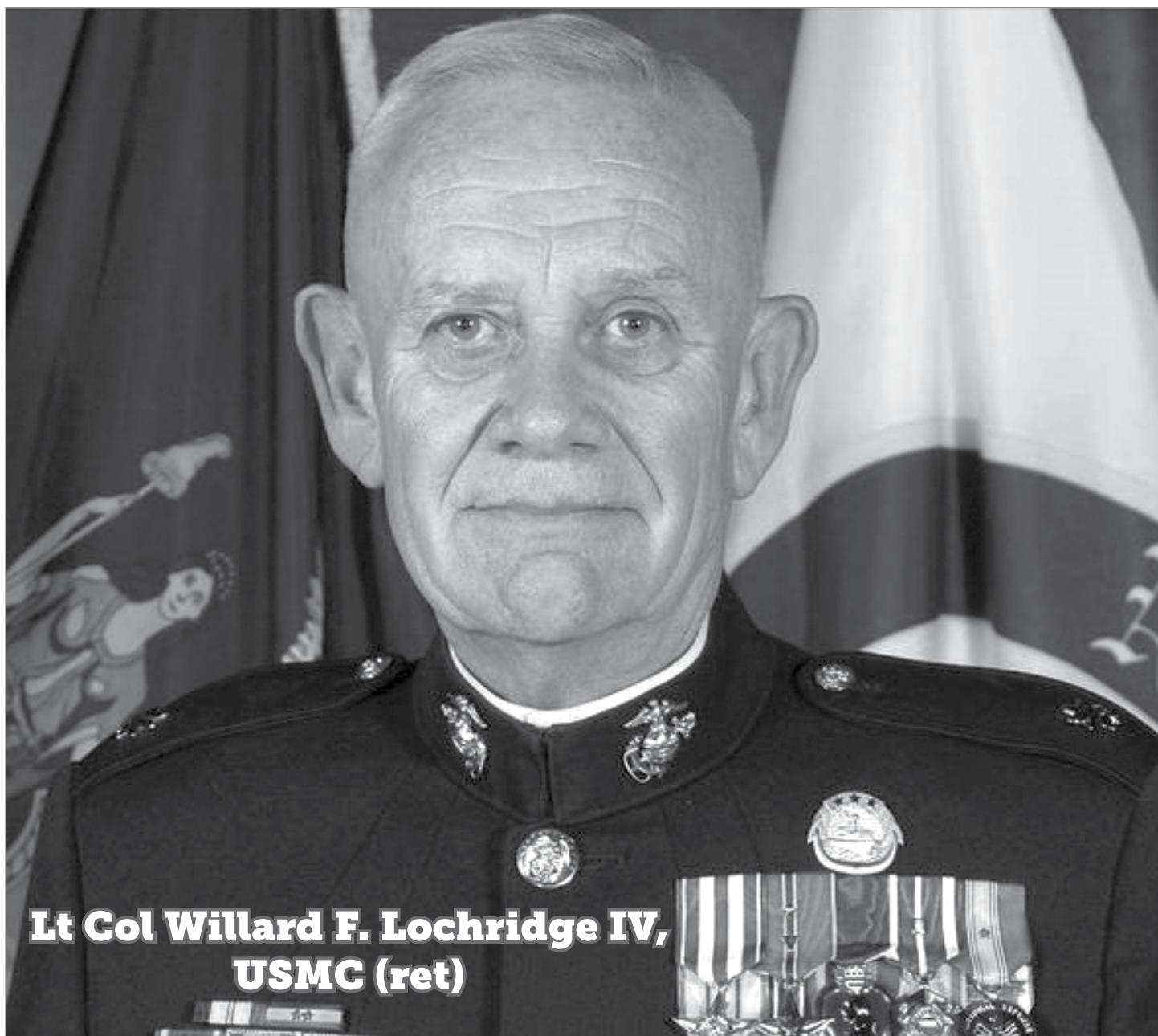




Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



**Lt Col Willard F. Lochridge IV,
USMC (ret)**

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Photos by Bella Krusac

A close-up photograph of a fountain pen nib, showing the fine tip and the feed mechanism. The nib is metallic and polished, with a black grip section visible on the left.

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C Co, 1st Tanks, '68 – '69

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DOB: 03/09/47

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Recruited by: Stan Price

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B Co, 1st Tanks, '66 – '69

MOS: 1811

DOB: ???

Wife: ???

Recruited by: Frank Box

Woolever, Joe E.

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A Co, 3rd ATs, 1965

MOS: 2143-2151

DOB: 11/01/44

Wife: Linda

Recruited by: Am Legion magazine

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Jimmy Didear

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ON THE COVER:

Editor's Note: We lost First Responder Col. Willard “Lurch” Lockridge early last year. He wrote prolifically about his time in-country and afterward. He shared with us many of his stories in our magazine and there are more stories in the hopper to publish at a later date.

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as “Letters to the Editor”)

Ontos Stories

I am a Marine, Vietnam veteran 1802 tanker by training, but I was assigned Ontos duty in Vietnam–September 1966 thru September 1967. My service was with B Company, 1st AT Bn. Most of my time was spent in support of 2/5 – Chu Lai, Hai Van Pass, An Hoa, Liberty Road and Que Son valley.

I am currently a docent at the National Museum of the Marine Corps (sometimes referred to as “Mr. Ontos” or Ontos6). Additionally, I am the team lead for the museum’s community outreach efforts and the team is called Task Force Ontos. Being the team lead I got to name the team.

