



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Featured Stories:

Tanks in Hue CityPage 15

Not Just Another Con Thien Casualty..... Page 31

On The Trace All Alone Page 37

Do You Need Help Writing Your Own Story? We have several members who have volunteered their time especially if you think that you may need some help composing a story or two of when you were a US Marine.

Please call or email them today.

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Special Note: *We anticipate having **Forgotten Tracks, Volume 2** ready for purchase this fall just in time for Christmas gift giving. Details will follow in the next issue of the Sponson Box.*

The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Legacy Donation Program

During our 2015 reunion in Washington, DC we announced we were moving forward to develop an end of life gift/donation program that would guide you, should you wish to leave a financial donation to the VTA, when you check in to "The Great Tank Park in the Sky."

The official title of the program:

The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Legacy Donation Program

If you would like to leave a financial gift or some of your personal property, and to name VTA as beneficiary in your will or trust, you can find an

instruction guide by going to our web site at WWW.USMCVTA and select the Legacy Donation Program. You can then simply print out the two page guide and then meet with your lawyer or financial advisor to make your gift become possible. If you are unable to access a computer and if you need help, please contact Rick Lewis, Vice President USMC VTA, via phone at 858-735-1772 or email: ricklent@aol.com

If you need more research into a gift/donation planning, here is a web site you can also explore. [Http://planner-gift/different-types-of-donations](http://planner-gift/different-types-of-donations)

Letter from the President

TIGER SHOOT 2016: I got a call from the 2nd Tank Bn. CO about a month ago. The colonel said that due to the on-going Dept. of Defense budget cuts, there will be no "Tiger Shoot" competition this year.

HISTORY: This past January, Vietnam magazine featured a story about American tanks in Vietnam. While the story, in general, was barely worth reading, the beginning of the story had the author detailing the Battle for Hue City with so many inaccuracies that I was compelled to (a.) write to the publisher and to the author advising them that some of their research (or lack thereof) needed correcting... and for which I received the "sound of crickets," and (b.) to feature a section of this issue of our magazine with more correct details for that month-long battle which took place during Tet 1968... 48 years ago.

YOUR STORY: I have a sports analogy that may fit more appropriately with the ongoing appeal to get you to submit your story. How about this: A baseball batter steps up to the plate, but after several pitches he does not take a swing at the ball. For the life I me I will never understand why he would not take a swing because we all know that he will never get on base (or hit a homerun) if he never tries to hit the ball. Likewise, if you never take a chance and put a story on paper of your time in the Marine Corps, then how will you ever know if it is worth the effort? The answer is, you won't. Not unless you try. There is an announcement in this issue listing several members who would be very happy to help you with your writing endeavor. Please call or email any or all of them. They are there to help you.

2017 REUNION: Our next gathering will be September 21 – 25, 2017 in St Louis, Missouri. If you look on Page 7 of this issue, there is a book review. The book's author, Nick Warr, has been invited to be our Guest Speaker for the reunion banquet in St Louis.

HOLIDAY GIFT GIVING: Here is something to consider: For Christmas gift giving, many families practice a very practical method for the adult members that is called a "Pollyanna." That is where each adult draws another adult family member's name out of a hat. Each adult member then gives and gets one present. For my way of thinking, this is a great solution to over-spending on "unwanted" gifts that may never again see the light of day, plus it can really help ease the stress spending far too much money on gifts that may or may not really matter. In the past and for whatever reason, my younger sister insists that all of the adults in our family exchange gifts with each other. Since she has been able to prevail for the past six or seven years, I have found a fairly practical solution. I select a worthy charitable non-profit organization and I donate a sum of money in each person's name as their Christmas present. After sending the donation check to the charity, I then obtain an image of that organization's letter head and I create a "Thank You" letter from the non-profit addressed to each of the family members. I then stick the letter in an envelope for that year's Christmas gift. Over the years, I have donated to the National Wildlife Foundation, the SPCA, a special school for learning disabled kids, and a few other "do-gooder" nonprofits. Well, this past Christmas, I finally woke up and said to myself, "Hey! The USMC Vietnam Tankers Association is a non-profit and they sure can use some extra cash so why not donate to them in my family members' name?" And that is what I did. QUESTION: Would you also consider the same gift for your family and for the VTA this holiday season?



"All great things are simple, and many can be expressed in single words: freedom, justice, honor, duty, mercy, hope..."

Winston Churchill



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A Co, 1st Tanks, '68 – '69

MOS: 1811

DOB: 9/15/44

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DOB: 11/20/42

Wife: Rosita

Recruited by: Jim Coan

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?? Co, 3rd Tanks, 1966

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DOB: 11/28/46

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Recruited by: John Wear

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B Co, 5th Tanks and B Co, 1st Tanks

MOS: 1802

DOB: 06/06/42

Wife: Gloria

Recruited by: The Website

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

CORRECTIONS

We got a phone call from our resident tank authority, Gerry Hodum, informing us that one of the tanks on the cover photo of the most recent issue of the Sponson Box was misidentified. While the old WW1 Mark 4 was right on ... the modern day tank was not an American M-1 "Abrams." It is a British "Challenger 2." We are genuinely sorry for the mistake.

Jerry White writes: It's been some time since I have communicated with you. I met you at the San Diego reunion in 2011. I am a very proud dues-paying member of this fine organization. A few years ago you asked me if I had any stories of my time with B Co. 3rd. Tanks. I responded with a story you published in the Sponson Box entitled "We'll Meet You On the Other Side!" Since then, as age would have it, there were a couple minor errors in my recollections published in the story. I realize this now because I have been reading the "official" version of the history of what happened that day (nearly 50 years ago). Some of this new information was found in the USMC Vietnam Tankers History Foundation (Ray Stewart) website.

My tank commander, S/Sgt. Jose Alvarado was awarded the Silver Star for actions that day. And another crewman on the tank, Robert Haller, was awarded a Navy Commendation Medal. In reading the awards for both men, as well as the combat action reports, I can recall the small but none-the-less-inaccurate recollections of mine. In my published account, I referred to S/Sgt. Alvarado as perhaps having been promoted to Gunny or 2nd. Lt. at the time. I now know that came after that date of Aug. 20th. Another false memory appears to be that I recalled three tanks involved in the action. However, the awards say there were only two tanks. Lastly, I said no one was hurt or wounded. I was wrong. The record reflects the tank commander of the other tank was seriously WIA. I think that his name is Robert Adcock. I apologize for my bad memory, but it was a long time ago and I feel a real need to correct and update the story for the sake of history. Thank you for taking the time to read this, and if you could pass this along to Bob Haller, I would appreciate it. My Phone number is (928) 302-6486... Tanks, John.

Bob Haller explains: Alvarado was awarded the Silver Star and Bob Adcock was awarded a Bronze Star with a "V" for valor. I received a Navy Commendation with a "V". We were ambushed by an entrenched enemy that was also hidden in several bamboo groves. Canister took out most of them hidden in the bamboo, and we raked the trench line

with the machine guns, both 50 and 30; they had no place to run; a lot of people died that day. Adcock was wounded and burned by an R.P.G. and small arms fire. I helped him off of the tank and he did not want to be evacuated. I climbed back on and did what I needed to do. The fire was so intense that it shredded everything on the racks, chewed up the periscopes, and took out both antennas of my tank. It sounded like a heavy rain storm on a tin roof with thunder as the rockets kept coming. Later, I was promoted to corporal and given command of that tank until I was shot and evacuated.

Jerry writes more: Thank you so much for that considerate response to this 70-year-old! Yes ...I am still trying to figure it all out (lots of sleepless nights). My biggest problem is still dealing with how it may have inadvertently been my fault that my friend from Camp Lejeune, Joseph Clinton Brown (J.C.), was killed by the sniper instead of me. You see, the evening of July 31, 1966, he and I switched seats after I couldn't quite get the right frequency on the tank's radio. It was my first day on B-14, as I was replacing someone who was wounded the night before. J.C. had actually saved that Marine's life. He would go on to receive his Silver Star posthumously. We sat on top of the turret after he had tweaked the radio and after I made an "all secure" call. We were discussing baseball, his Baltimore O's and my Detroit Tigers, when suddenly a gook sniper opened up on us and hit J.C. in the chest. He was sitting in the loaders hatch where I had been sitting only minutes before. We both jumped off the tank and went around to the protected side where S/Sgt. Alvarado and another crewman were standing. To my horror, J.C. had an awful, surprised look on his face ... (I'll never forget it) ... and he then took a couple of steps and just collapsed. We called for a corpsman and the doc was there in a moment. J.C. held on for a couple minutes, but that's all. The shot was a kill shot through and through. John, I know this is an awful, terrible account of what happened and maybe you can see why I feel somewhat responsible. I have relived that evening many a night for nearly 50 years. We fired our 90 and shot up the coast line along across the Song Thu Bon River trying to get that damn sniper. I guess we will never know if we got him. I found out that J.C. is buried at Baltimore National Cemetery, and July 31st will mark the 50th anniversary of his untimely death. I will be there to grieve and pay my respects to the Marine and the man who took my place. John, you are free to print any or all of my letter...and Tanks again. I needed that.

Writer's Award Nominee

John Hunter Writes: The latest issue of the Sponson Box is your best work. I enjoyed most of the stories, es- >>



FRONT COVER PHOTO: U.S. Marine grunts seek refuge behind 3rd Tank Battalion's F-32 during the month-long battle in Hue of Tet 1968.

pecially Tom Colson's. I have told you before that this guy knows how to tell a story. If you ever give out awards for best writer, I want to recommend Tom. No, I have never met him, I will make an attempt in St. Louis to do that.

I also want to report a "mini reunion" in San Diego on March 28th. I met with Ray Stewart and his wife, Julie. I spent the day with them. Ray bought me breakfast and lunch. They were in a hotel across the street from Balboa Park. We walked around it for a couple of hours and spent the rest of the day in their room just talking. We had a great time. Ray was my platoon leader in Chu Lai in 1965 and we were both transferred to 3rd Tanks in Da Nang. But I did not see him up there. I ended up as a driver of a flame tank. I am planning on a couple of stories on flames for you since it seems to be the popular theme now days.

An Invitation to "The March Out"

Bruce Van Apeldoorn writes: We have snow up to our ears today (Feb 15, 2016) so the cancellation of the MCL meeting didn't surprise me. Check out the below response from one of our elder Marines. Those Old Corps Marines ... you got to love 'em!

----- Forwarded message -----

Troops,

Regular League Meeting may be canceled but...The Chosin Reservoir March Out Recreation is still on. The weather is perfect this year! Thank goodness. For a while it looked like global warming was going to ruin everything. We are still short of Chinese to shoot at us so if you have a favorite Chinese restaurant, ask them to help us out. Meet by the tank at Dorsey Road American Legion Post at 2:30 am Wednesday morning. We'll finish just north of Buffalo. Dress warm. No live ammo! We don't need any unfortunate incidents like last year.



Ontos Notes

Sgt Major Robert Singer writes: To Mike Giovinazzo—

Good job with all that you are doing for all the old ON-TOS guys out there and for the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. In October, 1968, I joined A-Company, 3rd Anti Tanks, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division. I was a 0351 who had previously served with 1/1 in RVN (the Company First Sergeant signed me up for a 0353 MCI Course). By then, the 3rd Anti-Tank Battalion had folded the Colors and A-Company (reinforced) became part of the 3rd Tank Battalion. A-Company consisted of 3 of its organic platoons and 1 platoon from 5th Anti-Tank Battalion ... (as I remember it). The clock was ticking on the life span of the ONTOS in the USMC. The mailing address I was using at that time was A-Company "ONTOS", 3rd Tank Battalion. First to go was the platoon from 5th ATs and then they started working on the rest of the company. I believe by April 1969 the 1st Platoon was the only platoon left. We reported with everything back to Dong Ha which was home to 3rd Tank Battalion. Orders were cut for most of the platoon to go to the grunts. I could have gone back to Okinawa with the vehicles, but I opted for 2/3 instead. Another interesting thing during this time frame was that the USMC was experimenting with those US Army M113 Armored Personnel Carriers. We actually had a platoon in 3rd Tanks all manned by Marines. Obviously that went nowhere. As an aside, I am sorry I missed the reunion in D.C., but I was really under the weather.

Remington Raiders

Tom Hayes writes: Finally! A story about 0141 Admin Clerks! I was clerk with Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks in 1968. The office consisted of one rusty typewriter and some files. The company was "in the field" most of the time at places like Cam Lo Hill, Mai Loc, Mai Xa Tai and finally near the airfield at Quang Tri. My acting 1st Sgt was GySgt Jim Langford. If you know "Top," you know that most of our time was not spent in the company office. We were in the bush conducting ambushes, patrols, and listening posts. It was great to read something different and knowing that a lot of different MOS's made up a Marine tank company.

3rd Tanks at Camp Pendleton

A letter in Leatherneck magazine: I am told the leather-necks of Company C, 3rd Tanks were stationed at Camp Pendleton in 1951 and 1952 prior to deploying to Korea. I thought that the 3rdMarDiv was in Okinawa and Japan during that period of time.

The reply: The 3rdMarDiv and 3rd Tank Bn were reactivated in January 1952 at Camp Pendleton. They arrived in Japan in August 1953 but later moved to Okinawa in 1956. According to official 3rdMarDiv history, they actively trained in Japan and Hawaii but did not participate in the Korean War. ■



Book Review

Phase Line Green: The Battle for Hue, 1968

BY NICHOLAS WARR, NAVAL INSTITUTE PRESS, 1997

The author, Nick Warr, was a platoon leader with C/1/5. He tells a riveting account of what his unit went through in two weeks of vicious house to house fighting in the embattled Citadel area of Hue, which had been invaded and occupied by the North Vietnamese Army during Tet, 1968.

On February 12, Lieutenant Warr's unit was transported in Whiskey boats on the Perfume River to the Citadel. On that day, his company numbered around 200 Marines. Within a week, that company strength was down to 50 operatives, and his platoon had taken so many casualties that Warr was told to go help the 60mm mortar crews unload ammo, as his platoon was essentially eliminated as a functional fighting unit.

What caused these heavy casualties was the initial rules of engagement passed down from on high that prohibited Marines fighting in the Citadel from employing any weapons more powerful than their M-79 grenade launchers. The tanks could not fire their 90mm main guns, and naval gunfire, artillery, and air strikes were off limits.

Once these limits were lifted, and the Marines could employ their supporting arms, the tide turned in the Marines' favor. One tactic that worked really well was for a tank/Ontos team that would speed up to a designated location, stop and open fire with their big guns, then back out. The

grunts would then charge across the street into the blasted, enemy-occupied buildings, rooting out the NVA. This tactic went on for several days until one morning an Ontos came around a corner going the wrong way. It pivoted and fired off a broadside with all six 106mm guns, almost wiping out

several Marines to its rear with the back blast. The Ontos honeymoon was over for "C" Company.

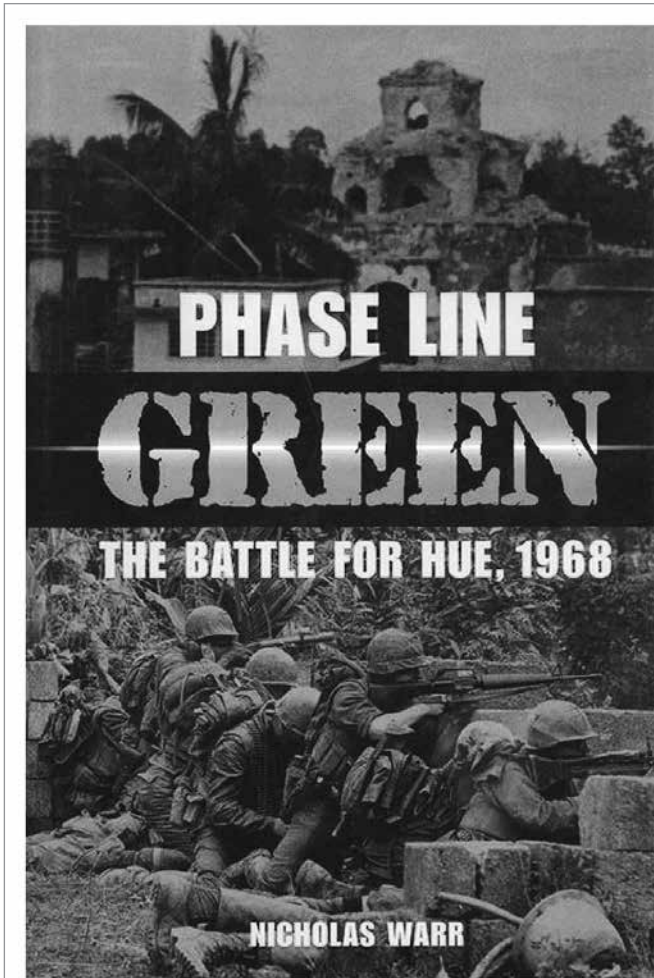
Nicholas Warr has written a book that should be mandatory reading at any War College or military academy where urban combat techniques are being taught. The hard-won lessons learned by those 1/5 Marines finally carried them to victory over the stubborn North Vietnamese Army occupiers of the Citadel.

Warr tells the story from an eyewitness perspective of what went right and what was done wrong in the fierce struggle for control of Hue's Citadel. He holds nothing back. Thus, he has written a classic military history book that is highly recommended to anyone who wants to know and understand the

true facts of that battle.

[On a personal note: My OCS platoon sergeant, Staff Sergeant Lunsford, was a replacement as Warr's platoon sergeant near the end of the battle. He was from Tennessee and had received a Silver Star during his first tour in 1965-66. I can still hear him yelling at us on the grinder: "You-all mahch lak a buncha turkeys bobbin' fo' bugs!"]

—Book review by James P. Coan



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“It is foolish and wrong to mourn the men who died. Rather we should thank God that such men lived.” — General George S. Patton

Craig Ammon

Blake Ammon writes: My Dad passed away yesterday at around 4:00 in the afternoon. My sisters and I were at his side most of the day, but we stepped out for a couple minutes so my uncle could have his time with Dad and he ended up passing then. I'm thinking he was waiting for us girls to leave, but it's still upsetting knowing that we weren't at his side. Cynthia mentioned that Harold wrote down everything that happened that day in Vietnam and I would really like to read that if you wouldn't mind sending it to me. At least I know that my Dad isn't suffering anymore with all of his illnesses, but it still doesn't bring much comfort right now, as I'd like him here with me

Maurice C Ashley, Jr. BGen, USMC (ret)

Leatherneck magazine reports: General Ashley was 90 years old when he passed away in Stewart, FL. After enlisting in 1943, he served in WW2, the Korean War and Vietnam. In Korea he was a tank platoon leader and a company commander with 1st Tank Bn. Then, in 1968, he was assigned to 1st Mar Div. in Vietnam as the commanding officer of 1st Tank Bn and then as regimental XO of the 5th Marines

Thomas M Baranski

Leatherneck magazine reports: He was 73 and had served in tank units during the Vietnam War

Thomas E Glisch

Tom was born on July 1, 1947 and passed away on Tuesday, March 15, 2016. He was a resident of Franklin, Wisconsin at the time of his passing. He served his country in the U.S. Marine Corps as a tank crewman during Vietnam. He was married to Jackie. In lieu of flowers, memorials to VFW Post 10441 Tichigan or the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

From Tom's Prayer Card:

*I'd like the memory of me to be a happy one,
I'd like the leave the afterglow of smiles when day is gone.
I'd like to leave an echo whispering softly down the ways,
Of happy times, and laughing times, and bright and sunny days.
I'd like the tears of those who grieve to dry before the sun,
Of happy memories that I leave when life is done.*

Joe Wilder, Sgt Major, USMC (ret)

Ken Zebal writes: It is my sad duty to inform you all that



Joe Wilder passed away last night (March 25, 2016). His son-in-law called me this morning to ask that I pass the word. For those of you who may not have had the pleasure of serving with him, Joe was a Korean War veteran and met us at Chu Lai in July of 1965. He did two tours of duty in RVN and received two Purple Hearts. As the Platoon Sergeant for 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company during Operation STARLITE, he was TC of A-35. He was very steady under fire and I was proud to serve with him. As his career progressed, he was promoted up to SgtMaj and was on the short list of those considered for selection as SgtMaj of the Marine Corps.

