke out in a wide smile and said, "I loved having tanks with us. I always felt safer when they were nearby."

I was a bit surprised to hear that because I'd heard some Marines in Nam call us noisy, incoming magnets. He told me that he'd been on an operation in mid-summer of '67 with 2/9 and got heat exhaustion. Some tankers used their extra water can to soak him down and keep him from going into heat stroke. When he was wounded in a firefight, a tank crew pulled up next to him, climbed down and loaded him on the tank and drove him to the medevac LZ. He has been grateful for us tankers ever since.

I was hoping to sit next to him and his wife on the flight home, but it was not to be. Anyway, this is how you make lemonade when you get lemons at the airport. Find a Marine to sit down with and swap stories. Before you know it, the gate attendant is calling for all passengers to board. Semper Fi!

John Wear Confesses

Based on some recent news that hundreds of US Marine recruits at MCRD San Diego fell prey to a "unidentified source" of a serious sickness which caused a delay of their graduation date, I have the following "confessed" to make:

It was the fall of 1966, and during our 10 weeks of US Marine boot camp at MCRD San Diego, my recruit platoon got assigned to one week of mess duty. For whatever reason, my personal assignment was the "salad room." Our duties were peeling potatoes and carrots, chopping lettuce for salads and producing other cold side dishes for the chow hall. It was also the period of time in Southern California when nights were chilly and days were warm ... so upper respiratory infections (aka "head colds") were a fairly common malady among my fellow recruits ... including me.

One of the salad room assignments was for us to make a huge vat of potato salad. After peeling and cutting up the potatoes, we chopped celery and added it to the vat. Then, huge jars of mayonnaise were dumped into the vat. It seems as if the only way to effectively mix the ingredients was to roll up the sleeves of my utility shirt and use my hands and arms to mix the concoction. As I was mixing the potato salad, my used Kleenex tissue fell out of my shirt pocket and into the potato salad. I did not notice the fallen object until I had washed off my arms and hands and then reached into my pocket to use the tissue to wipe my dripping nose. I then looked into the vat and carefully dug the nasty tissue out of the potato salad. A little while later, we served the salad to the recruits. And we wonder how colds and other maladies spread in living conditions with tightly packed bodies? As an aside to my confession, our boot camp series graduated on time so I figure that my gross mistake did not have the same effect as the most recent outbreak at MCRD San Diego.

Three Sergeants Major

BY JOHN HUNTER

This is a very short story about my recent experience with Marine Sergeants Major. During my time as an active duty Marine, I never talked to a Sgt. Major. In fact, like most young Marine enlisted men, they scared the shit out of me! The first time I had the courage to speak to one was at our most recent reunion in St. Louis, when I met Sgt. Major Bill "JJ" Carroll, a true gentleman. We had a nice conversation and he gave me one of those "Tank" pins he had. My second experience was on October 30th of this year at the Pala Raceway here in San Diego County. The Raceway is located on the Pala Indian Reservation. The Sgt. Major named Louie, was riding motorcycles with his son. This guy is on Active Duty and stationed at Camp Pendleton. To my surprise he is a young guy, about 40 years old. I figured he must be pretty sharp to make the rank as young as he is. Then, yesterday, coming back from riding my motorcycle at Cahuilla Raceway, which is located on Cahuilla Indian Reservation, I stopped for gas at the La Jolla Trading Post. You guessed it, it's located on the La Jolla Indian Reservation. When I stopped I met a retired Sgt. Major riding a Harley. He is a 30-year man and he told me he wanted to stay in longer, but his wife didn't want him to. So, in less than two months I have met three Marine Sergeants Major. To me, it is pretty strange but a pleasure for sure.

John with his bike

Tales from Across the Pond

A DOGGIE TANKER'S TALE

I'm pulling this one last story from out of the deep dark recesses of my mind. To tell the truth, I'm not sure that it belongs here in this category. Anyway, here it is. This involves my old buddy FJB (Fred Burnett), driver of A-15 and later A-16. He had received a package from home and one of the items in it was a "new fandangle" razor. Instead of individual razor blades, it had a continuous strip of metal wound into a coil. While Fred was showing it around, he was approached by Dennis Felton, the driver of A-13.

"Let me see it, I have one just like it back home." Then he began to turn the dial ... click. Upon hearing the click, FJB asked him to stop, adding that he hadn't used it yet. Dennis assured him that it was not a problem, click, click. "When you get to the end you can start over" ... click, click.