Tom Roberts, Captain, USMC (ret.)

Doug Scrivner writes: I was checking on my old CO from Charlie Co, 1st Tanks in 1969 yesterday, this is the response I got back from his daughter today:

Thomas G. Roberts, 83, of Yuma, died 20 March 2016, in Scottsdale, Arizona. He was born 24 February 1933 in Virginia. Tom's ashes will be interred with full military honors in the National

Memorial Cemetery of Arizona on April 25th, 9 AM. Tom grew up on a farm in Virginia. He proudly served in the U.S. Marine Corps for 23 years. After retirement, he was part-owner of Navajo Center where he became a silversmith. From there, he worked in sales for Sprague's Sport Shop. Next, he became a craftsman with wood. He made beautiful furniture and elaborate bowls. During that time he was also a substitute teacher as well as a board member of the Marine Corps Tankers Association. Tom traveled extensively and made friends wherever he went.

Doug adds: Back in 2005 or 2006, when the Mint came out with the USMC collectors coin, I got three of them; two for me and one for my son (1990-1994). Later Tom and I were emailing back and forth. I asked him if he'd seen the new USMC coin and he told me, "Yes" ... and that he really wanted one but the stock was gone. I sent him one of my coins and I told him it was a gift for keeping me alive back in the day. A couple of months later, he sent me a beautiful wooden bowl that he had made. On the bottom, he wrote that kind of wood that it was made of and he signed it "Charlie 6." He included a hand-written note with the bowl that read, "No good turn goes undone without being punished. Here's your bowl. Keep your powder dry." I was surprised but very happy to get it. In 2012, he sent me an "Arizona Centennial Commemorative Coin" which was #98 of 100 made. Apparently he forgot I owed him, not the other way around. Below is an image of the button he had made and that he brought with him to the 2007 Las Vegas reunion. He gave one to each of "his boys." The motto was on a sign that hung over our company door in Vietnam. If memory is correct, his unit had the same sign in Korea



Pat Rogers

Ken Zebal writes: It's my sad duty to inform you that I received a text from Aaron Wiersum that Pat Rogers passed away yesterday (5/4/16). Pat honorably served his first enlistment as an 1811 including combat in RVN (65-66) with Bravo 1st Tanks (Operation Starlite & Go Noi Island) and

then he went on to have a successful career in the NYPD. He had another successful career in the USMC Reserves as an O3O2 and retired as a CWO-3. After retiring from NYPD and USMCR he worked as an operative for the CIA and then started EAG Tactical, his own company. Pat was driven to be successful and never took no for an answer – he always persevered. More to follow.

Charlie Tubbs adds: Pat and I went back to Aug 22, 1963 when we arrived at Parris Island, South Carolina. Pat from Brooklyn and me from New Jersey. We served in 2nd Tanks for some time and made at least one Caribbean float together. Several years ago with the aid of the internet, Pat and I caught up with one another. We spent a number of hours on the phone always agreeing to try and coordinate our schedules to meet at some point. It never happened.

Robert W. Maddox

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

Anthony L Tilli

Howard Blum writes: Just found out Anthony L. (Tony) Thill (1/25/48–4/4/16) of Alsip, IL passed away. He was not a member of the VTA (I tried for many years to get him to join but....). I met him when assigned to A Co, 5th Tanks in Okinawa (for flame training) in 2/67. We subsequently served together in A Co. 3rd Tanks until 3/68. We continued our friendship for the next 50 years. I'm sure some of the guys remember him.

I Lost a Friend Today

By Rosemarie Musser
The wife of USMC grunt from A/1/7

*I lost a friend today
God decided to take him away.
A hero of sorts was this man,
Who fought with me in a foreign land.
My comrades at arms leave one by one,
For them God silenced the guns.
Some of us had our private hell,
Silently we don't complain or tell.
I hope that you understand me now.
My son I hope and pray
You never have to endure
The pain and horrors of any war.
So fly the flag and hold it dear.
It means so much so let's be clear
Don't let your sacrifices be in vain.
REMEMBER...*

Looking for

TERRY BOCCHINO

Marvin Forney is looking for VTA member Terry Bocchino. Unfortunately, the contact information that we have on the VTA Membership Roster for Terry is out of date, and for that reason we cannot get hold of him. If anyone knows of Terry's whereabouts, we'd appreciate a heads up. And so would Marvin.

Marvin Forney
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A DAY AT THE BEACH, BLT 1/3

Around 2 or 3 AM in June of 1967, BLT 1/3 was waiting to head back to the beach and load up on Navy landing craft. We were coming off "Operation Bear Bite." If my count is right, we made a total of seven beach landings with one being "Operation Buffalo." I got this information from the book, USMC Fight for the DMZ by Keith William Nolan. In the book, the Cpl. Miller that is cited is not me ... but on page 358, footnote 1, the author cites "C" Co., 3d Tank Battalion and a 1st Lt Wayne M. Hayes (KIA) who was our Ontos platoon leader. Nolan also states that the LT wanted to be a tanker. On page 360 it tells what happened next.

Cpl. Spud (Miller) BLT 1/3 1967, Vietnam "66-67"
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Phone 208-733-2493



Above is a photo that was taken at Camp J.J. Carroll, Dec. 1966. The photo is of me (then PFC Spud) mucking out my drivers hatch. The photo was taken by 1stLt. Wayne Hayes.

THE SOUND OF MUSIC

Mr. Wear: I got your email address off an old issue of Sponson Box newsletter September 2012 that appears at www.usmcvta.org. My name is Duke Hall. I served with the Marines in Vietnam 1968-69. My MOS was 2533 "RTO." I went to 1st Marine Division's Interrogation Translation Vietnamese language course in Kaneohe Bay MB in 1967

and was stationed with 2nd Bn., 13th Marines at Camp Pendleton. Later, our BLT was sent to RVN Feb., 1968. During my tour in Vietnam, I was assigned to several units and many different places.

One time I was placed on a bridge with a Kit Carson Team between Hill 55 and the An Hoa Combat Base. I can't remember how long I was there but it was probably a month. With us on the bridge were two tanks. I got to know the tankers pretty well but I can't remember any names.

Funny story...I was at a 1st MARDIV Assn reunion in Charleston, SC, a couple years ago and got saddled up over beers with a couple Motor -T guys. One was a 2-1/2 ton driver in convoy bringing grunts up to Hue from Phu Bai at start of the battle there. The convoy got hit hard in NVA ambush and one truck overturned on to a couple Marines and it was blocking the road. In the chaos, no one quite knew what to do. So, this truck driver took it upon himself to run toward a Marine tank that was a couple blocks away firing down a street. He got the crew's attention and a Marine popped his head out of the turret. The motor-T guy asked him if he could come down and help move the truck. The tanker said, "Sure. Just let me finish what we're doing here and we'll be right over." A few minutes later up comes the tank, moves the truck off the road, getting wounded out and both the tank and the grunt convoy returned toward Hue. To hear this truck driver tell the story was priceless. He spoke as if it were a Friday night high school football



play. He loved that tank crew. ONLY IN THE MARINES! To my best recollection this photo was taken in the May/June/July of 1968 time-frame. We were on a bridge between Hill 55 and An Hoa Combat Base. It was definitely not Liberty Bridge. As I recall, it was a lot smaller bridge but had at

(Continued on page 45)

SHORT STORIES

The Story of My Thumb

BY FRED GOGER

I did an extended tour with H&S Co., 3rd Tanks in '66-'67. I went up with the Battalion Liaison Group when we moved north to Gia Le ... (I think that's what the camp was called) ... in the Hue-Phu Bai area. I was on the detail to string barbed wire on the perimeter. Two guys standing on the tailgate of a "six-by" truck with a 90mm casing filled with dirt or something. The weighted 90mm contraption had handles on it so the guys could lift it and bang it down onto the tall engineer stake driving it into the ground, and then the perimeter wire would be strung. I was on the ground clearing the ground of debris and rocks with a couple of other guys with shovels. So I'm kneeling down trying to pull up a big rock with my bare hands when a shovel comes down hard on my left thumb and nearly cuts my thumb off. What followed was a lot of pain, blood, and even more cursing. I still have the scar. Just one of those moments that had no influence on anything, but every time I look at my thumb, I smile because it brings me back. Semper Fi!

Who are Veterans

BY VIRGIL MELTON, JR.

We are young men and women who left home with smiles and grins to fight in wars far and near. We are white, black, brown and other races. We are Protestant, Catholic, Jewish and other denominations. We are teachers, preachers, farmers and laborers. We are husbands and wives with families and friends. We are men who lost brothers and buddies on the battlefield. We are women who bandaged and cared for the wounded. We are warriors who memorized letters from home and carried them in our hearts. We are patriots who came home to cheering crowds and parades. We are patriots who came home to pro-

testers and protest signs. We are silent and do not boast of our service, it was our honor. We know that freedom can never be taken for granted. When we hear that Star Spangled Banner, and see our flag proudly waving, our heart beat quickens and tears swell, remembering how our comrades fell. We are men and women who love God, country and family who stepped forward sacrificing blood, sweat and tears when this great nation called.

Estranged from the military

BY DAVID ZUCCHINO AND DAVID CLOUD

Los Angeles Times

"Thank you for your service." Americans often use this platitude when they encounter soldiers in airports and other public places, but for men and women in the military, such gestures often "ring hollow," said David Zucchini and David Cloud. That's because the gulf separating our professional "warrior class" from the country it serves is wider than ever before. With another Memorial Day having come and gone, it's worth noting that less than 0.5 percent of the U.S. population is in the armed services today—the lowest rate since World War II. These soldiers are drawn largely from Southern and rural states, and 80 percent of them have a parent or sibling who also served. Soldiers feel their estrangement from the rest of society keenly. As one West Point commander recently put it, civilians view the military as a "guard dog"—a necessary evil. When civilians try to assuage their guilt by thanking soldiers for their service, said Afghanistan veteran Douglas Pearce of Tennessee, "What they're saying is, 'I'm glad you served so that I didn't have to and my kids won't have to.'"

Reprinted from The Week magazine, June 5, 2015 issue.

A Mustang Story

BY SCOTT HINES

SGT. USMC 1964-68

3RD ANTI-TANK BN. (ONTOS)

After returning from a tour of Japan and Viet Nam, several of the former members of the 1st and 3rd Anti-Tank (Ontos) Battalions were being gathered to form the 5th Anti-Tank Battalion at Camp Pendleton. I joined them after reporting in from my post-Vietnam 30-day leave. Then, a few months later we ended up at a new place called Camp Los Flores. This was September, 1966.

We NCOs found ourselves teaching various classes. The classes were attended by a lot of "new guys" most of whom would be in Nam in a month or so, and a few of the "old salts" who couldn't figure out a way to get out of the classes.

Occasionally, a member of Division HQ would come to check on us in order to make sure we were actually teaching the classes and following the official training manual. Most of the time it would be a clipboard toting shaved-tail ROTC Lieutenant who knew nothing about the topic being taught; and, in deference to our combat experience, these freshly-minted officers would usually introduce themselves, sit silently in the back of the classroom while taking notes, making check marks in the right places on the form and then leave.

One day, as my luck had it, during a class on mapping a young Lt. "mustang" let me know that he would be the monitor for my class. Of course, within 5 minutes of meeting him, he had explained how after boot camp he had gone to OCS and how much of a highly qualified Marine that experience had made him. I knew this would be a fun afternoon.

I conducted the class in my normal manner, but just before the (take >>

ten, expect five and get three minute) break, I told the class how important mapping was and how learning it was a part of their job as a Marine. I ended it with “Remember the Marine Corps motto Semper Fidelis, which means Be Prepared” and dismissed the class for the break.

As I expected, when I turned around, I was met with a gasping red-faced Lt. who could hardly speak. Through clenched teeth, he explained how the motto was not Be Prepared, but Always Faithful. I promised that I would correct the misquote before class ended. As I taught the next 55 minutes the Lt. was fit to be tied. Then I wrapped up the lecture and dismissed the class. Then I held up my hand to stop the tide and in a loud voice, I explained that I needed to correct an error I had made earlier. “I stand corrected,” I said. “The Marine Corps motto is not Be Prepared.” I further explained, “To be prepared was the Boy Scouts motto.” Adding that the Boy Scouts had adult leadership and that Semper Fidelis really meant “Time Flies.” Amid laughter the class left, and I left the Lt. scribbling on his clipboard.

And Scott replies with his own Sea Story: I was never a fan of know-it-all 2nd Lt’s that walked around like little tin gods. I liked the ones that listened to and learned from their experienced NCO’s. I liked the ones that would pitch in and fill sandbags along with their men. Those are the ones that earned my respect. I found that the higher the rank of the officer, usually the better he treated the troops; maybe because he didn’t have to prove himself—he already had.

I once asked this “old guy” who was with his wife, to hold my wallet while I participated in a sailing regatta at Anacostia Naval Station (near DC) when I was with the security unit to “Marine One”. He and his wife were there to watch the race. By the way, I was not a sailor at the time, I was just “rail meat” or ballast in the three heats, which we

won. The race was against British crews from a British ship that was in port. I didn’t want my wallet to get wet. This “old guy” in civilian clothes was really nice and very cordial. I thanked him after the race for hanging on to my wallet. A few minutes later, one of my buddies asked me if I knew who that “old guy” was. I told him I didn’t. He then told me his name, which I don’t remember now, but the “old guy” was an U.S. Navy Admiral! I didn’t know he was even in the military, and did not address him as “Sir”. He was a super nice person. I still have the small trophy that each of us was awarded for being the winning crew. These were small sailboats with three man crews. We raced a course on the Potomac River.

The M-1911 .45 ACP versus the 9mm pistol

BY RICK LEWIS

I was part of the testing team in 1985 when the Marine Corps was looking at the 9mm vs .45 cal. We had enlisted men and officers that included a few “Fly Boys.” Most were very unsafe gun handlers. I had to stay in their shit all of the time. Over and over again we fired at all types of targets and different materials. Hits were scored by depth of penetration, knock down power, and numbers of rounds it took to achieve a good kill. Part of this testing was using high-end equipment that manufacturers supplied to us. Plus, the vendors were allowed to take care of us, in as much as they had hot lunches delivered to the range, took us out for dinner, drinks, good smokes, sitting around till late talking up their weapons. As my penance, I would hang in there and listen to all the manufacturer BS, and then the next day I’d shoot next to the Marine who had the most to drink the night before, and I’d lobby for his vote on the .45.

Out of seven on the team, only two voted for the .45. Afterwards, the POS 9mm was going to be the Marine Corps sidearm and the Marine Corps

was taking back the .45.

I know not all Marines in VN got to fire their .45 at the enemy. I had that chance once. I was sent out with the grunts of 1/1. During the operation, the grunts wanted to know if the land had dried up enough for the tanks to support them in the area called the “Horse Shoe.” It was never a fun place to go.

So, off I went late on the first day and not too long after we started, we took a water break. And sure as shit-in’, we got hit. A gook machine gun fired like all get out as soon as I was outside of the tank and my feet hit the ground. It scared the shit out me. I just remember using the butt of my .45 to try to dig a hole in the rock hard dirt. A grunt came up, grabbed me and hauled me over to better cover. Just as we got there, an NVA soldier came from behind us. Having my .45 still in hand, I shot two rounds and he went over backwards and down like a rock. I remember thinking what a dumb shit I was for not bringing more than two mags for the pistol ... plus not bringing my M-14 off the tank.

It was a very long night, but we had no more enemy contact. Mid-morning we returned to battalion. When the Lt. asked me if the tanks could move around OK out there in the horse shoe, all I could say was it was so hard I could not dig a hole using the butt of my .45. He gave me a head shake and walked off. However, I remember thinking the .45 did what they had told us back stateside. That is about how effective the .45 was stopping the enemy’s advance. I understand that that the Marines in WW2 had learned when fighting the Japs who were charging them with fixed bayonets that the .45 took the Japs backwards and kept many a Marine from getting bayoneted. I have read accounts where Marines tell how the .45 saved them time and time again.

Now let me take the .45 to another level: Sport Hunting. I have hunted wild boar up by Edwards AFB and up

in the Redding area of California. At the Edwards AFB hunt, we had a few new guys moving over the sage brush with us. I had my Winchester lever action 30-30 rifle in hand and my .45 pistol in a cross chest Alaskan shoulder holster. The rules of the hunt are that when you flush a hog and you can’t get a shot, you holler out to the other hunters to let them know that the hog is moving. And let me tell you that, despite being “fat as a pig,” hogs move very fast. Well this one time the damn hog came my way and he closed so fast that I just dropped the rife and pulled out the .45. When I am hog hunting, I always have a round in the chamber. I fired the first round and it bounced off of his hard head. The next two put him down no more than 5 feet from me. Again the .45 stopping power was there. I carry it on all my hunts.

This is a long answer to why I would carry a .45 over a 9mm any day. And yes, I would carry more than two mags.

Lurch’s Enemy Tunnel/Air Vent Finding Technique:

BY WILLARD “BILL” LOCKRIDGE

Before taking over 2nd Platoon, Bravo Company in late May 1966, I was first assigned in April 1966, by BN to become Assistant Platoon Commander under Lt. Dix Gardner’s 1st Platoon. 1st Platoon was attached to Kilo Company 3/9, which was located in the Horse Shoe area that was just South by a few clicks from Marble Mountain. The Company was located in a sandy area on a ridge facing west over a few small villages and rice paddies. Just east of us was a leper colony and then the South China Sea.

Dix was a superb platoon commander whom everyone respected. During my short tour with him, mornings always started with C-rat coffee. We would take an empty C-rat can, bend the top into a sort of handle, and then cut a small piece of C-4 and light it off with a match. Within seconds you had hot coffee. Well, one day Dix was cutting a slice of

C-4 that accidently fell into his coffee C-rat can. He said something like “Oh Hell,” and cut a second piece to get his water boiling. His coffee ready he drank it all down including the C-4 slice. Within an hour we had to medevac him back to Charlie Med in Da Nang. So, now I became the Platoon Commander.

Capt. Bob Brooks, who was then CO of Kilo Company, decided we would move out and conduct a series of sweeps to our south. We had a couple of engineers who were assigned to the Company and joined our mini-missions. Time and again we would come upon enemy tunnel systems or more commonly air vent holes leading down into them. Our engineers would drop grenades or small charges of C-4 into the holes. Their efforts were brief and didn’t cover the entire network. Something better had to be devised.

Thinking upon this situation one night, I came up with an idea that might help. Every several days we had to run our tanks back to Company HQS located near MAG-16 to re-fuel and to take on ammunition. While there one day, I took a tank small fording stack, a metal top of a CP tent that had a ventilation cutout hole in it to accommodate a small smoke stack, and about 50’ of accordion-type hose that just fit inside the top of our fording stack. The other end of the hose fit nicely into the CP vent.

Now we were ready to try it out. The next mission was a go, and we all started off. Moving again into an enemy area, our engineers discovered a small air vent hole. So, we dismounted and placed our CP vent on top of it. Then, we put the hose into the short stack that was already secured to the backend of the tank and directly covered the engine exhaust outlet. Next, the hose was placed into the CP vent. Just before “ready go” we would raise the CP vent up a little and put a red smoke grenade inside after pulling the pin out. Next, the tank driver

stepped on the accelerator blowing engine exhaust down the hole along with red smoke. To the engineers amazement, red smoke started to pop out of a number of air holes that in some cases spread as far as over 50 yards long. Each hole then received a grenade or a C-4 charge. Bingo, it worked and all were flabbergasted.

After about two weeks of utilizing our new technique, Division informed our BN and Company COs to stop using the system due to the potential of “poisonous” gas (carbon monoxide) from the tank’s engine entering the tunnels. Oh well, forget about the explosives that were dropped in.

Marines

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

I like the fact, that if you are a self-declared enemy of America, running into a Marine outfit in combat is your worst nightmare, and that your health record is either about to get a lot thicker, or be closed out entirely.

I like the fact that Marines are steadfast and consistent in everything they do...regardless of whether you agree with them or not.

I like the fact that Marines view the term “politically correct” with nothing but pure disdain.

I like the fact that Marines stand tall and rigid in their actions, thoughts, and deeds when others bend with the direction of the wind and are as confused as a dog looking at a ceiling fan.

I like the fact that each and every Marine considers the honor and legacy of the Corps as his personal and sacred trust to protect and defend.

I like the fact that most civilians don’t have a clue what makes us tick. And that’s not a bad thing, because if they did, it would probably scare the hell out of them.

I like the fact that others say they want to be like us, but don’t have what it takes in the Pain-Gain-Pride department to make it happen.

I like the fact that the Marines >>

came into being in a bar named Tun Tavern. And that Marines still gather in pubs, bars and sloop chutes to share sea stories and hot scoop.

I like the fact that Marines do not consider it a coincidence that there are 24 hours in a day and 24 beers in a case...because Marines know there is a reason for everything that happens.

I like our motto, SEMPER FIDELIS, and the fact that we don't shed it when the going gets tough, the battlefield gets deadly, or when we hang up our uniform for the last time.

I like the fact that Marines take care of each other, in combat and time of peace.

I like the fact that Marines know the difference between 'Chicken Salad' and 'Chicken Shit' and aren't afraid to call either for what it is.

I like the fact that the people of America hold Marines in the highest esteem and that they know that they can count on us to locate, close with, and destroy those who would harm them.

I like the fact that people think we are cocky, yet we know that we have confidence in everything we do and the fact that they don't know the taste of that makes them look at us as if we are arrogant.

I like that fact that we know the taste of freedom and would give our very lives for it. And that it is a taste the protected will never know.

I like the fact that Ronald Reagan said.. 'Some people spend an entire lifetime wondering if they made a difference... Marines don't have that problem!'

I like the fact that we are brothers to the end, and that no matter what happens in life, we know that we have one another's 'six' covered.

I like the fact that an elected member of congress felt compelled to publicly accuse the Marine Corps of being "radical and extreme," and I also like the fact that our Commandant informed that member of congress that she was absolutely correct and that he passed on his

thanks for the compliment.

I like the fact that Marine leaders—of every rank—know that issuing every man and woman a black beret—or polka-dotted boxer shorts for that matter—does absolutely nothing to promote morale, fighting spirit or combat effectiveness.

I like the fact that Marines are Marines first, regardless of age, race, creed, color, sex, and national origin, or how long they served, their former rank, or what goals they achieve in life.

I like Marines...and I love the fact that I am humbled to walk among the ranks of other Marines.

I like the fact that you always know where you stand with a Marine. With Marines, there is no middle ground or gray area. There are only missions, objectives and facts.

Saepe Expertus, Semper Fidelis et Frates Aeterni
(Often Tested, Always Faithful, Brothers Forever) ■

HUE CITY TANKS in



3rd Tanks in Action

BY LT. COL. DAVID B. BROWN, USMC (RET.)

HUE CITY – TET 1968: Out of nowhere, two M-48 tanks churned around the corner. Squad leader, Sergeant Horner, darted over to the lead tank determined to retrieve his casualties. He was focused on saving his men. Corporal Dave Collins, his radio operator, hightailed it with him. Horner opened the radio box at the rear of the tank—it didn't work. Collins climbed aboard the tank and asked for their frequency. He turned off the company frequency and radioed the tank commander.

After Horner sent men to recover Smiley and Murdock, both tanks began cranking forward together forming a shield across the street with Horner and Collins in trace. Horner put the right tank in the lead.

"Move three meters. Stop! Left tank, move three meters. Stop!"

The tanks provided a new threat. B-40 anti-tank rockets now exploded off the tanks' armor, wildly spraying shrapnel on the meager protection being used by the men of the trapped squads. In the first B-40 salvo, Horner was hit on the left hand, arm and side. He bled profusely but not enough to stop him on his rescue mission. Horner bellowed to Smitty's 3rd squad on the left to fall in behind the tanks.

Collins, who had reluctantly left Brown's squad to become Horner's radio operator after Horner lost his operator, caught the spirit of being a "go-get 'em" grunt again and yelled over to Brown's trapped men, "We're coming!" Deafening, the sounds of the battle raging on the street, rounds ricocheting off of the pavement, rockets exploding off of the tanks, and men shouting to and fro, drowning out everything else for the men of Fox.

Holding the radio hand set while talking to the tanker, Horner was staring into the eyes of Collins when a sniper's round passed through Collin's neck. Killed instantly, he fell to the street outside of the tank's protective shield.

Lance Corporal Jimmie Palmo, witnessed his buddy's death, dashed over to the tank. Looking at the lieutenant, Palmo said, "I'll take the radio." Together they pulled Collins' fallen body, and stripped him of his PRC-25 radio.

Twenty meters passed. The armor shield had collected eight Marines from 2nd Platoon. Two were walking wounded; PFC Hanschel's body was placed on the tank's hull.

After Brown's cigarette was lit, Campbell stuffed the cigarettes and lighter in his pants. In the distance, they heard the approach of the tanks. They could hear the shouts of their fellow Marines, "Fall in behind the tanks!"



In the photo: L/Cpl. C.C. Campbell dashing out from the wall to (H-52) an M-48 tank. >>

Photo from Vietnam

The photo is of the flame-thrower tank called "The Cremator" with Howard Blum or Isaacs (without the shirt); taken around Sept/Oct 1967.

Howard writes: I recall being in the Alpha Company area Aug/Sept and being told to get "The Cremator" ready for an operation. As you can see in the photo, the .50 cal. is missing. To the best of my recollection, our .50 was needed, being used on another tank that was out on an operation at that time. I definitely remember thinking it was a great idea to take an extra .30 cal. and mount it (with tripod on sandbags) to the top of the TC cupola in lieu of my .50 ... so I did. I did not have time to test this concept and, unfortunately, the "great idea" was not so great. To make a long story short, we joined up with several gun tanks and an infantry unit in the field. A day or so later, we found ourselves in a fire fight with the NVA. Using that .30 cal. I was unable to see impact of my fire unless I stood all the way up in the TC hatch. I was fortunate to realize that it was not a very good situation to be in. As you can see from the photo, it would be great as an anti-aircraft gun. Subsequently, we got back, reinstalled the .50 cal., and returned the .30.



Brown's ears perked up as the tanks creaked closer. "Why?" he asked, prepping himself to jump up and run.

"Seems they don't want us doing anything dangerous," Campbell laughed, flicking the remains of his smoke aside.

With Campbell in the lead, the men hurled themselves off of the ground and over the protective wall. Bullets impacted around them, but Brown and Campbell reached the safety of the armored shield. Gasparini joined them, and all living Marines were collected. The dead were placed on the tank hulls; weapons and equipment were retrieved.

Horner talked briefly on the radio to Downs explaining the situation. Downs told the exhausted lieutenant that they had to recover Delariva Vara's body while there. The tanks ground forward another twenty meters. As they moved three meters at a time down the street, the enemy B-40 and RPG attack intensified. One hit the lead tank just above the hull platform and the explosion knocked Henschel's body off the tank. Henschel lay in the street, now missing a leg and screaming.

"Hey Lieutenant, look at Henschel! He's alive!" one of the Marines shouted.

"Someone keep him near the tank," Horner responded in a weakened voice. His loss of blood was taking a toll.

Once in view, Delariva Vara began moving his arms letting the tankers know he was alive. While the tanks fired madly to provide cover with their .50 caliber machine guns, Smitty and one of his men rushed out to the immobile Delariva Vara and dragged him back behind the tank's armor shield. The tanks began slowly backing up to the corner of Highway 1 and out of the enemy's line of sight.

On the way, Horner finally succumbed to his injury and fell unconscious; his men carried him back the rest of the way. The blackness of night had completely enveloped the streets by the time the 2nd Platoon returned to the MACV compound. A veil of hopelessness shrouded Brown. From a robust squad of fifteen he was down to six effective Marines. He, PFC Keif and PFC Odom were all that were left and not wounded. Gasparini and Campbell were wounded although they were expected to return to the squad. Cpl. Brown's best friend, his in-country buddy, Figueroa-Perez had been mortally wounded and wasn't expected to live until morning.

The next day, led by 3rd Platoon, Fox Company moved across the street. The plan was to skirt around to the left of Hue University; then, with the same two tanks that rescued the 2nd Platoon, follow Truong Dinh Street to the next intersection where they would come abreast of Hotel Company.

Led by Sgt. John Mahoney and LCpl. Ernie Weiss, the leading 3rd Platoon passed the hotel and began slipping in and around the two-and-a-half-foot high walls separating private properties. They slithered through small gardens and under suspicious eyes of a few chickens still roosting there. They were three-fourths of the way down Truong Dinh Street

when they could hear that the tanks had turned the corner and had begun coming up the street behind them. The other two platoons began crossing Highway 1 behind the tanks.

A B-40 rocket hit one tank. Immediately, both tanks reversed their course, backing up and returning to the corner. In the middle of Truong Dinh Street, the lead tank rolled over barbed wire entangling its treads. Its motor strained at the driver's hopeless attempt to free it from its entrapment. The rear tank crossed back over Highway 1 and into the safety of the MACV compound, leaving the other unsupported.

When the company reached the MACV side of the street, all firing stopped. Downs assumed responsibility for the stranded tank. Staff Sgt. McCoy, the 3rd Platoon Sergeant, was positioned next to Downs. "Sgt McCoy, I want you to outpost the tank; so if they attempt to attack it, we can counter their attempt with a squad from here," Downs ordered, pointing across the street.

"Aye, aye, Sir. I have the perfect two guys."

After placing Contreras and Schuett at their listening post by the tank, McCoy returned to the building they were staying in that night and was greeted by Sgt. Chuck Ekker, one of his 3rd Platoon squad leaders. Ekker showed him the side of a C-ration box.

"Staff Sergeant McCoy, isn't this the place that the lieutenant said we were at?" Ekker said, pointing at the letters "HUE." "That's pronounced 'who-ee' isn't it?"

"Yeah. That's what Lt. Haustarh said it was. Why?"

"Well, while you were out there with the tank, I was listening to the Armed Forces Radio Station, and they said that there was a Marine unit heavily engaged in a battle in 'Way City,'"

McCoy whistled, "Chuck, if they are fighting as hard as we are, then they're in a world of shit!" Now get the men rested. I just had my canteens shot through by those bastards out there and I am going to MACV to scrounge one of the new "doggie" canteens that apparently the Corps doesn't seem to want us to have."

While others regrouped, Private Jerry Schuett and L/Cpl Pablo Contreras were on guard through the cold, damp night. Finally, somewhere between 0130 and 0200, Schuett asked, "Pablo, what's a couple of grunts doing here guarding this tank all by ourselves?"

"Schuett, don't even think that way. We're staying here. And if you ever come close to falling asleep, I'm going to stomp your butt!"

Luckily, the VC and NVA forces ignored the tank and its two sentries that night.

The above story is reprinted from the book *Battlelines—The story of Foxtrot, 2/5 in Vietnam*

Editor's Note: The #2-2009 issue of the Sponson Box featured a story of the recollections of three tankers who were in Hue City during the 1968 Tet "celebration." Here is one of the tanker's (Carl Fleischman) version of the above story:

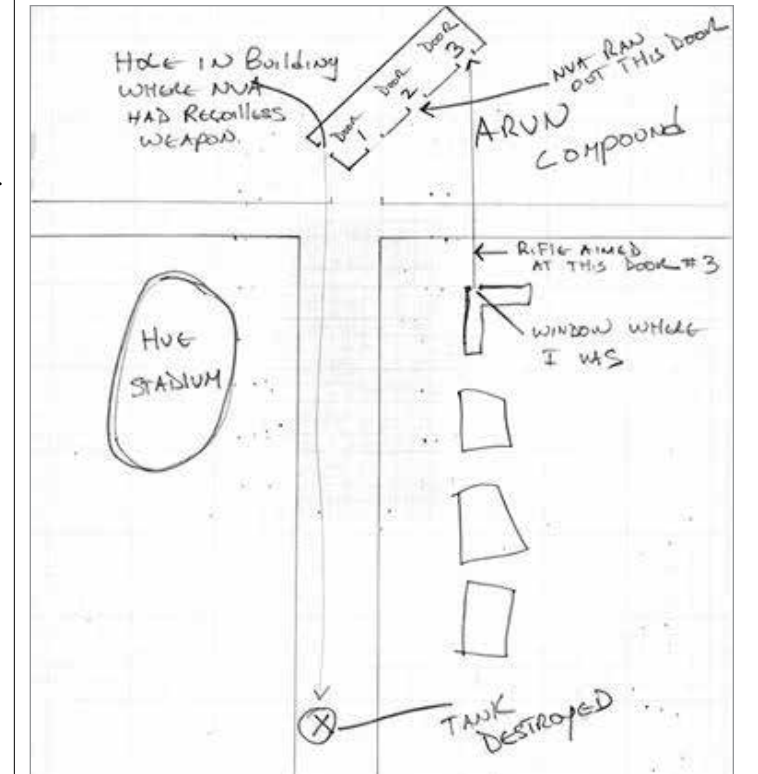
Carl Fleischmann writes: My good friend, Corporal Robert Hall was tank commander of the gun tank Hotel 52. I was that tank's driver. On the first few days of fighting, we were a few blocks outside of the MACV compound taking small arms fire when an RPG penetrated the TC's cupola and hit Hall square in the face. The gooks abruptly ended the attack and ran off so there would be no additional small arms or RPG fire affecting our rescue of our TC. The gunner of our tank (I cannot recall his name) yelled that Hall was hit and the turret filled with smoke. I threw the tank into reverse and backed down the street for a block. I then stopped the tank and got out to help pull Hall out of the turret. I grabbed him from the gunner and lowered him down to a few grunts that were on the ground. When I jumped down, I grabbed him again. He would not let go of me. His face was all bloodied and he appeared as if he was trying to say something to me. We put him on a "mechanical mule" for medevac when a grunt corpsman came to help. Robert was holding on to my arm with a very tight grip and he continued to attempt to say something to me but he was completely covered in his own blood and had virtually no face left. There was a loud gasp and he died. The grunt corpsman told me that I could let go of him since it appeared that Robert was dead. I told the corpsman that he couldn't be dead because he was still holding on to me. I guess that is what they call a "death grip." We had to actually pry Robert's fingers off of my bruised arm. I will never forget that awful moment for the rest of my life. My leader and friend was dead.

Later that day, we were sitting outside of our tank waiting for orders to move out to help the grunts again when a gook mortar round came slamming in the middle of us. I got a small wound on my leg but the other two crewmen of my tank got hit hard. I was the only tanker not injured. For some stupid reason, no one came to tell me what to do so I ended up spending the night in the tank by myself. If I had known then what I knew now, forget about it! But then, I was a 19-year-old kid and I was charged with protecting my tank. Thank God the night was uneventful! The next morning a Marine or Navy Chaplain came by and helped me move the tank back to the MACV compound.

From the 3rd Tank Battalion Command Chronology:

Operation Hue City. Having entered Hue during the initial enemy attack on 31 January tanks H-51 and H-52 and flame tanks F-32 and F-33 continued to operate in support of the 1st Battalion, 1st Marine Regiment, until 17 February. During that time the tanks participated in numerous patrols from the MACV Compound and engaged in clearing operations south of the Perfume River. The tanks fired 1147 rounds of 90MM, 15,000 rounds of caliber .50, 155,000 rounds of caliber 30 ammunition and 60 seconds of napalm. They accounted for 145 enemy dead confirmed and suffered 1 killed, 10 wounded and evacuated and 4 wounded and not evacuated. Tank H-51 was destroyed by four recoilless rifle hits, two of which penetrated the tank. The four tanks involved in the operation sustained a total of 28 hits by anti-tank weapons during the operation. On 17 February the remaining three tanks boarded an LCU to travel to Dong Ha. The LCU was hit by mortar fire enroute up the river and was forced to return to the Hue Ramp and off-loaded the tanks. That evening the tanks reembarked on another LCU and departed Hue and arrived in Dong Ha the afternoon of 18 February.

This is a hand-drawn diagram of when H-51 was knocked out by NVA recoilless rifle fire.



On 11 February, A/1/1, commanded by Lt. Ray Smith, was making a sweep near the Hue stadium. The two supporting tanks – one gun and one flame—were flanked by protecting infantry. The gun tank was hit by 3 or 4 B-40s and/or RPGs. The tank was stopped and belching smoke. The dying tank driver was pulled out of his hatch and he, along with a number of wounded infantry, were piled on the flame tank, which backed quickly away. In doing so, the tank backed over a wounded corpsman. Luckily enough—considering what it might have been – the hapless corpsman sustained only a broken arm.

Eddie Neisse: The tank destroyed near the stadium was hit with a 57mm or 75mm recoilless rifle round fired from a building in an abandoned ARVN compound at the end of the street. MY platoon found the shell casing in the building later in the day. I was ahead of the tank when it was hit, but a few Marines were hit with shrapnel after it flew off the tank to include L/Cpl (Chunky) Pettit. The driver was wounded pretty badly and we were told he died later that day after being medevaced. Attached map is of South side of Hue. The red arrow is where the tank was hit. Yes, I remember it like it was yesterday. ■

Tanks and Grunts in Hue City

AT 0700, 1 FEB., ELEMENTS OF ALFA CO, 1/1 AND FOXTROT & GOLF. 2/5 WITH TWO M-48 MARINE TANKS ... (EDIT: ONE WAS ACTUALLY AN M-67 FLAME-THROWER TANK) ... SET OFF DOWN LE LOI STREET. THE WORD HAD BEEN PASSED TO RELIEVE A SMALL POCKET OF SOUTH VIETNAMESE HOLDING OUT IN THE THUA THIEN PROVINCIAL PRISON AND TO LIBERATE THE NEARBY PROVINCE ADMINISTRATION COMPLEX.



If you look in the background of this photo there are two tanks side-by-side in the same battle that is depicted below. What follows is a series of photos that were taken by a very brave Japanese photographer. The series also includes the photo that is on the cover of this issue of our magazine.

Both of these photos show tanks from H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn (F-32 and H-52) protecting the grunts.



The aftermath along a wall



Tending to the dead and wounded.

Here is an eye witness account of another firefight the next day: At 0700 on 2 FEB 68: Lt Col Gravel launched a two-company assault supported by tanks (again) towards the jail and provincial building. As a M79 grenadier from Company G, 5th Marines recalled: "We didn't get a block away [from the MACV compound] before we started getting sniper fire. We got a tank and we went down one block, turned right and received 57mm recoilless which put out our tank." The attack was "stopped cold" and the battalion returned to the MACV compound.

Rich Horner (2nd Lt. 2nd Plt Fox Company 2/5 1968): I just finished reading the February 2008 Leatherneck article "Marine Tanks in the Battle for Hue City: Tet 1968". On page 12 at the bottom of the center column the author mentions the attack on 3 February, 3d Plt, F/2/5, with two tanks attacked toward the west down the street. The attack was carried out by the 2nd Platoon. I was the Platoon Commander of 2nd Platoon, Fox Company 2/5 on that day. The two tanks that came down to assist us after we were pinned down made it possible for us to retrieve our wounded and get the rest of the men out alive. I was wounded during the engagement and was medevaced the next morning. I was on my radio up against the rear of the two tanks during the battle and coordinated their positions to provide us with cover and fire support. I never knew who those guys in those two tanks were and never had the opportunity to thank them for their support on that terrible street battle. I know I got off that street alive only due to the fact that those two tanks came down to help us. A picture of this engagement was in Life Magazine the fol-

lowing week and I have several other photos that were taken by the same photographer that day. From the article it appears that Lt J. E. Georgaklis was one of the men in those tanks on that day. Do you have any information on him or any of the other men who were in those two tanks on that day? I would like the opportunity to personally thank those men who I owe so much to. Thanks for any help you may be able to provide me.