A worried FJB asked, "are you sure?"

"Oh yah," replied Dennis, "the one I had would go on forever." "Click....click.... click....click....click. "Now watch," he said proudly.

Almost immediately, a frown crept over Dennis' face, which was matched with the look Fred wore, of course to be honest, his was more of a look of terror.

Felton never skipped a beat, "That's funny, mine didn't stop; it must be a different brand."

He then handed it back to Fred. Fred's eyes bulged in their sockets.

"You, you, youuuu destroyer!" He then dashed it to the ground, though later he did retrieve it and managed to get a few shaves from the one remaining "blade."

From that day on, Dennis wore the moniker of "The Destroyer." Often, new troops would ask what Destroyer's real name was and, whoever was asked, would shrug their shoulders and say, " I have no idea; it has always been "The Destroyer."

Dennis Felton was from Rochester, Michigan. After returning to civilization in early 1968, we enjoyed a brief period of leave before returning to Ft. Knox to finish our military careers.

That was the last I heard of him until the summer of 2006, after my wife and I had returned from a trip west to the Minneapolis-St. Paul area where we attended the wedding of my fellow A Co., "First Platoon-er" Larry "Bug" Bugni's son, Joe. It was then I ran across an obituary for a Dennis C. Felton on line with Ancestry.com.

I clicked on the online obit and there was "The Destroyer's" smiling face. It was just an older version, no doubt about it. I then sent an e-mail copy to my fellow sleuth, Larry Bugni.

In short order he replied, having been intrigued by the fact that Destroyer was a longtime government employee. "Bug" said that he had "Googled" Felton (at the time I did not know what a "Google" was, but I had heard of a gaggle of geese). Turns out there was a "gentleman" of the same name, Dennis C. Felton, who was employed by the IRS and engaged in some shenanigans, but that's another story

1st Anti Tanks (Ontos) Action 7 Feb 68

BY: JOE TISCIA

I was on convoy duty 7 Feb 68 during the Battle of Hue. After resupplying Bravo 1/11 at the Rock Crusher, we headed back to Phu Bai. Two Ontos were added security for our return trip. A-11 was commanded by Cpl. Dace Smith and A-13 by a Sgt. Prather. A-11 took the lead and A-13 was at the rear. It was 23 vehicles with around 50 Marines and the two Ontos crews. The standing orders were that Ontos on convoys were to ride with the six recoilless rifles with empty tubes. >>

We ran straight into two Battalions (804, 818) of NVA and a sapper company of Viet Cong. We were outnumbered 8 to 1. The Ontos crews tried to go out and load the 106s, but it was deadly. The Driver of A-13, PFC Bierle, was wounded severely as he headed to reload. He lay there wounded and was executed when the NVA overran the rear of the convoy. The top brass had cost us the day.

Our two Ontos were knocked out and the crews became casualties. CPL Dace Smith in A-13 managed to get a round off before being severely wounded. It was a terrible day. Marines were casualties right and left. We barely held on in a graveyard that provided us the best defense. Most of us ended up wounded.

We were spared the same fate as PFC Bierele when reaction forces from Phu Bai (led by Lt. Stewart Brown) and the 2nd React force from the Rock Crusher with Charlie 1/1 Marines, were able to assist with two Quad Fifties from the Army's D Battery, 1st Bn., 44th Artillery, led by 1LT Robert Coates. He also was killed that day. Total casualties including the reaction teams; 63 Purple Hearts (21 were KIAs), two Silver Stars and a Bronze Star. We inflicted on the two Battalions of NVA and Viet Cong over 200 casualties that day. (That was 200 less to fight in the City of Hue)

I still want to know, during one of the deadliest months of the Vietnam War, who was responsible for the order given to the Ontos crews to convoy with empty tubes? It was a deadly order; and it came from the top brass. You can see a detailed story of the actions that day on www.2-7-68.com. This little known action during TET is now in the chronicles of the history of the Marine Corps at Quantico, VA. It is written by those that served the Corps proudly that day... no one backed down...they looked death squarely in the eye and never flinched.

For over 40 years, I lived with the stigma of not being given the honor and privilege of dying with my fellow Marines. But I have finally learned that I survived to be a part of the telling of this story of utmost courage. I now speak to groups about Vietnam and the brave Marines and the two little Ontos of 7 February 68. I am no longer just a survivor. These Marines now live again through me and the Marines that have finally told the story of the "Convoy to the Graveyard."