Chris Brown: Late last night I got a call from my old platoon commander who told me that he had made contact with the men who drove the tanks in Hue City. Like him, many times I have wanted to personally thank you guys for getting us out of there. It was a long time ago but I remember it like it was yesterday. It was my squad that went down the right side of Tran Cao Van Street and we proceeded to get pinned down for a couple of hours before they brought you guys up to get us out. I might not ever had gotten out of there had it not been for your tanks. Charlie Campbell and I were pinned down over a wall and Louie Gasbarinni was wounded by a tree. We were the furthest down the street and pinned down by the snipers until you guys showed up. Charlie and Louie have since passed away but thankfully I am still here to say thanks to you men. As Rich Horner told you we have a reunion every two years and this year is going to be in Washington DC. The planned events include the Friday evening Sunset Parade at the Marine Corps Barracks, a Saturday trip as a group to the new Marine Corps Museum at Quantico and a Saturday evening banquet. There will be trips to The Wall and a lot of hanging out in the hospitality room sharing pictures, memories and a few beers. If you can

make it we would love to have you join us. The Fox 2/5 Association has about 500 members from the 1966-71 era. Not all are active but we usually get a strong showing at the reunions. If you are interested I would be happy to send you the details. I am sending some black and white pictures that you may or may not have seen before. I help a writer do some research on a book called "Fire in the Streets" and was able to put my hands on these pictures. They were taken by a UPI photographer named Sawada. Let me know if you do not get them. As you can see in the pictures we were putting some of our dead brothers up on the tanks as we pulled back. One of the guys actually was alive and remains so today and will be at the reunion. I am sure he would like to thank you as well. I hope some of you can make it. Thank you again.

Editor's Note: *On April 7, 2016, I was on the telephone with Charles West from Laverne, AL. During this battle, "Charlie" was the tank commander of F-32, the flame tank (on the left in most of these photos). Charlie relayed the story that to this very day, he vividly remembers that during the above horrific firefights, how utterly senseless the next incident was: The battle was raging and the less-than-mental-giant "brass hats" in Saigon had just passed the word that no weapon larger than a 60 mm mortar could be fired inside of the city limits. Their well-intended but utterly flawed idea was that they did not want to destroy the old imperial city while saving it with large caliber weapons. Corporal Robert Hall was the TC of H-52 (the gun tank on the right of the photos). Charlie remembers that Hall repeatedly came over the radios requesting permis-*

(Continued on page 36)



1ST TANKS in Hue City

FROM THE ALPHA COMPANY, 1/5 WEBSITE

On Feb 10th, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines began moving into the old city of Hue. Early that morning, helicopters had lifted three platoons of Bravo Company 1/5 from the Phu Bai airfield to the Mang Ca compound located in the Citadel. On entering Hue, they were greeted by enemy gunfire, wounding the pilot carrying the 3d Platoon, forcing them to abort the mission and return to Phu Bai with the troops still on board. Later that day, they left Phu Bai again, this time as security for the 1/5 battalion CP on convoys in route to Hue on Hwy 1. Meanwhile, Alpha Company 1/5 was boarded on Navy LCU's, and were heading up

the Perfume River towards the north-east compound of the Citadel. After their relatively uneventful cross-river passage, the Marine company and some tanks joined the two platoons of Bravo Company at the 1st ARVN Division headquarters. By nightfall, all of Alpha Company, two thirds of Bravo Company, and the five tanks attached from the 1st Tank Battalion were now in the Citadel. Charlie 1/5, Delta 1/5, Bravo 1/5's 3rd Platoon with Major Thompson, were all expected to arrive there the next morning.

At 2200 on 11 Feb., 2nd Platoon, Alpha Co, 1st Tank Bn. landed at the LCU ramp in Hue City. The tank com-



An M-48A3 from A Co, 1st Tank Bn with "The Original Flower Children" painted on its search light cover, supports 1/5 Marines on 2/12/68. The name on gun barrel is "MAD HARLOT."



The Ontos proved to be a perfect "shoot and scoot" weapon in Hue City where it could pull out from behind a building, shoot a devastating salvo of its 106 mm recoilless rifles at the enemy, and then scoot back around the corner for cover.

pany commander, Captain Conwill Casey, accompanied the platoon and set up his company CP at the MACV compound in south Hue. On 12 Feb., Major Robert H. Thompson's 1st Bn, 5th Marines was helilifted into northern Hue, the Citadel. The helilift coincided with a platoon (5) of M-48A3 90mm gun tanks from Alpha Co, 1st Tanks moving through the Trong Dinh Gate and into the adjacent 1st ARVN Division compound.

The tank platoon was a cobbled-together blend of Capt. Casey's company headquarters' tanks along with tanks from each of the three tank platoons. Many of the tankers met each other for the first time on the LCU boat ride up from Da Nang. None of the tankers had experience in urban fighting. However, there was no doubt that they were Marines led by a superior tank officer, First Lieutenant Ron Morrison, and they would fight like no others. Once inside of the ARVN compound, 1stLt. Morrison and Major Thompson agreed that the supporting tanks, with infantry squad protection, would fight the battle together. Included in this Marine combat team was the 106mm recoilless rifle-armed "Ontos." Each of these elements- infantry, tanks and the Ontos brought to the party unique capabilities that, if worked well together, would ensure the best chance for success in winning the battle for the Citadel.

Cpl. Mario Tamez said that most every night, as the day's Citadel battle wound down, the tanks came clanking back to the ARVN compound. Later in his career, Thompson stated, "They reminded me of knights returning to the castle after fighting the dragon all day."

The infantry squad leaders who provided the "eyes

and ears" to their tanks as they worked through the confined streets, met with the tank and Ontos crewmen to critique the day. After the evening meal, the leathernecks would plan the next day's attack while the tanks topped off with fuel and ammo for continuing the attack.

Tamez estimated that the tanks took more than 63 RPG / B-40 hits during the nine days they battled the NVA / VC. Another tank crewman, L/Cpl. Dennis Martin, agreed. The tanks usually led the attack down the narrow streets. Streets in some sectors of north Hue were so narrow that the end connectors on the side of the tank treads made contact with the buildings on both sides. They were always surrounded. Within a few days fighting, the tank crews were reduced to three men. The tank commander was often a lance corporal, and two privates first class made up the crew.

Retired Colonel Bob Thompson, when asked, "What would you have done without the tanks?" replied, "Oh, we would have won; it would have taken us a lot longer and we would have sustained greater casualties—greater than the 60 percent we did."

At one point during the battle, Thompson's force had gone four days without resupply. Because so much of the success of the battle was dependent on tank and Ontos support, Thompson would not continue the attack until they were rearmed.

The toughest north Hue objective was the massive Dong Ba Tower, which looked down on and controlled access to the Dong Ba Gate. The tank 90mm HE rounds turned the tower into a very large pile of rubble that also served as an early grave for the NVA occupants. >>



An M-48 tank from Alpha Co., 1st Tank Bn. with Marines of 1/5. They are coming up to the Dong Ba Tower on the left, which the tank is aiming towards.



This next photo was also taken on February 13 inside the Citadel by Bruce Lemming – Weapons Platoon, Alpha Co. 1/5. The photo shows in the distance a Marine tank and the smoke at the Dong Ba Tower where Alpha Company 1/1 was ambushed.

On Feb 13th, 48 years ago in the early morning, the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines moved out of the Mang Ca Compound and headed south along the inner wall of the Citadel moving towards a secure line that the ARVN had secured earlier. Leading the battalion march was Capt. Jim Bowe's Alpha Company followed by 1st Lieutenant Scott Nelson's Charlie Company, then Bravo Co. and the Battalion Command Group. Alpha Co. was in front, leading the way. When they got to Tinh Tam Street, 1st. Platoon turned left towards the southwest wall with the tower right in front of them to their right. The two other platoons behind them proceeded forward towards the ARVN "green line." Once first

platoon reached the wall, they turned right and started maneuvering along it towards the Dong Ba Gate / Tower." When the point-man reached the base of the tower, all hell broke loose.

Caught off guard, Alpha Co. would suffer a terrible loss. It was here, Capt. Bowe, his executive officer, their gunnery sergeant, and just about everyone around them were injured in the chaos. One Alpha Co. Marine was killed and 33 were wounded in less than 15 minutes. By the end of that firefight, over half of Alpha Co. 1/1 was wiped out.

Captain Jennings with Bravo Co. was now ordered to move up and relieve the badly torn Alpha Co. while 1st Lieutenant Scott Nelson's Charlie Co. resumed the attack with Bravo on its left flank. Again the 1/5 advanced a little more but, once again, was stopped dead in their tracks. Later, with two tanks in the lead, Charlie Co. was able to advance about 300 meters before heavy enemy fire from the tower, once more stopping the Marines. Here, Colonel Hughes radioed Major Thompson to hold his positions. Unable to budge, Major Thompson had asked that his Delta Company, which was still in the southern city, be returned to his operational control in the Citadel.



UNCLASSIFIED

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OPERATIONS AND TRAINING

During the month of February the 1st Tank Battalion participated in one major operation, Operation Hue City. On 3 February, the 2nd Battalion 5th Marines, and the 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, started operations in the Hue City area in an attempt to recapture the city. On 13 February these units were reinforced by the 1st Battalion, 5th Marines, and the 3rd Platoon, Company A, 1st Tanks. Elements of the 2nd Battalion, 5th Marines, and 1st Battalion, 1st Marines, were initially supported by a platoon of tanks from the 3rd Tank Battalion; however, on 17 February, this unit was replaced by 2nd Platoon (Rein), Company A, 1st Tank Battalion.

The 3rd Platoon, Company A, operated from 13-24 February in the area of (YD7623). From 24-27 February, the 3rd Platoon, Company A, operated in the area of (YD7720). From 17-24 February, the 2nd Platoon, Company A, operated in the area of (YD7821) and from 24-29 February, in the area of (YD7824).

The fighting in Hue was consistent and heavy for the period 13-24 February. On 24 February, the Citadel was secured. During this period of contact, Company A tanks suffered 34 RPG hits and struck two mines.

Below is some written traffic from tankers that appears on the A Company, 1/5 website:

Danny "Wildman" Wilderman--(January 2, 2014): I was platoon mechanic but served as crewman on Lt. Morrison's tank during Operation Hue City. I was driver of the tank that Tex Hodges was KIA . I was one of the few that made from start to finish. I'd like to hear from anyone who was there.

Bill James--(January 8, 2014): Are you on FB? If you are I would be happy to add you as a member of the 1/5 Vietnam Veterans group on FB. There are a number of Hue City veterans on board, and quite a few will be attending the USS Hue City memorial service over the Feb 1, 2014 weekend in Jacksonville, FL.

Bill Cain – (March 25, 2015): I was the tank commander of A-31 in Hue. My tank was unique because I had a M-60 mounted on the top of the cupola. I didn't have a .50 in the cupola. Long story. I remember Capt. Casey, very well. The only other Marines I remember were my driver, Bates, and my best friend Dennis Cook (KIA) who was a driver on another tank.

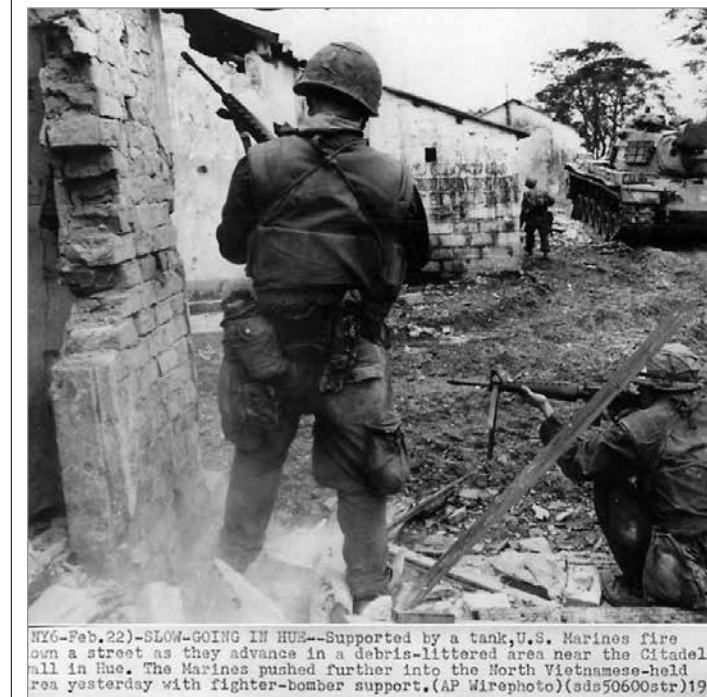
Jim Arend – (Feb 5, 2016): I found your entry on the 5th Marines website. I crewed with you at the bridge below Hill 55. On Jan 31, 1968 we shined the Xenon searchlight on the lost patrol and we caught a 122mm rocket on the turret. You saved our platoon commander's life when you got him to close the cupola before it hit. Do you remember Tony Trabuco ? I thought they surveyed A-31!

Dennis Martin – (February 1, 2016): Danny: I hope you remember me. I was part of A-22 crew. Do you remember when that huge pig chased us and we climbed on top of a car roof? The damn thing tried to get up there to get us. I guess it was hungry. Please get in contact with me. My phone number is 734-425-1804.

Steve Cramar--(March 14, 2016): I was a combat engineer. I got there right after the fighting in Hue City was

finished. I joined up with either Charlie or Delta Company. I can't remember which but we had an Ontos and two tanks with us. One of the tanks had "Ho Chi Minh Sucks" painted on the main gun barrel. We were sent on the other side of Hue and down this long stretch of sand with trees on both sides. We passed an amtrac that had hit a mine that was made from one of our bombs. I have been trying to find that crew forever. That same tank also made it to Go Noi Island and upon returning to Liberty Bridge they hit a mine in the elephant grass. Does any of this ring any bells?

Isaac Goodman: I arrived to 1st Tanks in April, 1968; post Hue City. There was an Alpha Company Sgt. / Tank Commander who was relieved of duties, and was pending Investigation / Judicial Action. During the battle, the Marine Sgt. / Tank Commander had made the decision to "blow a hole" in the Citadel wall. His crime was that he violated the "Rules of Engagement," to wit — "Historical Buildings / Markers," are not to be fired upon." Our Marines from 1/5 were caught in a "crossfire" trying to get over the wall. After the tank had fired in to the wall, the Marines were able to attack the machine gun positions and take them out. The best part of this story is that not one officer or enlisted Marine from 1/5 would cooperate with the investigation. No witnesses = No case. The charges were dropped and the Sgt. was transferred Stateside. I only spoke with him briefly; mostly about the other three crew members. I wish that I could be of more help to you in this endeavor.



NY6-Feb.22)-SLOW-GOING IN HUE--Supported by a tank,U.S. Marines fire own a street as they advance in a debris-littered area near the Citadel wall in Hue. The Marines pushed further into the North Vietnamese-held area yesterday with fighter-bomber support.(AP Wirephoto)(sds50600str)1968

Editor's Note: Many of the Marine tankers from Alpha Company, 1st Tanks who served in Hue City during Tet '68 have either never joined the USMC VTA or have dropped out. We would be honored if they joined our brotherhood. It would be very nice to have them offer up their own personal histories. ■

Sea Stories about Hue City

The Traffic Circle Ambush



Alpha Company 1/1 continued north along Route 1 and, as the convoy reached the rural fringes of Hue, it met up with a column of four tanks from the 3rd Tank Battalion. They had been enroute to get on U.S. Navy Landing Craft Utility (LCU) boats at the ramp outside of Hue and be transferred up to the 3rd Marine Division at Dong Ha. The tanks reported that they had come upon a South Vietnamese unit that had been ambushed (photo above) and completely wiped out.



Sgt. Major Eddie Neisse, USMC (Ret.) was a young L/Cpl. with Alpha Co, 1/1 in early 1968: “We rode the six-by trucks up Route 1. It was tense to say the least. As we got

closer to Hue City, then things got very quiet. We started approaching the south side of the city; there were a lot of small houses along side of the road but no Vietnamese civilians at all. THAT WAS NOT GOOD! A little way up, the first indication that this was not a normal patrol was an ARVN tank was off to the right side of the road and it was destroyed. Then a few more houses up Route 1 there was another ARVN tank with a hole in the side of the turret and a dead ARVN soldier on the ground. My antenna was up big time. To me, this was not normal, no civilians and two destroyed ARVN tanks.

Capt Gordon “Batch” Batcheller – Alpha Co., 1/1: “All I saw was a tracked vehicle of some sort in the street, with the head and upper torso of a South Vietnamese soldier lying on the deck of the vehicle completely charred to a crisp.”

L/Cpl. Carl “Flash” Fleischman–H&S Co., 3rd Tanks, the driver of H-52 tells his story in graphic detail: “The first indication that the situation was dangerous was when I saw an ARVN M-41 Walker Bulldog tank blown up with human pieces hanging out of it.” Then, when crossing the Phu Cam Canal on the southern border of Hue, “all hell broke loose.” Having no clear idea of what was going on and with no prior combat experience Flash witnessed Cpl. Hicks, the TC riding in the cupola of the lead tank (H-51), shot through the neck with the round exiting his back. Cpl. Hicks was evacuated to the rear and the column of tanks and infantry fought their way toward the MACV compound.

L/Cpl Mike Andregg – H&S Co., 3rd Tanks, the driver of F-33 says, “We drove past the traffic circle with the knocked out ARVN tanks, and when we got to the Esso gas station, the gooks opened up on us. I had never been in combat before and I did not know what was going on, so I stood up in the driver’s seat. When I stood up, I did not realize that I unplugged the comm. helmet from the tank’s intercom. My TC, Cpl. Joe Richelieu, jumped out of the TC cupola, smacked my helmet and got me to sit down inside of the driver’s compartment. Then he hooked up my comm. helmet and began talking to me. He told me to button up and drive toward the ambushing gooks. Just then, a U. S. Army 6X6 truck with a quad-.50 mounted on the back drove up and the four .50 caliber machineguns began firing into the NVA ambush site. All of a sudden it got real

quiet. That quiet only lasted for about ten minutes.”

Eddie Neisse: We drove over this small stream / river (which turns out to be the An Cau Bridge on the Phu Cam



Canal...I would find this out years later). We then drove past a few houses on both sides of the street and entered this little shopping area of the town. There was an ARVN Jeep that looked like it was run over by a tank. I would find out later that’s exactly what happened. An NVA in the Jeep tried to take out one of our tanks and the tank ran him over ... HE LOST!

At the Perfume River Bridge



February 1st–Leaving Company A behind to secure the MACV compound, Lt. Col. Gravel, the 2/5 battalion commander, took Company G, reinforced by the two tanks from the 3d Tank Battalion and a few South Vietnamese tanks from the ARVN 7th Armored Squadron, and attempted to cross the main bridge over the Perfume River. Lt. Col. Gravel left the armor behind on the southern bank to provide direct fire sup-

port. As he knew that the American M-48s were too heavy for the bridge and, after asking the South Vietnamese tankers in light M24 tanks to accompany his men, the ARVN “refused to go.” During the crossing, many of the grunts were immediately cut down. Once over the bridge, the grunts turned left and came under withering fire from the Citadel wall. They lost a third of Golf Company, losing 10 Marines and wounding 56. After the Marines were able to cross back over to the south side of the river, the NVA blew up the main bridge crossing the Perfume River to the Citadel.

Carl Fleischmann recalls: “After we fought our way to the MACV compound, it was about 3:00 PM, the grunt CO left his company there and took our tanks over to the big bridge that spanned the Perfume River. I guess that he wanted to see if he could secure the bridge before the gooks could blow it up. As we pulled up to the bridgehead, all hell broke loose from the other side. There was a B-40 rocket team under the bridge on the other side getting ready to shoot at us. Cpl. Hall, my TC, had the gunner shoot under the bridge and take out the B-40. He then had me pull our tank right up to the bridge. Just as I was inching on to the bridge, the whole thing blew up in our faces. The span on the far side flew up and settled into the river. Talk about having the shit scared out of you! I actually crapped in my drawers. And boy did it stink! Luckily we went back to the MACV compound and I was able to find a clean pair of shorts to put on.”

An “Uncle Walter” (Cronkite) story:

Lawrence LePage: To John Wear, I believe we met briefly at the MACV compound in Hue on the 2nd or 3rd day of the battle. I was trying to help you load ammo into your tank. Later (or maybe earlier) you were passing out recovered M2 carbines to individuals around the tank. I got one of those carbines and carried it for the rest of my tour. Back then, I was a 1st Lt. and later (in 1976) I retired as a captain. Thanks.

John Wear: Thanks for the heads up and the recollection of a pretty crazy time of our lives. Who were you with? I have joined up on line with several Marine veterans of the Hue battle. There is a Facebook page that we visit and chat on occasion. I also paid a visit the USS Hue City in Mayport, Florida, for one of the many annual celebrations and remembrance ceremonies. Did you snoop & poop in and around the city or did you spend most of the time in MACV? Was Big Ernie Cheatham your CO? I understand that he passed away recently. I will never forget his untoward comment over the radio was. “Get those big, noisy fuckin’ RPG magnets away from my men!” May he rest in peace.

Lawrence LePage: I moved around the city. My job was to escort civilian press and TV into the city, embed with a grunt unit for a day or two, and then get them back without losing any. I brought Walter Cronkite in along with his crew, among others. Operating rules were that TV >>

had to be escorted by an officer, press could be escorted by enlisted. As it turned out, I did most of the escorting at first. Then the Da Nang press center set up an office in Hue and all I had to do was get the media people into Hue and they'd get them back to Da Nang or Saigon. The trip from Phu Bai to Hue and back was dicey, but never had much more than rifle fire from the west. Mortars once. A burst from one of our choppers one time when I was hiking with two of my Marines. It wasn't very close, so I figure they saw some black pajamas near us and probably saved our butts.

I actually worked for General LeHue as I was supposed to be the PIO for Task Force X-ray. I remember Big Ernie Cheatham. The scene clearest in my mind is seeing him standing in the street next to a RR and directing its fire. This was one of the north-south streets west of the university. He was exposed to fire from three directions. I'm surprised he survived Viet Nam.



John Wear: How about that? Are you in either of these attached photo images from Hue City? As you are well aware, old "Uncle Walter" is not one of the more well-respected men of the press in and among the Vietnam veterans. You know? Big Ernie was so darn cantankerous and one-way, that he simply had to survive Vietnam!!!

Lawrence LePage: That's me, driving the jeep. Or, rather steering the jeep. We had to push it because engine noise was annoying the sound man and the camera man wanted the stability of the jeep for his shot as they walked along. Thanks for the photo. I don't remember who took the shot but I do remember that anywhere we went, cameras popped out to take a picture.

Here's another story about "Uncle Walter" (Cronkite):

The only presence by 'National Media' that I recall was when Walter Cronkite came into the city (around Valentine's Day?) and walked w/LtCol Gravel along Route 1 from An Cu Market & traffic circle at entrance to city to 1/1 CP at 5-corners intersection before you got to MACV. You'll find a still of that picture in almost every large format



or 'coffee table' photo journalist's book on 'Nam (like the one posted above). They're walking in trace of M151 that replaced LtCol Gravel's that had been blown away by 1/1's own forces (to prevent radios & 'shackles' from getting into enemy hands, then RPG-ed later by NVA. It had been left inadvertently on Route 1 causeway between radio tower (half-way along on SW side) and rice fields other side (NE) when Alpha 1/1 and 1/1 Command Group on Day 1 were fighting up to MACV vicinity. Golf 2/5 had probably just been arriving at city limits.

Cronkite, after interviewing Gravel, then proceeded afterward to Hoang Giang Hotel (on Perfume River at juncture w/Van Duong River at causeway to N to Col Co Beach) adjacent my Bravo 1/1 CP and climbed to top floor to film across Perfume River towards Citadel and the 'Big Market' along NE moat to E. corner of Citadel. That was filmed interview of himself commentating about battle that was seen back in The World. His film crew then went down to the park to right (NE) of 'Silver Bridge', between that and LCU Ramp, and paraded around openly to film along banks and across Perfume River from park. My people were supposed to provide them 'security' and everyone usually got dinged in that park by snipers from NW side of river. They were lucky dusk was falling and snipers didn't want to give away their positions. Later, following 1/5's mop-up in Citadel, 1/5 & 2/5 went north across the causeway and then attacked 3d NVA regiment in Street w/o Joy. Bravo 1/1 passed thru Delta 1/5 lines around 3am to attack to N to Col Co Beach, which was being held by 3d Platoon (-) Bravo 1/1 that had been dropped onto the beach from guarding III MAF to sweep two clicks UNSUPPORTED NE to mouth of Perfume River before garrisoning the Col Co Beach complex. We reached them about half-way up road to beach and, after they rejoined Bravo, a full-strength Doggie 82d Airborne Co., mechanized on rat-patrol jeeps and 5-tonners, went up road to take over what my 3d Platoon had been doing w/o any support. Obviously didn't want to overtax their legs.

BLACKIE

Foxtrot Three Two in Hue City



Early in the battle, F-32 firing the one and only load of napalm that was fired during the month-long battle. According to the TC, Cpl Charles West, the grunts were catching an inordinate amount of NVA sniper fire from a building, so rather than heed the directive not to fire anything larger than a machine gun, Charlie took matters into his own hands and ended up burning down an entire city block. Two days later, Charlie was medevaced after being shot by an NVA sniper.



The crew of F-32 midway in the battle (L to R) Brad "Goodie" Goodin, "Scooby" and John Wear

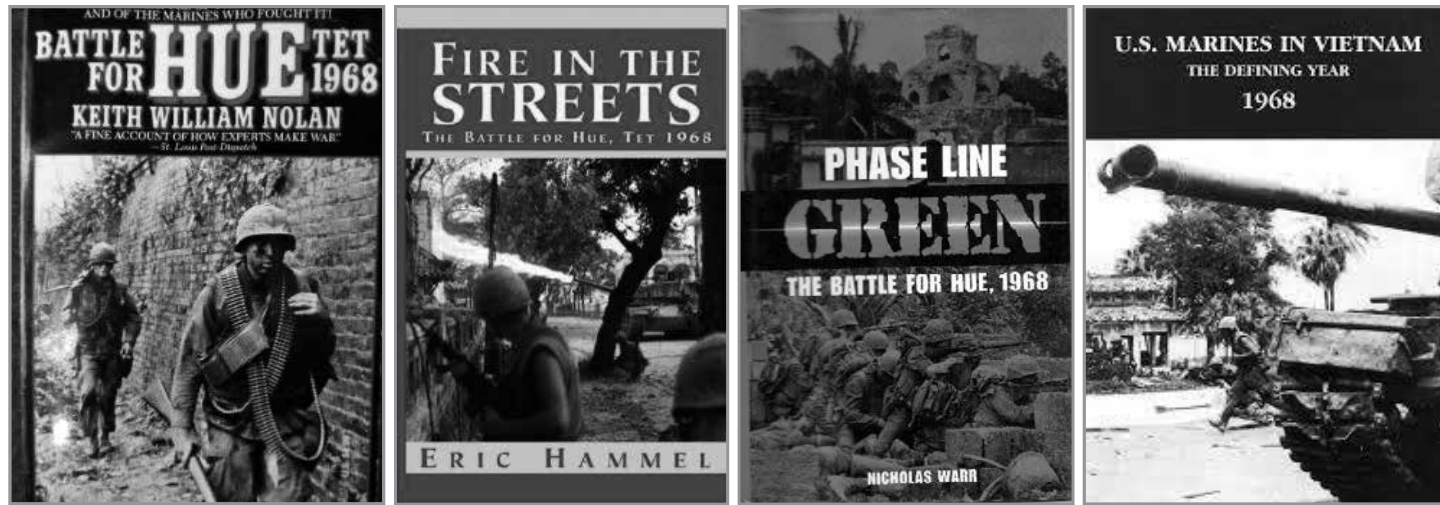


Feb 15, 1968 - F-32 ready to load on to an LCU at the U. S. Navy Boat Ramp in Hue City

The Abandoned Doggie Tank

The story was that the U. S. Army tank (on the left in a ditch) had been in the city during the first few days of the battle. The hapless driver drove the tank into some concertina wire and ended up getting stuck in an open sewer ditch. The tank commander did not know how to extract the tank so he ordered the crew to abandon the vehicle. The TC placed a thermite grenade inside of the gun breach and one on top of the communication radios thus rendering the tank destroyed. ■





THE BANDITS

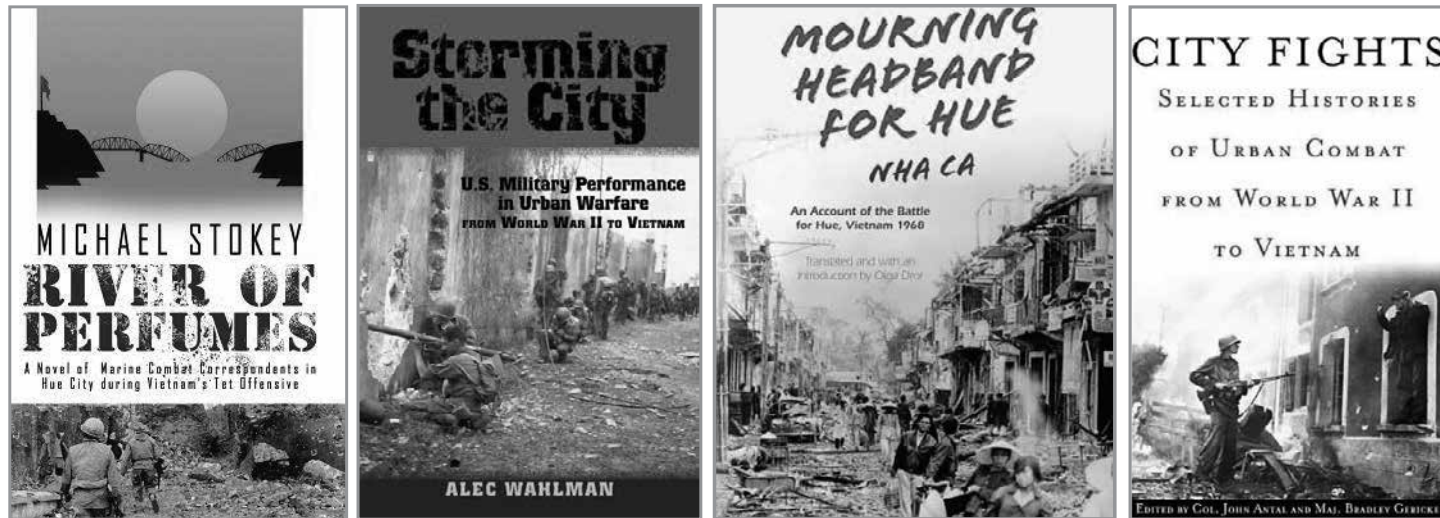
Provisional Platoon H&S Co, 3rd Tanks.

1st Row: Joe Richelieu, S/Sgt. Fred Stanton, 1st Lt. Jim Georgaklis.

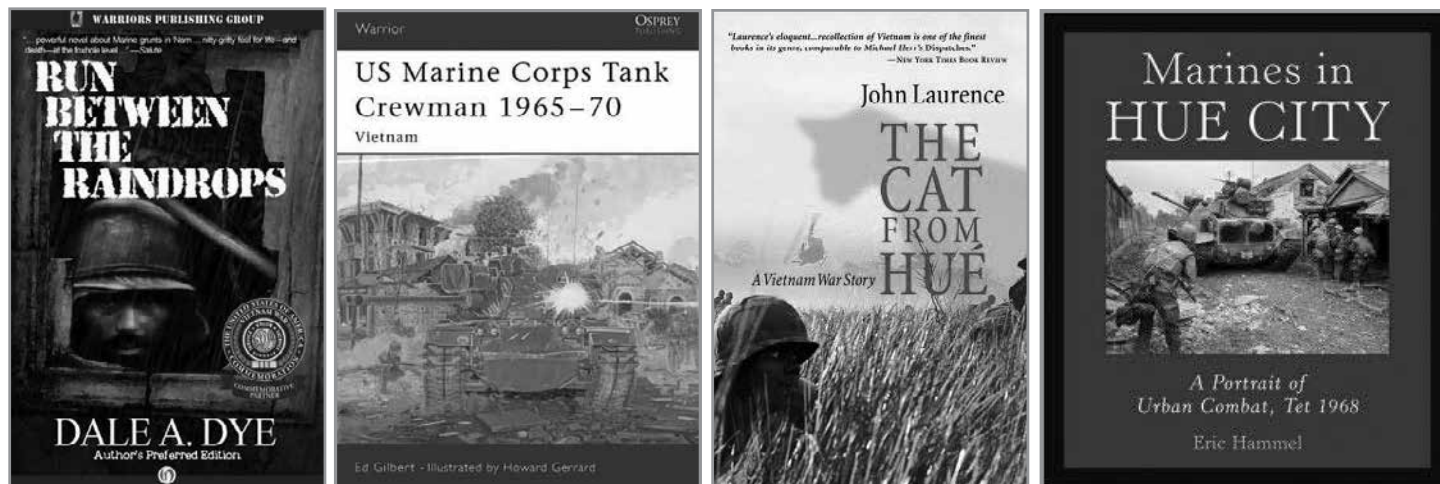
2nd Row: Brad Goodin, Sgt. Amos, "Scooby", Willy Williams, UK, Al Esquivel.

3rd Row: Mike Andregg, John Wear, Carl Fleischmann.

Back: Alfredo Martinez.



The only U.S. Navy ship named for a battle of the Vietnam War, the USS Hue City



This large mural is painted on the bulkhead of the Officers Mess on the USS Hue City

(Continued on page 32)

TANK & AT KIA HUE CITY

Cpl. Robert E. Hall

MOS: 1833
H&S Co, 3rd Tank Bn
DOB: 9/16/1947
VN Arrival: 8/30/1967
WIA: 2/4/1968
KIA: 2/4/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: South City
Home: Lynchburg, VA

PFC Thomas L. Beierle

MOS: 0353
Alpha Co, 1st AT Bn
DOB: 8/4/1946
VN Arrival: 4/11/1967
WIA: 2/7/1968
KIA: 2/7/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Hue Ammo Convoy Ambush
Home: Zion, IL

PFC Manzalle A. Ford

MOS: 0353
Alpha Co, 1st AT Bn
DOB: 11/10/1947
VN Arrival: 11/7/1967
WIA: 2/7/1968
KIA: 2/7/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Hue Ammo Convoy Ambush
Home: Mt Pleasant, IA

PFC Larry K. Powell

MOS: 0353
Alpha Co, 1st AT Bn
DOB: 4/23/1948
VN Arrival: 1/13/1967
WIA: 2/7/1968
KIA: 2/7/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Hue Ammo Convoy Ambush
Home: Ft Worth, TX

Sgt Ronald R. Prather, Jr.

MOS: 0353
Alpha Co, 1st AT Bn
DOB: 9/6/1944
VN Arrival: 8/4/1966
WIA: 2/7/1968
KIA: 2/7/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Hue Ammo Convoy Ambush
Home: Mt Pleasant, IA

L/Cpl. Jimmie M. Couto

MOS: 1811
Alpha Co, 1st Tank Bn
DOB: 4/12/1944
VN Arrival: 4/24/1967
WIA: 2/13/1968
KIA: 2/13/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: ???
Home: North Reading, MA

PFC Anthony Montano

MOS: 1811
Alpha Co, 1st Tank Bn
DOB: 11/14/1948
VN Arrival: 11/16/1968
WIA: 2/16/1968
KIA: 2/16/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Citadel of Hue City
Home: Los Angeles, CA

S/Sgt. Bernard J. Novak

MOS: 1833
Alpha Co, 1st Tank Bn
DOB: 10/12/1943
VN Arrival: 8/25/1967
WIA: 2/22/1968
KIA: 2/22/1968
Cause: Gunshot
Location: Citadel of Hue City
Home: Muskegon, MI

Cpl. Wesley E. Hodges

MOS: 1811
Alpha Co, 1st Tank Bn
DOB: 7/16/1948
VN Arrival: 5/31/1967
WIA: 2/23/1968
KIA: 2/23/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Citadel of Hue City
Home: Lufkin, TX

PFC Lester E. Chambers

MOS: 0353
Alpha Co, 1st AT Bn
DOB: 8/17/1946
VN Arrival: 12/27/1967
WIA: 2/25/1968
KIA: 2/25/1968
Cause: Shrapnel
Location: Citadel of Hue City
Home: Dallas, TX

Sgt. William C. Marsh

MOS: 0353
Alpha Co, 1st AT Bn
DOB: 2/26/1940
VN Arrival: 9/10/1966
WIA: 2/25/1968
KIA: 2/25/1968
Cause: Gunshot
Location: Citadel of Hue City
Home: Amarillo, TX

LT. TED CHRISTIAN: NOT JUST ANOTHER CON THIEN CASUALTY

BY JIM COAN

Recently, a Marine who served with 1/9 at Con Thien contacted me through my publisher. He had read my book, *Con Thien: The Hill of Angels*, and he wished to thank me for writing about the day 2/Lt. Ted Christian and three others were killed at Con Thien. Dan Baldwin was a L/Cpl. Forward Air Controller radioman assigned to 1/9. He was wounded by the same incoming 57mm recoilless rifle airbursts that killed Lt. Christian, mortally wounded the A/1/9 CO, and took the life of a corpsman friend, plus a third Marine. Now, some 48 years later, he told me that my book had helped him bring some closure to that awful day.

I still carry with me memories of Ted Christian – always will. I first met Theodore Howard Christian from Gauley Bridge, West Virginia, when we reported to the Basic School at Quantico after surviving OCS the previous fall and winter of 1966. He and his roommate lived across the hall from me and my roommate. My roommate and I were like the “Odd Couple.” I was Jack Lemmon; he was Walter Matthau. Ted and I would study for exams on Sunday evenings together, while our roommates were out getting thoroughly soused in town. My roommate was a slob at housekeeping (our quarters were inspected every morning) and I resented having to clean up after him. Ted and I often played “ain’t it awful” about our roommates.

So, Ted and I grew to be good friends. We both had ideas of making the Marine Corps a career and wanted to graduate from TBS with high marks. Our peers gave him the nick-name of “warthog” because of his acne scars, heavy eyebrow ridge, and pronounced lower jaw. He had played fullback on his college football team and he basically had no neck—his head seemed just to rest atop his shoulders. He might have had a Neanderthal ancestor way back.

After graduation from TBS in May of 1967, I went on to Tracked Vehicle

Officer’s School at Camp Pendleton. Ted had his 30 days leave, then reported to 1/9 as a platoon leader with Alpha Company. It was early October of that year when I bumped into Ted by the south gate at Con Thien. His battalion had just replaced 3/9 on The Hill, and Ted was the new XO of A/1/9. I was the platoon leader of 1st Platoon, Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks. Life was not so perilous as it had been during the September siege, but Con Thien was still a dangerous place where death could fall from the sky at any moment. Because I’d seen Ted and many of his Marines walking around not wearing their helmets or flak jackets, I intended to mention it the next time I saw him.

On October 12th, I was walking by the Alpha 1/9 area and saw Ted and his CO, Captain Ryan, standing outside the Alpha Co. bunker chatting with the Bn. Chaplain. I walked over and pulled Ted aside. I said, “Ted, this place takes incoming every day somewhere on The Hill. You need to have your Marines and yourself wear flak jackets and helmets . . . at all times.”

Ted replied, “Aww, this place ain’t so bad. We’ve seen a lot worse.” Rather than argue about it, I decided to walk away. That old premonition had surfaced that told me something bad was about to happen. I had learned to listen during my previous five weeks on



The Hill when that feeling of doom washed over me. A minute later, I reached my tank on the southern perimeter and climbed aboard into the TC’s cupola.

Then I heard that wiizzzzBOOM of a recoilless rifle airburst exploding. I looked through my TC cupola vision blocks and saw a greasy black cloud arise above the Alpha Company area I’d just left a minute earlier. The cry went out, “Corpsmen up!” I was not about to go over there, as one round of incoming was usually followed by more. Sure enough, a second airburst exploded in the same area a few minutes later.

It was an unusually warm October day. L/Cpl. Dan Baldwin was sitting on top of the Alpha Company bunker along with a dog handler, waiting for Alpha’s patrol to form up that he and the dog handler had been assigned. Dan had just removed his helmet to wipe the sweat off his brow when the first airburst hit. A piece of shrapnel struck him in the head. The dog handler was also wounded and his scout dog killed. >>

Dan recalled that, while sitting there with blood dripping off both hands, both arms, and both elbows, he assumed he was dying. He was expecting to see a bright light or even an angel coming for him. Instead, a corpsman ran over to his side and bandaged his head. He had been moved out of the immediate area when the second airburst hit. While he was sitting in the Battalion Aid Station, marveling at still being alive, the Alpha Company CO, Capt. Ryan, and 2/Lt. Christian were carried in on stretchers. The captain was still alive . . . barely; Lt. Christian was dead. A corpsman friend of Dan's, "Doc" Richard Smith, and another Marine were also brought into the BAS, killed by those same recoilless rifle airbursts.