I want to thank the following Marines for making it all possible: LT. Butch Plunkett, our sponsor; Cpls Chuck Gilbert, Ned Clark; Authors Howard Melton, Ron Taylor, Tim Campbell, and Leonard Lindquist contributing to the facts of this story. Plus, there were many others that have contributed later...thank you all. There should have been many more awards issued for valor that day. They were all heroes.

UPDATE: It is with great sorrow that we announce that on January 14, 2018, Corporal Dace Smith reported to the guard shack in Heaven. He will be missed by his family and friends. ■

Photo from Vietnam

1st Tanks Blade Tank - 1969

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

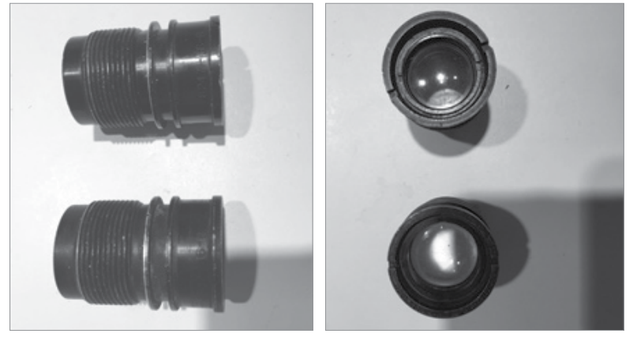
Can you guess who this hard charging young Marine is?

The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 with the right answers will have their name entered for a prize drawing to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.

Last Issue Winner

On Dec. 12, 2017 at 9:50 AM, I finally got a telephone call from John Grooms correctly identifying

the photo that was in the October 2017 issue as **Eye Pieces for the M-17 Range Finder**. When I told John that he beat out 500 other members in identifying the optics, he told me that while out on an operation his tank got hit by two mortars and one of them blew off one of the outside range finder "ears" so he had to go back to the rear to have it repaired. During the repair process, he studied all of the parts and so he was able to ID the optics



VTA Mini-Reunion Ft Benning

Sept 5 – 8, 2018

Schedule of Events

Wednesday Sept. 5th	Arrival day–Dinner on your own.
Thursday Sept. 6th	Morning–Jump School overview (1.5 hrs.) Tank School, tour, picnic lunch provided. Meet new tankers and school staff. (2-3 hrs.) Evening–Pizza together at hotel with all of the USMC Tank School staff. (2.5 hours). Plus presentation to tank school from VTA.
Friday Sept 7th Morning	Tour Tank Restoration Museum (2 hours) Back to Hotel: Presentation on the fundraising for the National Armor & Cavalry Museum (Possible) Bus trip the PX food court. Tour of the Infantry museum on you own.
Saturday Sept 8th.	Day of departure

TRAVEL SUGGESTION:
Fly to Atlanta–(ATL) Hartsfield-Jackson Atlanta International Airport

Go on line or call to arrange for limo/bus to drive from ATL to Columbus ($86 round trip) from:
Gromme Transportation
2800 Harley Court
Columbus, GA 31909
Phone: (706) 324-3939
Email: columbusoffice@groometrans.com
Website: https://groometransportation.com/

LODGING:
Hampton Inn – Columbus South – Ft Benning

2870 South Lumpkin Road
Columbus, GA 31903
(706) 660-5550

Special Room rate: $119 per night + taxes, etc.
Rate includes:
Two queen beds
Free breakfast
Free Wi Fi
Free Parking
Room reservation cutoff date: 08/05/18

COMMENT: **We really need a head count.** If you are remotely interested in attending this event then please call or email:
John Wear at 719-495-5998 or email Johnwear2@verizon.net
Or **Rick Lewis** at 858-735-1772 or email RICKLENT@aol.com and let us know your plans.

Please call today!!!

WE ARE PLANNING A SPECIAL 2018 USMC VTA Mini – REUNION!!!

WHEN: September 5 to 8, 2018
WHERE: Ft Benning, Columbus, Georgia
WE PLAN TO VISIT:

The Tank Restoration Museum – There are more tanks than you've ever seen before!!!

The USMC Tank School

US Army Museum of the Infantry

NOTE: Please go to the VTA website for more details... http://www.usmcvta.org

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

Please note: If the last two digits after "EXPIRE" on your address label is "17" then your 2018 membership dues are now payable. It does not matter the month that you joined, your annual dues are payable on January 1 each new year.

Make your check out to: USMC VTA for $30* and mail to:

USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611

Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.