Around 1600, I was heading toward the CO's bunker for the daily briefing when I passed by the BAS. Lying on the ground outside the bunker were three stretchers, the dead occupants all covered with blankets. A bare arm was

extended on the ground of the closest stretcher. The watch on that arm looked familiar; it looked just like the watch worn by my friend Ted Christian. "Do you know who this Marine is?" I asked a nearby corpsman.

"Nope," he replied. "He was with some guys killed by incoming a little while ago." I bent down and gently lifted the blanket off of the Marine's face, dreading, but somehow knowing, what I might find. It was Ted, his ashen face instantly recognizable. I stumbled into the BAS to inform them that one of the dead Marines lying outside was Lt. Ted Christian. The lead corpsman replied that they already knew their names and that they were awaiting medevac. Shocked and grief-stricken, I continued on toward the CO's bunker. I hardly heard a word said during the briefing.

Later, Dan refused to get on the CH-46 chopper medevac when it landed at the BAS LZ. He saw the bodies of Lt. Christian, corpsman

Smith, and a third Marine carried aboard, and the mortally injured Captain Ryan being worked over feverishly by two corpsmen. He felt that it would be dishonorable to go aboard that chopper carrying dead and dying Marines. [Captain Ryan succumbed from his wounds five days later.]

Dan wrote to me: "In my entire tour I never saw a Marine mourn someone's death; we just got over it and went on. However, Alpha Company appeared to go into mourning after that day and morale plummeted. After Captain Radcliffe took over Alpha, it took a while to get the company back into combat readiness." Dan concluded his message with these words: "Your story brought these incidents home and somehow changed my memories from a dream-like, unreal experience back to once-lived reality. Thank you, sir."

And I replied, "Thank you, Dan, for letting me know that a story in my book had a meaningful impact on your life. Semper Fidelis, Marine." ■

Vietnam—A Strange Experience From A Western Perspective

BY MICHAEL GIOVINAZZO
SGT. 3RD. PLT. "A" CO 1ST. AT'S

I doubt if anyone who served in Vietnam was not aware of the differences in culture and behavior compared to the American mindset. The following are some of what I observed that are indelible in my mind:

- A Shell gas station in the middle of nowhere.
- Vietnamese women moving water from a canal to a rice paddy for hours, using what looked like a conical bucket stretched between two ropes.
- A rice paddy that served the dual role of toilet and growing rice.
- Reconstructing burned down huts by slicing bamboo for days.
- The sight of a small bus overloaded at least five times what it should be, with people and animals both in and on top.
- Bicycles loaded with enough items that would fill a truck.
- Rice in a bowl covered with flies, so it

looked black, until they were shooed away.

- Small children smoking cigarettes and the ability of children, in the middle of nowhere, to get you anything you wanted, including ice, liquor, watches, pornography, etc.
- Sweeping for mines on a road as Vietnamese civilians are walking past.

The funny part is, this all became normal. It was such that if someone said a flying saucer landed in the rice paddy, no one would pay much attention. The blowing up of my tender 19 year-old-mind started with my entrance into the country by amphibious landing on Operation Double Eagle in late January 1966. This episode had to take ten years off my life.

The night before the landing, I was told by a L/Cpl in the reconnaissance battalion, who I recognized as stationed with me in my previous

duty station, told me there would be 65% casualties on the beach. Of course, everyone didn't know this. He was in the know and I was 19 and stupid enough to believe him. I kept my thoughts of doom to myself. To think I volunteered to be there, because I broke up with my girlfriend, only to become engaged to her prior to leaving.

I was on the LSD Catamount, one of a five-ship Battalion 3/1 landing team. I had a sleepless night. Reville was sounded sometime about 4 AM and we were told to go to chow for a steak and egg breakfast. Who could eat? Besides, it didn't

look much like steak, or eggs. Wet scrambled eggs and a thin tough as leather form of beef.

As light appeared, I saw what I had seen in the movies prior to the invasion of a WWII Pacific island. It looked like a hundred ships, of all kinds. I could hear what sounded like big guns being fired from ships and the explosions inland. After the ships stopped firing I saw jets flying over, going inland, and could hear more explosions. I carefully observed the Marines I saw and no one was saying anything. They probably didn't have the classified information I had. My platoon commander and platoon sergeant didn't mention any particular doom that would befall us when they explained the particulars of the operation, prior to us getting into the boats in the well deck. I guess they didn't get the word.

I had participated in amphibious landings in the Mediterranean and one in the Philippine Islands, just prior to Double Eagle. They were practice and this was real. None of the platoon had any combat experience, but I did have some security in the faith I had in our NCO's. All Ontos commanders were sergeants, except for two senior corporals. They were all career Marines and were expert in the Ontos and tactics. I would trust my life to them, even though I didn't have a choice.

We eventually departed the ship and circled, awaiting our time to go in. I was butted up in the loader's compartment. There wasn't a square centimeter of room to move around in, equipment over and under me. I finally felt the boat stop and the ramp went down and we proceeded off. Our Ontos went under water and water was leaking in the rear doors and from above. I thought this was the end of the line for me. I could then feel the Ontos moving and going up the incline from the water onto the beach. After about a minute, the Ontos commander said I could get out. What I then saw was surreal.

I saw Vietnamese walking around the beach, carrying wood and whatever they carry on those poles with two baskets attached. My mind was blown. I went from a WWII war movie, which I felt I was prepared for, to some other dimension. This was only the beginning of the absurdities that I would experience for the next year. ■

Sea Stories About Hue City (Continued from page 29)

Aided by Tanks

Marine Kills 7 In Hue Battles

PHU BAI, Vietnam (ISO) — "The tanks were chasing enemy in front of my platoon. Enemy soldiers kept appearing like pop-up targets."

That is how Sgt. Josef Burghardt, 24, a platoon sergeant from A Co., 1st Bn., 1st Marine Regt., described the coordination with Marine tanks which aided him in getting seven confirmed kills during the fierce street fighting in Hue.

Early one morning, Burghardt and a rifle squad from his platoon were searching houses in Hue for enemy snipers that had been firing on passing vehicles.

"I spotted some enemy soldiers moving in a building," he explained, "so I got on the radio and 'called up' a tank."

Soon a tank was pounding the building with its 90mm gun and a .50 cal. machine gun.

Several North Vietnamese Army soldiers ran from the building in a vain attempt to escape the wrath of the tank. Burghardt killed four.

The following morning, the sergeant was informed by a member of his platoon that four enemy soldiers—three NVA and a Viet Cong guide—were trapped by a squad of Marines.

Leaving his fellow Marines to provide covering fire, he maneuvered through alleys and buildings until he had flushed the enemy and then opened fire, killing two of the NVA regulars.

Again the platoon sergeant was leading a squad of Marines when they checked a treeline near Hue for enemy positions.

"An NVA fired a B-40 rocket at us," he related, "but missed." Enemy soldiers ran with the rocket launcher, the Marines in pursuit.

Suddenly another NVA, armed with an AK-47, stood up and opened fire at the Marines. Burghardt also promptly neutralized that threat.

Tears Didn't Spoil His Aim

PHU BAI, Vietnam (ISO) — Unintended tears were not enough to spoil the aim of a determined Marine rifleman in a battle with North Vietnamese Army (NVA) soldiers during Operation Hue City.

"Our platoon was sweeping through an abandoned Army of the Republic of Vietnam (ARVN) compound when some enemy troops threw riot gas grenades at us," said Lance Cpl. Edward F. Neas, 18, of "A" Co., 1st Bn., 1st Marine Regt.

As the Marines quickly donned their gas masks, an NVA soldier ran from a nearby building.

Despite the flowing tears, Neas zeroed in and scored one enemy kill.



Hill 54

BY KEN ZEBAL

During the spring of 1966, 3rd Platoon, Charlie Company, First Tanks was attached to 1/5 operating in the Chu Lai TAOR between An Tan and Tam Ky. Our Platoon had been administratively shuttled from Alpha 3rd Tanks to Charlie 3rd Tanks and now we were Charlie 1st Tanks. It was the same tanks and crews (except for rotations) but different tactical markings. The process of crossing Song An Tan had improved since we left Hill 69 during the monsoons. Marine Combat Engineers devised a motorized, floating pontoon bridge consisting of a section of bridge fixed on top of a group of motorized pontoons located just east of the Highway 1 Bridge at An Tan. A tank would drive onto the bridge, the engineers would start their outboard motors, and we'd all float-motor-drift across the river. After landing, the tank would debark and get back on Highway 1. The first couple of times were a little goosey but that Marine Engineer field expediency and ingenuity really worked great.

The Platoon CP was north of An Tan in an old L-shaped Vietnamese grade school compound converted into an ARVN and PF outpost just East of Hwy 1. Since being with them was new to us, we would marvel at their tactics—you guys know exactly what I mean. A few ARVNs or PFs diddy-bopping down the center of the road with some holding hands, smoking cigarettes, and others firing their rifles in the air indiscriminately. Being with them in the same compound was different. They weren't really big on setting watches and night discipline, although they tried to steal anything and everything from us. Come to find out that theft-specific behavior may have been a Buddhist thing. From their perspective it seems that everything belonged to everyone. Therefore, for them it was culturally acceptable to take what they needed or wanted from us or anyone else. This obviously resulted in some problems but helped us stay focused on watch. An ARVN barber provided us haircuts for a fee. As part of the haircut he shaved our foreheads and noses with a straight razor and then cleaned our ears using a really long and thick toothpick with a small cotton wad on the end. We nervously guarded each other during these haircuts with a .45 sitting openly on our lap to passively

dissuade the barber from cutting a throat or jamming that long stick through a brain

We'd done the road sweeps, blocking positions, and patrols day-in and day-out, so we were familiar with the whole area West of Highway 1 between An Tan and Tam Ky. By that time, Milo Plank had rotated and Jim Bentley was 32's driver, and when Tony Pinnetti went back to the world he was replaced by Clyde "Marty" Martinelli, Jr.

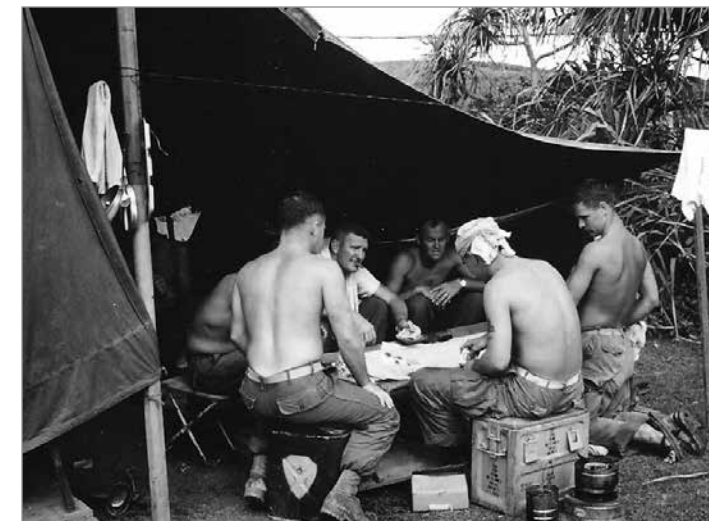


Clyde Martinelli, Jr and Ken Zebal

Marty had a fairly interesting background; he was a Korean war vet, former Drill Instructor, had been shot in a San Diego bar fight with a .22, and he was a 2141 as well as an 1811. Marty joined the platoon during the late monsoons as a brand new L/Cpl. working his back way up the rank structure during one of his roller coaster promotion-reduction cycles. He used to tell fabulous and exotic sea stories about fighting in the Korean War and his multiple tours in Japan which seemed to be at the root of his variable ranks. There must have been a woman involved. Come to find out, as a 2141 he'd been TAD from the 12th Marines on Okinawa to a Nationalist Chinese Army 8" howitzer battery on Formosa during the second Taiwan Strait Crisis in the late '50s. He was on one of those islands between mainland China and Formosa when mainland China was shelling

Quemoy, Matsu and Little Matsu with their 210s. Those who've been subjected to incoming enemy 82mm mortars, 122mm rockets and 152mm artillery can just imagine being pounded by incoming 210mm arty.

1st MARDIV ordered 1/5 to seize, occupy and defend Hill 54. We conducted an approach march up Highway 1, deployed, crossed the line of departure, made our way to Hill 54 and occupied it entirely unopposed. No fighting, no mines, no nothing; we just got up there and dug in. Because Hill 54 was heavily vegetated and previously unoccupied, the 1/5 Bn. CO wanted us to clear fields of fire for the rifle companies by running our vehicles all over the bamboo and brush. So we did and then we dug revetments for our vehicles, made range cards, and prepared to meet the neighbors whenever they decided to show up. We actually went on grunt patrols to find key avenues of approach just like the MCI course said. Anybody remember Mission Enemy Time & Terrain (METT) and Key Terrain and Observation and Fields of Fire, Cover and Concealment, Obstacles, Avenues of Approach (KOCO)? Life was good, we had at least one hot meal a day, water, and no incoming. Sure, there was some sniping and automatic weapons fire, but it was generally a good place to be. We also played a lot of cards and dominoes.



Left to Right: Unknown, Charlie Denton, Carl Phalen, Roy T Szabo, Ken Zebal (with a rag on his head) and unknown.

The slack times didn't last long since 1/5 was right on the FEBA, and Division continued its push to the north. 1/5 had a Combat Outpost Line to the north and west and began BN-sized operations, patrols, sweeps and some civic action medical activities in the villes. What that meant to us tankers in practical terms was lots of section-level patrols, road sweeps and blocking positions. Generally, a light section would leave the hill and the heavy section would provide direct support remaining on the hill.

However, the Viet Cong with some NVA had recently shown themselves much more inclined to fight, so the

sweeps and blocking positions became a lot more interesting and intense.

It was during one of those blocking position operations that things got really busy. Grunt companies from 1/5 had been pushing the enemy towards us from the west for a few hours when a bunch of real live gooks finally showed up. These guys were not your run-of-the-mill black pajama'd day-time farmers, they were uniformed, organized and using small unit tactics to keep themselves from being killed or captured by us and the grunts. That was the day we emptied the turret magazine, ruined a .30 cal. barrel and learned a lesson. The lesson we learned was to not use oil for cooling a really hot machine gun barrel inside the turret. It smoked a lot and stunk and really didn't cool the barrel much. Changing the hot .30 barrel happened just like we were trained to do it. Except at the time we were engaged firing the 90mm and the .50. Remember too, it was really hot (95+) and humid (95+) and there wasn't a whole lot of room between the 90mm and that banana-shaped turret magazine holding 5100 rounds of coax.

In those days we had body counts, so after every fight one of us would leave the tank and, with the grunts, count the enemy dead and try to figure who did what. Sometimes we'd have to assemble the pieces to make a whole. On one of the blocking position operations, 32 had a good day. Good days being relative, we actually shot a gook with the 90mm gun, which was a lot harder than it sounds, and got another with the .50. Although this doesn't measure up with a tank-on-tank shooting match or hand-to-hand combat, it felt like a small accomplishment at the time.

Back on Hill 54 during the night of 15-16 June, we heard a firefight taking place north and west of our position. There was nothing unusual about it except that after a while we began to hear single shots, then pistol shots and hand grenades, none of which was a good sign. The next day we found out it was S/Sgt. Jimmie Howard and his Reconnaissance Platoon fighting for their very lives that night all alone in the middle of nowhere with little or no support. Please see the Book Review of Hill 488.

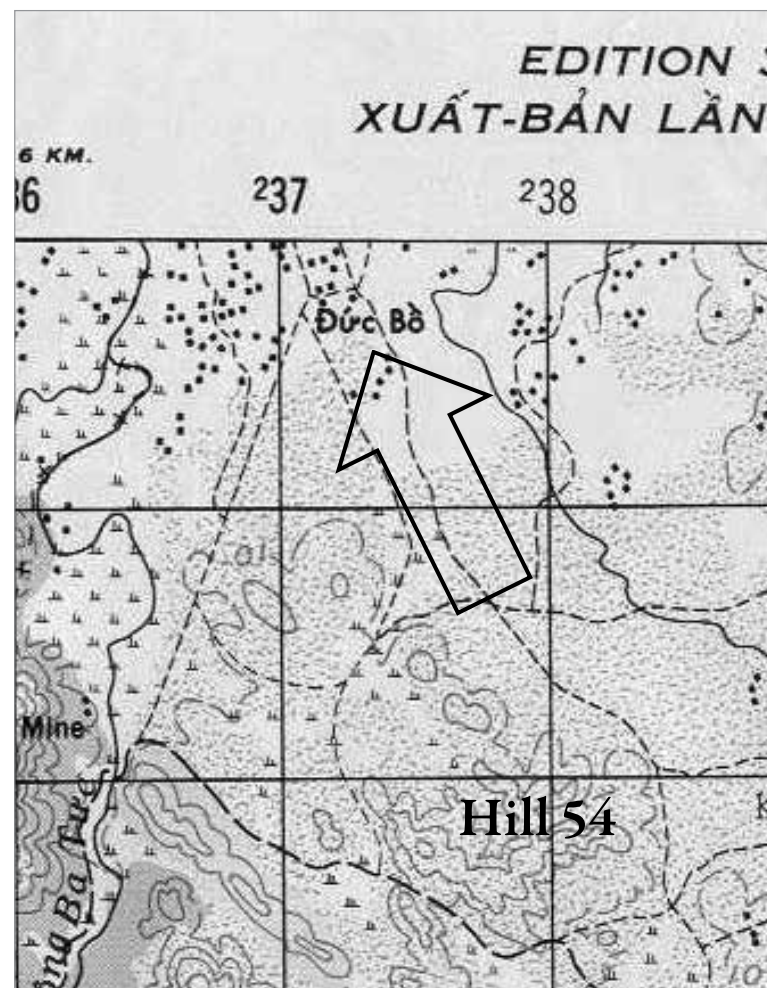
Meanwhile, we continued to live large with one hot meal, enough water, and playing dominoes. The 1/5 Bn. CO wanted to push north, and the next 'ville along the way to Tam Ky was Duc Bo, which had a deep ravine several hundred yards to its south. Our Lt. decided to send the author and S/Sgt. Fred "Boat" Staton (Heavy Section Leader) to find an appropriate location where the tanks could cross by accompanying a grunt squad from Bravo 1/5.

On 23 June 1966, the patrol left the perimeter towards Duc Bo and was taken under fire by an enemy sniper some place to the west between Hill 54 and Duc Bo. We all knew that the Viet Cong didn't shoot well so we ignored his attempts to distract us and continued to the ville. However, pretty soon another gook sniper started fir- >>

ing which placed us in a cross fire. More to the point, the second sniper seems to have paid attention during NVA marksmanship training because his rounds were impacting all around us. After a while, the second sniper found his mark when one Marine was WIA and medevac'd. Later that morning, another Marine was KIA and then another

one was WIA just outside Duc Bo.

Editor's note: In the most recent past issue of the Sponson Box, Ken had a very nice review of the book Hill 488 by Ray Hildreth. The above story was supposed to have followed Ken's book review. My apologies to Ken for my being tardy. ■



Tanks and Grunts in Hue City

(Continued from page 19)

sion to shoot his 90 mm main gun at the NVA soldiers firing on his tank ... while the hapless grunts were seeking shelter from the withering enemy fire while crouched behind the two tanks. Charlie said that Hall would shout over the radios, "I see the damn gooks right in front of my tank. They are standing up shooting. My machinegun is not being effective! Request permission to fire my main gun!" Only a few minutes later, Cpl. Hall was all but demanding permission

when an anti-tank round from a gook 57mm recoilless rifle slammed into the TC cupola and killed him. Hall was the only tankner from 3rd Tanks to be KIA during the battle. That day Charlie also told me that he knows that if the gun tank had been able to engage the enemy with the 90 that Hall may still be with us today. During the battle it was not but two days later that the "Brass Hats" realized that too many American lives were being lost due to the too-restrictive

ROE and the large weapons-ban was lifted. But too late to prevent Corporal Robert Hall's death.

"On 3 Feb., the South Vietnamese lifted all restrictions on fire support south of the River of Perfume. It opened the way for support from up to 8-inch howitzers, naval gunfire and, if the weather cleared, fast-moving tactical aircraft laden with rockets, bombs and napalm." ■

OUT ON THE TRACE ALONE & LONELY**

BY: JOHN WEAR

C Co., 3rd Tanks

It is the second week of January 1969 and today every functioning tank from Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks is called up to mount up and head out on a sweep operation that will run along the "Trace" and head east of Con Thien toward Gio Linh. This is to be a tank-only operation where no grunts are to be deployed. My tank (F-31) is short a crewman because my gunner, Russ "Pappy" Papparillo, is in Hong Kong on R&R. And, as it turns out, the TC of F-32, Brad "Goodie" Goodin, is also short one of his crewmen, Brian Samson, who is also on R&R. Even though I am the Flame Section Leader of record, I voluntarily go out on this operation as the driver of Goodie's tank. For those of you who do not remember, Goodie was the driver of the tank (F-32) that I was assigned to after I got in-country and when I was sent to Hue City back in February. In the meantime, Goodie has been promoted to corporal and is now the TC of his own tank which is also known as "Crispy Critters."

We jump on Crispy Critters, fire her up, get in line and after the normal USMC period of "hurry up and wait", we head out of Quang Tri with me driving. The long armored column roars north on Route 1 up to the sprawling Dong Ha Combat Base. We enter the north gate and, in a few minutes, we are exiting the base at the west gate that leaves us heading west on to Route 9 toward Cam Lo. In the meantime, as we roar through Dong Ha, it seems as if every pogue that is stationed there has stopped what they were doing and stand there staring at this mass of armored Marine Corps firepower as we drive by, stirring up a huge dust cloud along the roadway. It feels terrific being part of it!

In no time we have forded the Cam Lo River and passed the recently destroyed Cam Lo Bridge. As an aside, the sad story of the destruction of the decades-old French-built cement bridge is another tale of U.S. Army negligence and

ignorance that I will convey at a later date, but suffice it to say that the doggies have a long way to go in learning how to "win the hearts and minds" of the indigenous people.



On the road heading north toward Con Thien

Our column trundles past our old Charlie Company HQ at Cam Lo Hill; up through the "Charlie 2" artillery fire support base and on north through "The Washout." As we approach the hills of Con Thien, we turn east and begin the sweep along the Trace toward the ARVN base at Gio Linh.

In about an hour, when we get midway between Con Thien and Gio Linh, we pass by the recently-abandoned firebase known as "Alpha Three". We are in a long line of single tanks that are tracking the leader as we sweep along the "Z." About five miles past "A-3," the word comes over the radios to turn around and head back toward Con Thien. As I indicated before, up to this point, we have been religiously "tracking" the tank ahead of us. As most tankers know and understand, each tank in line has been keeping their tank treads inside of the track marks of the leading tank. And we do this maneuver mostly to avoid hitting booby traps (anti-tank mines) that may be placed in our path. If the first tank can make it without hitting a mine then all of the tracking tanks will likewise make it.

Without giving it much thought, I stop the tank to turn around and then punch the gas pedal and steer to the left. As I make this maneuver, our tank goes outside of the tracks of the tank in front of us ... and all of a sudden ... BOOM! Our tank bucks into the air as we hit a huge mine.

At the moment of impact, there is another tank that is just to the left of us. It had already turned around and was getting in line to head back toward Con Thien. I saw the loader sitting on his hatch on top of the turret and, as the explosion occurs, I see him and his TC duck down. They appear to catch some of the mine's shrapnel in their faces. I heard later that the loader got hit in the eye but it did not blind him. Thank God!



The blown bridge at Cam Lo (late 1968)

81315H 148 C Co. 5 SR-At YD192728 F32 while turning around hit ^{mine} at YD192728. PFC D 1156 priority medavac. Schrapnel in eye, LCpl H 3724 routine medavac scrap metal in nose.

As we are recovering (mentally) from the explosion, someone comes over the radios and he sounds pissed. I think it is the skipper (Capt. "Weird Harold" Kuchma) who is yelling over the radio, "Why was Cpl. Wear driving the fuckin' tank? Why was he not the fuckin' TC? Maybe this would not have happened if he'd been doing his fuckin' job instead of joy riding." We ignore these comments and play dumb.

A few minutes later, as we stand outside looking at the damaged tank, there is much speculation as to what caused the damage to our tank. What seems to be the best guess is that we probably ran over at least one unexploded 105mm artillery round (or two?) since the tank was picked up high in the air and we came crashing down with a big dusty thud. The left side of the tank is missing about ten track blocks, some of the suspension, and two sets of road wheels. It is not a pretty sight. The lifers are afraid that there may be more mines under our disabled tank and so they won't take a chance to move us until they can call for engineers to come to sweep the area. What a crock of bullshit! We can't hurt our tank much more than the mine already has; besides, the day is passing by quickly.

And of course, in no time it starts to get really dark and so all of the company's tanks but two of the gun tanks leave for Con Thien. A few minutes later, when the lifers are out of sight, I ask one of the gun tanks to hook us up and pull our disabled tank inside of the perimeter of the abandoned Alpha-3 firebase. Screw those rear echelon lifers and their "suspected" mines! We have to get inside the wire anyway. There are no grunts out here. We are just two gun tanks that "work" with our "sick" dragon tank in tow.

After we haul our damaged tank inside of the wire, all three tank crews are on 100% alert while spending a very long and sleepless night (that truly seems as if it will never end) watching arty flares being fired from the Charlie-2 arty base and from an AC-47 "Spooky" gun ship illuminate the area.

I vividly remember standing in the cupola looking out into the darkness and hear the "boom - boom - boom" report of the 105mm arty back at C-2. In a few seconds, the "pop - pop - pop" of the arty flares go off overhead and the black night turns into daylight. Then the moaning 'whoop - whoop - whoop' of the casing that carried the arty flare into the sky as it falls to Earth. This happens all night.

I know that without anyone saying it, we are all scared shitless that the gooks will see us as "sitting ducks" and send a large force of NVA soldiers to wipe us out. No one can sleep. We are all too petrified. We yammer over the radios

to encourage each other.

"Hey! Look over there! Is that a gook."

"Where?"

"Right in front of the gun tank!"

"Oh Shit! It might be. Wait for the next illum to go off."

Boom - boom - boom

Pop - pop - pop

"It's just a shadow."

Miraculously, the gooks don't seem to notice us ... or maybe they just don't care. Not one round is fired from our machine guns or the main guns. As I said, it was a very long night. Especially for me, since I am less than 30 days "short" to going home to The World.

Finally, the sun peeks over the horizon and we are able to relax a bit. From sun up until the middle of that afternoon, there is absolutely nothing happening. Why? We figure that it's because the USMC cannot supply us with a tank retriever to get us back to Dong Ha for repairs. One of the gun tanks radios to Charlie Company in Quang Tri for permission to go back to Dong Ha on their own, but they get a negative reply. Later, we offer to line both gun tanks in a row and in tandem haul our sick dragon tank back to Dong Ha. Again, negative on that idea. As the day progresses we keep making radio checks between the company, 3rd Tank Battalion Maintenance at Dong Ha, and with the company tanks that are moving from Con Thien back to Quang Tri. We do not want to spend another long, dark, and very scary night out here alone! Around 4 pm, a most modern-looking U.S. Army tank-retriever shows up.

I had heard about this model of tank retriever before,



U.S. Army M-88 Tank Retriever towing a "sick tiger"

but never saw one in person. It is an M-88. It is sleek looking and has a gasoline powered engine. The doggie crew is a bunch of for-real "in the rear, with the gear" dudes. They look as if they are going to attack the North all by themselves. Guns up, machine guns locked & loaded with their heads down and hatches buttoned up. Sweet Jesus! Get me the heck out of here! As they pull up to our tanks, we are sitting around on the ground, shooting the shit like we have not a care in the world. We are shirtless, helmetless and we look like we are spending a casual day at the beach. The doggies stick their helmeted heads out of the vehicle and stare at us in disbelief. I am sure they think that this close to the DMZ, the area must be full of blood-thirsty gooks causing all sorts of mayhem and death. We are acting like we are back in Dong Ha waiting for noon chow. In fact, half of us are heating C-Rats with C-4 and getting ready to "enjoy" the meal.

As soon as the doggies arrive we get down to business. We take a large hunk of rope and tie it to our tank's towing pintle, and then we attach the rope to the outstretched broken track that was blown off by the mine. No sense in leaving perfectly good track block out there to rot. Then, as soon as the doggies get our tank attached to their recovery vehicle, we take off like a bat out of hell. As we are being towed along the Trace, I look back and see that a set of road wheels and a few bumper springs fall off our tank and are left behind. Later, Lt. Spalsberry, the 3rd Tank Bn. Maintenance CO, gives me a ration of shit about leaving "perfectly good" equipment out on the "Z" when he desperately needs it in the 3rd Tank Battalion tank park for repairs. In the end, he has to go to the doggies begging for spare parts.

Meanwhile, back on the Trace, the doggie tank retriever's engine is operating at maximum RPM's and the screaming engine smells as if it is going to burn up. I think that, as long as they get us to the Dong Ha tank ramp, who cares? We zoom past the south gate at Con Thien, through the Washout, Charlie-2 and Cam Lo Hill. The tied-on section of broken track that we are trailing behind us looks like we have this 25 foot "tail" sweeping back and forth behind that tank. When we pull through the gate at Cam Lo Bridge, the track "tail" catches a large section of the perimeter concertina wire. Do you remember the concertina wire that I fell into one evening on our way to Cam Lo District HQ? This is the same wire that we catch with the loose sweeping track! As the doggie retriever is blasting along the road, we are pulling the perimeter wire out of the ground and

along through the vile. For the first few seconds I don't say anything to anyone knowing the doggie grunts that are assigned to the Cam Lo Bridge will suffer the fate of busting heavies to repair the damage to their perimeter wire. When we get about 300 yards outside of the gate and all of a sudden the wire pulls itself free of the track "tail". Nothing is said to anyone and no one is the wiser. As we keep blowing down the road, I look back to see the doggie grunts flipping us the finger and cursing us wildly. Goodie sees what has been going on and we all laugh out loud ... but nothing can be heard over the screaming retriever engine's noise anyway.

About 30 minutes later, we pull into the Dong Ha 3rd Tanks Maintenance tank ramp and, as we disconnect the retriever we give the thumbs up sign, thanking the doggies for their help. They stare down at us with a look as if they should be awarded the Medal of Honor for helping us. Assholes!

Even though my own tank is parked in the company street at Quang Tri, I feel obligated to stay in Dong Ha to help out Goodie, mostly because I was the driver who actually hit the mine. The next day, Goodie's regular driver, Samson, shows up from R&R. Again, I could have gaffed off the whole situation and let the three regular crewmen do the mine damage repairs, but I am not a total butthole "lifer." Plus, I figure that as the section leader that I should lead by example. Right?

We bust our butts in the hot sun for just under two days. During that time we had to pull three broken torsion bars by blowing them with C-4, much to the chagrin of the Battalion Maintenance Gunny. As most of us know, the act of "pulling" torsion bars is the one thing that no tank crewman wants to have to do. If you don't have the ability to blow them with C-4 plastic explosive, then you have to hammer them with a torsion bar puller (we call it a "slap hammer"). It is very difficult work that is virtually impossible to accomplish because, as time passes in the soaking wet conditions of tropical Vietnam, the torsion bars are usually rust-welded to the hull of the tank.

Now we have everything just about finished. All that needs to be done is to get the broken track mounted and secured. We walk the track onto and over the final drives, button the track together, and we are done. We pull out of the tank park and head back to Quang Tri and Charlie Co. HQS.

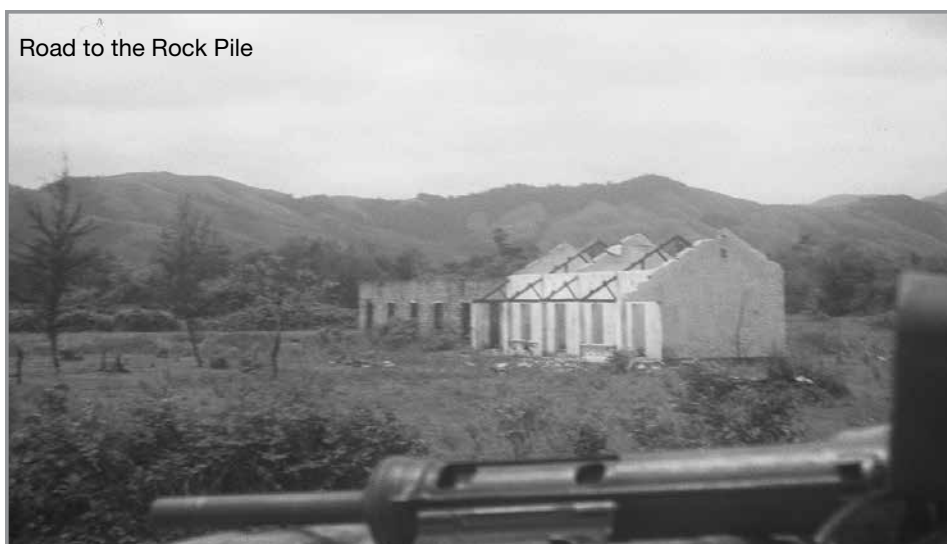
**This is an excerpt from John Wear's Vietnam Journal ■



ANIMAL LOVERS

BY RIC LANGLEY

Road to the Rock Pile



Our days as artillerymen were over. We were told to pack up, that we would be moving back out to the Rock Pile. Right around the time of this move, the last of the old 1st Plt. guys rotated back to CONUS and we got several new members: Charles Poteete, Alvin Hamby, Miles Jansen, Joseph Milos, Bob Rigsby and Lee Semon. And like me, these guys were all draftees right out of Tank School. We made the move on a dreary, rainy morning in early September.

After being overrun and working ourselves to death trying to keep up with the fire missions, we were overjoyed to be going anywhere away from here. Moving back in to our old position facing the razorback ridge, we renewed our friendship with the crews of the Marine 4.2 mortars that were set up to our rear. The mortarmen filled us in on what had taken place since we had departed. They told us that the other tank platoon had not had much success operating in the rough terrain around the Rock Pile. The rain that had been falling for the last few days had not helped either. The heavy grass would become so slick that the tanks would just slide around, unable to gain traction of any kind. We had noticed this same problem as we had made our way up the hill. The grass was slick but the bare ground was even slicker. By the next day, the rain had moved on and things were starting to dry out. The fighting had been

heavy in the countryside surrounding the Rock Pile, so we were told that we had to make a concerted effort to get our tanks out to where we could give support to the beleaguered grunts.

Our first day back would be a recon day spent trying to find a position on top of one of the nearby hills where we could put direct fire on the NVA. Siva, Sellers and I, along with a squad of grunts were able to find a route to the top of a hill which had a commanding view of the area that the grunts were trying to clear. It also overlooked a large NVA bunker complex that had been giving everyone fits. The gook complex was way beyond the tanks "advertised" firing range of forty four hundred meters; the best guess was that it was about seventy five hundred meters. Assessing the situation, we were confident that we could put rounds on target. Getting to the firing position would be no easy task. We would have to ford one small river, move along a rocky slope trying not to throw a track, and then up the side of a narrow ridge line that was slick as hell when it got wet. If we miscalculated and got too far to one side or the other of the ridge, it was a two hundred yard slide down the side of the hill to the bottom. Then, if it was not too wet, we would have to crawl our way back out.

One tank driven by Rigsby did make that mistake and ended up sliding to the bottom of the ridge. Rigsby said that once

the tank started to slide there was nothing that could be done. He just had to hang on and brace for the impact at the bottom. Along the way out to the hill top position and on the way back we even were able to get in a little wild game hunting. There was lots of wild life in the area including some wild chickens that the grunts loved to shoot and take back for a chicken feast. Having my trusty shot gun, I thought this was right up my alley, so I moved up to the front of the column of tanks. As we emerged from some thick grass, I spotted several of the tasty birds in a small clearing just a few yards in front of me. Picking out a nice fat one, I took aim and fired one round. The chicken exploded in a cloud of blood, guts and feathers. It seems that the 00 buck shells I had loaded in to the shot gun were a little too heavy a load for chicken hunting.

As the sun was dipping low in the sky we entered the perimeter still laughing about the chicken. The next morning we were up before the sun and ready to move to the new firing position that we had staked out the day before. There was only room on the hill top for two tanks, so we only took our light section of tanks (two tanks). The trip out went without incident and by nine o'clock we were on top of the hill and ready to fire. We had a recon staff sergeant with us who knew the area of the bunkers and he was able to spot them for us. Siva, Sellers and Whittington dropped down into the turret and started making calculations for windage and elevation. That left me standing on the back deck acting as a spotter. Siva picked out a bunker; Sellers figured in the added range over and above our maximum range and set the sights accordingly. It was decided to fire one of our few anti-tank "shot" rounds that we carried because they have a tracer and thus we would be able to follow the round better. The round was fired. I could clearly see the tracer as the round made its way down range missing an opening in the bunker by no more than three feet to the left. As instructed, Whittington had already slammed an HE round into the breach of the 9mm main gun. Sellers adjusted the gun to the right and sent the

round on its way. Through my binoculars, I could see the bunker erupt in a grey cloud. We thought maybe that we had just gotten lucky so another bunker was picked. This time no shot round was used and it took three HE rounds to knock out the fortification as the last round entering a small opening and destroyed it. With every round that we fired, the grunts cheered and danced knowing that was one less bunker they would have to contend with later on. The firing went on for most of the day.

After a few of the rounds fired there were quite large secondary explosions indicating that the bunker had contained some kind of ordnance. At the time we had no idea if the positions we had fired upon were occupied, but we did know the positions themselves were destroyed. The next day recon reported that upon searching the area they had found bodies, blood trails, rice and weapons scattered all over the area.

With weather permitting we would make the trip out to our own personal shooting range on a daily basis. Recon always had great targets for us to shoot at. We did make the mistake of allowing this to become too routine. One morning, due to the wet weather we only had one tank to deploy and, after arriving and getting set, there was a flash from the brush a couple hundred yards down the hill to our front and a whooshing sound. A gook 57mm recoilless rifle round just missed the turret of Charlie One-Duce. We scrambled around and got the tank backed part of the way down the hill as the grunts went to investigate. It was pretty obvious that we had pissed someone off big time. The grunts returned after searching the area. They had found where the gook anti-tank gun crew had set up, but by the time the grunts had arrived the gook gun and the crew were long gone. We pulled back up on the hill and this time we kept a better lookout as we continued our days firing.

Our next trip to the hill we were really on the look out for an ambush and had come up with a plan to take out the anti-tank gun crew if they fired on us again. We would move up on to the hill like we had done in the past, only this time we would not give them as good a target. I

would stay in the driver's seat with the engine running and, if they fired on us, we would immediately move into position, look for the smoke from the gun and fire on it. It sounded like a plan to me. For several trips to the hill we saw no more of the enemy gun team as we went about our business. But then I guess that our tank continuing to sit on top of that hill shooting at them at will was more than the enemy could stand. It was pretty obvious that we had established a pattern as we moved to the hill top showing the enemy just enough to tease him into firing and sure enough he did. That day, as soon as the gook round had plowed into the ground just in front of us, I mashed the throttle and the tank leaped up into firing position. At the bottom of the hill we could clearly make out the plume of smoke from the recoilless rifle. We peppered the area with HE rounds until we were sure that if they were still there they could not have survived. The grunts moved down the hill and searched the brush where the smoke had come from and after a short time they returned with a body count of three dead and one destroyed 57mm recoilless rifle. That was the last time we were attacked on top of the hill.

We were ambushed on one other oc-



caution while fording the stream on our way to the shooting gallery. The firefight lasted only a short time with us killing several NVA and only four Marines being wounded. The enemy had not yet learned how and did not have the weapons to deal

with the massive fire power of the tanks. Their time would come. When not on our hill top we would at times escort convoys, do road sweeps, and even move out with the grunts into areas where we knew we could get around without having problems getting stuck or throwing a track.

Rain had become our worst enemy. The smallest amount of rain could shut us down for days on end. We passed the time playing cards, going down to the creek to wash cloths and take a bath, dodged mortars that Charlie felt the obligation to throw at us every now and then. And, of course, as always we did endless preventative maintenance on the tank. The new platoon members were fitting right in and we were becoming a happy family. As always we were standing our normal watches at night. Most nights were quiet with Charlie coming around every now and then to see what kind of fortifications had been built. Our fortifications included our tarp strung from the side of the tank and the tank itself, which could be considered a moving fox hole.

On one moonless, cloudless night we were roused out of a sound sleep to noises coming from the base of Razorback Ridge. It sounded like a large group of troops moving in our direction.

Law Enforcement and the U.S. Marine Corps

BY JOE LIU

C Co., 1st Tanks, RVN '66 – '67

At a Vietnam Tankers Association reunion in Philadelphia a few years back, a head count was taken of how many Marines had become police officers after they got out of the Marine Corps. I was surprised and proud to have been one of those who raised their hand. To those of you who remember me, I was a Remington Raider with Charlie Company, 1st Tanks from December '66 to December '67. I entered the USMC at the age of 18, right out of high school. I was a confused teenager on 20 Jan 1966 and got out on 19 March 1969 as a married Vietnam veteran with a brand new wife and two kids as we headed home to Utah.

Believe me, becoming a cop was the furthest thing in my mind. Getting a job and supporting my new family was a priority. What we faced when we got out of the USMC was not a pretty picture. The anti-war movement was at its height and jobs were few and far between. I started pumping gas at a local gas station/tire store for \$400 per month and a 44-hour work week. The local Air Force base was offering temporary jobs of 900 total hours and my Project Transition training as a U.S. Post Office clerk didn't have any openings at the local post office.

Long story short, I had a friend whose parents I adopted as my own by choice. His father was a police sergeant in my home town. I lived with these folks when I got out of the Marines. After pumping gas and busting tires for three months, he asked me to take the test to become a police officer. I had no real burning desire to become a law enforcement officer but, out of respect, I took the test. I took the three hour test in thirty minutes. I passed it and then I aced the physical fitness test and moved on to the oral interview process. After the battery of tests, I became #3 out of 100 applicants.

On 4 June 1969, I joined the Ogden City Police Department; at that time

it was the second largest city in the State of Utah. My starting salary was \$434 per month. I look back and realized that my life was only worth \$34 more per month than as a gas station attendant. Amazing!!!

I have finally arrived to the theme of this story. What the USMC experience had done for me while serving 24 years in law enforcement.

Most all police departments are run in a military fashion—organization, chain of command, ranks, etc. Uniforms are worn and, of course, weapons training, physical fitness and many other aspects are the same as the U.S. Marine Corps. Having just been released from active duty, I was in the best physical shape of my life and I still carried a military bearing about myself. And, of course, I was full of piss & vinegar and ready to get paid for doing the same things that I did as a kid—get into bar fights, bust heads and maybe learn how to arrest bad guys. My training in the Marines helped me with almost all aspects of being a police officer. My uniforms were always shipshape; my weapons qualification was always a priority, and keeping a clean weapon at all times meant that I would never have a problem defending myself at any given time.

Back in the early days of law enforcement, your training consisted of being issued a badge and a gun, assigned to a training officer, and off to the streets you'd go. The program usually began in the red light / bar district (25th Street) which, at the time, was the roughest section of Ogden. Bar brawls, stabbings, and sometimes shootings would happen on a fairly regular basis. You were evaluated on how well you could defend yourself and your training officer. Being only 5' 9" and 165 pounds, I wasn't a big officer, so a lot of assholes had to prove themselves by whipping the smaller officers. In the Corps and from high

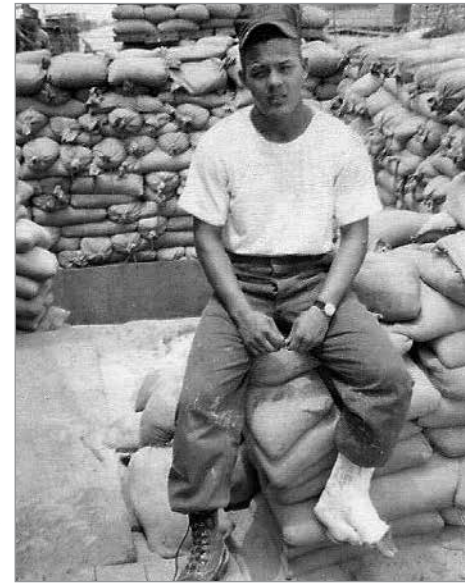
school, from fights on "Smokers Hill," I learned that you should always successfully fight someone who is only 8" tall. This was accomplished by knocking them down as quickly as possible. Hand to hand combat training, a Japanese friend in high school who was a judo champion, plus me being on the high school wrestling team helped me achieve my goal. Bar patrons on "two bit street" learned quickly that you don't mess with the little Chinese officer. Needless to say, law enforcement technology was limited. There were no hand-held radios, paramedics or stun guns. Communications was a radio in your patrol car, and once you left your car you would be on your own. If you needed a phone, you borrowed one or hoped that you remembered to put a couple dimes in your ammo dump pouch for a pay phone. You learned to take care of the problem by yourself, and those skills were definitely developed in the Marine Corps.

After only being in the police department for about five months, I had to relive Vietnam during one of the first times that I was shot at as a police officer. While being the Acting Sergeant on the night shift, we got a call about a man with a rifle who was shooting up a neighborhood. A couple of other officers and I arrived to see a man standing on his front porch with a hunting rifle in his hands. He fired at least two shots. I remembered what it sounds like when rounds hit close to you. While on perimeter guard, I had a few inbound shots taken at me. You would hear the not-so-close shots zipping past you and the real close ones popped in your ear. Anyway, the close ones you remember and a shot by the man caused debris from the building behind me to hit my helmet. The man had to be tear-gassed out of his home. He was arrested for aggravated assault and attempted murder of a police officer (me). In court it was asked, how did I know that the shot was meant for me. I recalled to them my Vietnam experience and needless to say, the man was

convicted and went to prison.

Having started in a large department meant that I experienced a lot very quickly. After serving two years on the Ogden City P.D., I went out to a suburban city called Roy. At the time, money was a big factor while supporting a wife and three kids. I got paid \$560 per month. My life's worth was growing. I rose from the rank of Patrolman to Assistant Chief in twenty two years. But the majority of my time was at the rank of Sergeant and above in the streets with the troops. While in the Corps, we learned to

take care of one another, and most important of all was to lead by example. For many years as Sergeant until I retired, I have always done my best to do just that. It seems like when you're not out there in the streets with your fellow officers / Marines, as a leader, they would follow you anyway, as long



Young Marine Joe Liu with an "Owie!"



Young Officer Joe Liu

as you didn't ask them to do anything that you would not do yourself.

During all critical situations like Man with a Gun, domestic disturbance, homicides, child abuse, etc.; I always tried to be the first one through the door and the last to leave. The safety of my officers always came first. They were always given my support and praise for a job well done; and an ass chewing (in private, of course) if it was needed. All of these things were developed by training and experiences in the Marine Corps.

Another and most important thing

that I learned while in the Corps as it relates to law enforcement was to be aware of your surroundings at all times. Survival in the street is the number one priority for a police officer. After returning from Vietnam, I developed a sixth sense of always being aware of what was around me. This carried over into my police work. There were many occasions in which I had to react quickly and it saved my life several times during critical situations. I learned to anticipate danger, expect the worst and prepare for the same. I guess that I could tell a lot of police "war stories" but that is for another article.

Anyway, to all of you Marines out there who became police officers, you should all be thanked for a job well done in a career that demanded so much of you. I am sure that you will agree with me that the Marine Corps saved your butts more than once. ■

Animal Lovers

(Continued from page 41)

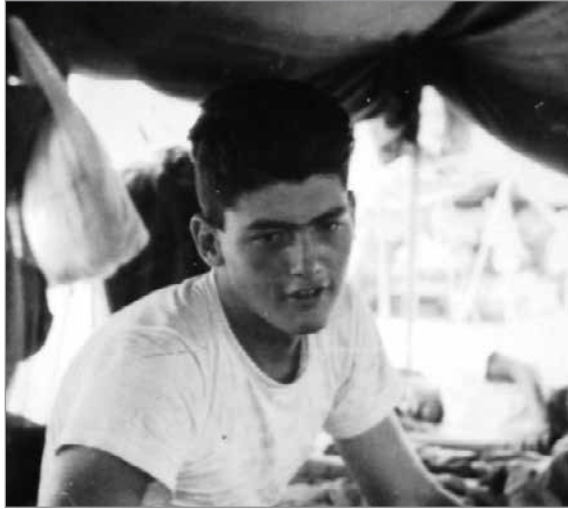
alert. They were told to be ready for an attack at any time. All the grunts and the three tanks on that side of the compound were ordered to open up with everything they had. That included M-60 machine guns, M-79 grenade launchers, M-14 rifles and anything that would shoot and to keep firing until ordered to stop. When the order to fire was given we blasted away with HE rounds from the main gun, augmented by .30 cal. machine gun fire. The whole perimeter opened up; the sound was overwhelming. After a few minutes the firing was ordered stopped and not another sound was heard for the rest of the night. With day break we were

all checking out the area directly in front of us thinking we were going to see NVA bodies stacked on top of each other like cord wood. But instead there was nothing to be seen. A small patrol was formed and sent to investigate, returning after a short time with the news that they had a body count. There were approximately twenty five to thirty dead rock apes lying at the foot of the ridge. I often wonder how this was reported in the daily press briefing at MAC-V in Saigon. Between the chicken incident and the apes it surely was not reported that we were animal lovers in the Stars and Stripes newspaper.

The days seemed to fly by and before long it was time to move again. This time, we had been at the Rock Pile for a little over thirty days; it was now around the first of October and the rains were heavier and more frequent. This was the last time we would see the Rock Pile. We had learned some valuable lessons there and had made some good friends with the mortar crews, the grunts, and of course the recon people who had helped us by pointing out the bad guys so we could put a hurt on them. The platoon had jelled into a tight unit that, so I thought, was going to be together for some time. Another job well done. Time to move on. ■

My Buddy Paul Devers

BY JOSEPH MASTRANGELO, H&S CO., 3RD TANKS, 1965



Paul about a week before he was KIA

On August 22, 1962, a group of 21 Marine recruits gathered at Newark Airport in NJ. All of us were from the New York–New Jersey area and we were waiting to board an ancient DC-3 airplane to South Carolina. One of the recruits was a tall, lanky 18-year-old kid from New York City named Paul Devers. At the time, we did not know it, but our friendship became like sibling brothers and it would last until his death. Over the next four months, Paul and I trained together in boot camp at Parris Island and in ITR at Camp Geiger. Paul and I received the 3000 (supply) Marine Occupational Specialty (MOS). Then, in December, we were sent to Camp Lejeune. Paul went to 2nd Force Service Regiment (FSR) and I went to 2nd Tank Battalion. From our original group of recruits, seven of us were assigned to 2nd Tanks. Two of the seven were tank crewmen assigned to the Flame Platoon, three went to battalion supply and two went to battalion motor transport (Motor-T).

In the months that followed, Paul always seemed to in in the 2nd Tanks barracks. Many times he came with us to the outdoor theater and often we would meet at the parking lot, which we called, “The Circle,” and we’d catch

a ride (a “swope”) to NYC for the weekend.

In September 1964, I received orders for Okinawa and, after a leave at home, I arrived in October where I was assigned to 3rd Tank Bn supply platoon. One month later, to my surprise, this lanky kid walks into the barracks. It was my best buddy, Paul.

There were many afternoons that we spent time at the Enlisted Club having a Budweiser or three. One day, after I had minor surgery on my leg, I was sent back to duty, but I had difficulty walking to the barracks after work, so Paul hoisted me onto his back and carried me there. Paul always talked about his family and especially about his girlfriend Diana. He wanted to go back to school after he finished his enlistment and get a college degree. His father was a New York City firefighter who was killed in the line of duty. I remember one time when he went to Kin Village and bought his girlfriend a beautiful white silk dress that he sent to her.

We were both shipped off to Vietnam to H&S Company, 3rd Tanks. It was located on Hill 34, just below Hill 327, where the 9th Marines HQ and the 12th Marines’ 105’s and 155 howitzers were located.

On the night of August 8, 1965,

Paul was assigned to an outpost where he manned a machine gun position outside of our company HQs location. On the following morning during platoon formation, a promotion to lance corporal was given to Paul and the rank of corporal was presented to me. Instead of reporting to the supply tent, which we did almost every morning like clockwork, Paul was told to get some sleep since, that night, he was again going to man one of the machine gun positions on our line of defense. That afternoon, when I arrived to our tent, Paul was still sleeping. Knowing he and PFC Aguilar had to man the .50 cal. machine gun for the night, I woke Paul so he could get some chow. The last thing he said to me was, “You can sleep safe tonight, because I will be on the line.”

At approximately 2330 Hours the Viet Cong began a mortar attack. Paul’s position took a direct hit and he suffered massive chest and stomach wounds. He was in a tremendous amount of pain and his screams were so loud that everyone heard them. Unfortunately, I can still hear his screams to this day. The corpsman administered a large dosage of morphine and a fellow Marine lit a cigarette for Paul, but he quickly passed away. They medevaced Aguilar and I never saw him again but, years later, I heard that he lost the use of one of his eyes and lost part of a leg and an arm. The following day, another Marine and I were assigned the task of sending Paul’s belongings back home to his mother.

Two weeks later my brother sent me an article that was published in The New York Daily News which stated that the mother of a KIA Marine had received numerous phone calls from war protesters saying that they were glad that her son was killed in Vietnam. Her son was Paul Devers. ■

Stories from Jim Cowman

The Sliding Door

Late in 1966, the 1st Tank Bn. relocated from Chu Lai to Da Nang. Assigned to the S-5 section were Sergeants Keyser and Cheney. Together we planned several patrols to get familiar with the area. Maybe we wanted to play “grunt” as well. One of the patrols took us south to the river, then up river towards the “Ontos” Bn. compound and then back to our area. Not a great distance, but through an area of interest. We usually left before first light.

Our route took us through several villages. It was raining very hard. Keyser and I were standing in a village; it was just getting light and we were armed the way that the grunts should be. We were standing very close to a village hut. With no warning, the huts sliding door opened! This sudden movement scared the hell out of us! The man of the house was standing there, his “tool” in his hand, ready to empty his bladder into the rain. Jumpy as we were, we made some movement and our movement scared the hell out of the man of the house. His facial expression changed from one of enjoying his morning pee to one of sheer terror. The sliding door closed with his efforts in full stream. Once we calmed down, we could not help but chuckle as we continued on our patrol. Later that summer, I saw villages destroyed for less.

Looking For

(Continued from page 10)

least two tanks and some grunts guarding it. One standard M-48 tank and the other was a flame tank. We were on the bridge with a Kit Carson Scout team and became friends with the tank crew in the photo. The tank in the photo is named “The Sound Of Music.”

Thank you for the opportunity and

Nancy Sinatra Show

Nancy Sinatra’s show was scheduled for Feb 8, 1967 at the 9th Engineers Bn. area. Major Hooker and I concocted a scheme to attend. Nancy’s song, “These Boots Were Made for Walking”, was a big hit at the time. Nancy’s group also included a bunch of most attractive young American females, a rare sight indeed in these parts.

Hooker and I arrived early and managed a seat in the fourth row, left front. The show was great, the American gals looked better than ever! Later in the show, Nancy walked to our area, down the aisle and right in front of us. Then she sat down in the lap of the Marine right in front of me. Why him and not me? The young Marine had an M-14 slung around his shoulder, Nancy Sinatra on his lap and flashbulbs going off! I’m sure it was a 40–50 second episode he will never forget. So Hooker and I got a good look at Nancy, who was as pretty as ever and smelled great. It was a good show.

Songs by Major Karr

In 1971, I returned to Vietnam representing the Marine Corps Development Center. One of the projects I monitored concerned the XM174, an automatic grenade launcher that the corps was interested in. Teaching this weapon brought me in contact with most units that were still in RVN. Col. PX Kelly, later the Commandant

of the USMC, was CO of the 1st Marines. I conducted a firing demonstration for the officers and staff of his regiment. The demonstration went well and PX Kelly showed up and fired the weapon. Someone took an excellent photo of a Maj. Karr and me firing the weapon. The photo was published stateside. Maj. Karr invited me to a steak and beer party that evening. Of course I attended it and it was a wild affair before it secured.

Two songs popular at the time were a version of the “1st Marine Division” song and a Marine Corps rendition of “The Green Beret” tune. I noticed that, as Karr and his gang sang, an effort was made to tape record the results. I requested that a copy of the tape be mailed to me.

Four years later, Maj. Karr mailed me a copy of the tape. I still have it! The quality of the tape is not the best, nor is it intended for mixed company. But I would not part with it at any cost.

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

privilege to submit these photos and my story. I sincerely hope someone finds pleasure in them.

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Johnson City, TN 37601
Home Phone: 423-926-7934
dhall7934@charter.net

QUESTION: Does anyone recognize anyone in the photo? Please let John Wear know. ■

Photo from Vietnam

1965 Tanks Chu Lai
Alpha Company, 3rd Platoon, 3rd Tanks

This photo was forwarded to me by one of our Sierra Vista, AZ Marine Corps League members named Gary Shreve. He was a corpsman with 3/3 in 1965-66. He is a past commandant of our detachment. The story is that he once ran into a minefield to rescue wounded Marines when their helicopter crash-landed in that minefield. Jim Coan



Front Row (L to R): Sgt Sam Kaleleiki, LCpl Louis Borriello, PFC Dave Erickson, PFC Rob Lockett, Cpl. Ivan Williams, LCpl Rich Shaver, LCpl Charlie Denton, PFC Tony Pinnetti, LCpl Steve Nicholson
Back Row (L to R): Cpl. Rich Huff, Sgt Dan McQueary, PFC Andy Senecal, Sgt Ed Sipel, Cpl. Bill Raines, Sgt DJ Clark, LCpl Dave Doyle, LCpl JB Thompson, LCpl Ken Zebal, LCpl Milo Plank, LCpl Pat Boromeo, 2nd Lt Ken Zitz.
 Photo identification by Ken Zebal

When you are young, your grandparents try to tell you their history, and you don't care because it doesn't interest you at the time. Later on, you wish you had written what they said down.

QUOTEHD.COM Lillian Trujillo



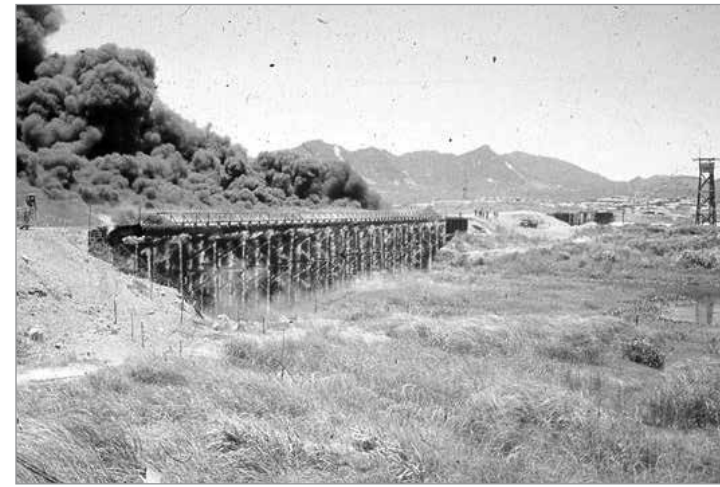
Bomb Crater Bath

I MIGHT GET SO DRUNK I HAVE TO CRAWL HOME BUT BY GOD I'LL CRAWL LIKE A MARINE



Bud Lite Tank

Liberty Bridge Burns August 1969



Lee Dill sent this terrific photo of Liberty Bridge that was nearing completion and then burning to ashes.
 QUESTION: Does anyone have details to share on this subject?

Stuck in the Mud



UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

HE WHO SHEDS BLOOD WITH ME SHALL FOREVER BE MY BROTHER.

THE FEW THE PROUD

www.facebook.com/MarineCorpsLife



Elephant Grass

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

Please check your address label. If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" is less than "15" then your 2015 membership dues are now payable. Make your check out to:

USMC VTA for \$30* and mail to:

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

*Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.



This plaque appears at the Parris Island rifle range.