I have a request for assistance, if possible:

- I really enjoy The Sponson Box. It is a great newsletter.
 - I would like to acquire 4 more copies on the latest issue that focuses on the Ontos.
 - I am more than willing to pay for them and the postage.
 - I showed the Ontos edition to some Marines and historians at the museum and they wanted to get copies.
- Also, I have volunteered to conduct a training class for my fellow docents at the museum on the Ontos.
 - So, I am looking for assistance, guidance for making this presentation.
 - I have a lot of good material from the Sponson Box and my own collection of photos and documents.
 - If possible, I would like a source for photos of the Ontos in action.

Hope this is not too “off the wall.” Thank you for all your efforts to keeping our history and legacies alive.
Semper Fi!

Andy Traynor

703-393-1767 (home)

703-919-9472 (cell)

Email: andy.pam@verizon.net

John Wear writes: If any VTA member does not normally keep their Sponson Box magazines, rather than throwing the special Ontos issue away, I wonder if they’d volunteer to mail them to me?

John Wear

16605 Forest Green Terrace

Elbert, CO 80106

More Ontos Stories

Roger Luli writes: This issue is awesome. I had my friend “the grammar Nazi” review my story, but you and Jim Coan really cleaned it up. I have several stories of my life in the works. Would you be interested in my beginning, my college experience, OCS, The Basic School, and Tank School? I am also working on the ambush at bridge 28. Love USMCVTA

Armando Moreno writes: The USMC VTA should be commended for including the “0353’s” in your organization and for dedicating the most recent past edition of our magazine to us. Throughout the years we have had many fine Ontos crewmen do their part in making sure that Ontos and crewmen would not be forgotten. Steve Markley is one fine Marine, who drew me into the Ontos vocabulary and as a result of his efforts to set up a viable website, many crewmen like me literally found a home there. It is something to be proud of and the stories from Marines I have never met but feel connected to is something very special. Scudder’s Ontos, which has now been sold and in the hands of a new owner is another one of those stories. I look forward to meeting new friends and reacquainting with old friends in Seattle in November. John, by putting our stories, be it Tankers or Ontos, on paper you have immortalized all of us and our experiences. More important, however, are our fellow crewmen, who were KIA, and their families, who will never be forgotten. The Ontos Community owes you a great deal of gratitude for your efforts to keep the “candle burning.”

The Dumbass Saved Us

I read with interest and some emotion the article “The Dumbass Saved Us” by B.R. McDonald in the January 2019 Sponson Box Magazine. The article on the ambush of the 2nd Platoon of A Company, 3RD Tank Battalion was one with which my platoon, 2nd Platoon of A Company, 3rd Tank Bn., was closely connected. We were originally the 2nd Platoon of A Company, 5th Tank Bn. landing at Da Nang around the first part of August 1966. We were deployed around Hill 22 west of Da Nang until receiving orders for movement by LCM to Dong Ha. We were in Dong Ha when we received orders to form up with 1st Platoon of A Company for movement to Con Thien.

1st Lieutenant Don Rohleder was senior to me and led a reconnaissance to Cam Lo to determine the suitable location to cross the Cua Viet River for movement to Con Thien. At the crossing he said, “Hey, Goodine, let me show you how it’s done. Bring your M3A1 and check out this crossing.” He waded into the river with me following to confirm the crossing was viable for our tanks. He inspired me to understand that lieutenants lead and do not delegate the uncertain or difficult work to others.

The next morning, the tanks from both platoons were lined up for the movement to Con Thien. My platoon tanks were experiencing communications problems and were unable to communicate with the 1st Platoon or each other. We were told to stand down until repairs could be made. Several hours later we were diverted to an alternative mission at the mouth of the Cua Viet River where the Seabees >>

were putting in a fuel farm for the Dong Ha region. The next morning, one of my tank commanders, Sergeant Johnny J. Whetsell, informed me that Don had been killed in an ambush on the way to Con Thien at a stream crossing.

I think of him often and know I became a better Marine Platoon Leader because of his example. And God bless that dumbass engineer!

One of your members, James Gulledge, was in my platoon from Camp Pendleton until we returned home in August of 1967.

Paul Goodine
Dripping Springs, Texas

A Thank You for Lt Col David Little

Dave: I saw your article in the VTA Sponson Box. Thanks for doing what should have been done at the time. We lost 33 out of our class and 3 were tankers, Phil, Lou Dobbin, and Wayne Hayes. Phil, Lou, Wayne and I were on the same flight out of Travis. They went to 3d Tanks and I went to 1st Tanks and got a lot of action, but nothing like that the classmates I lost in the Hill Fights.

Our class has stayed together pretty well and has a reunion every two years. If you have contact with his family, let them know we never forgot about Phil and put an engraved brick for him on the pathway at the Quantico museum. We also have a write up on our website which describes the action he was in. The web site is: <https://www.usmc-thebasicschool-1966.com/>. I will contact the web site administrator and send him a summary on the award for Phil and what you did and the family's appreciation for an effort that was no easy task.



I don't know what class you were in but we appreciate what you did, not only for his family, but for his classmates as well.

Jim Ray
LtCol USMC (Ret)

"Lost" Dog Tags?



Ken Burke
Trying to find this person. This dog tag was found in Vietnam 2 years ago by an Australian teacher. His name is not on the wall. Pass it around till he is found

John Wear writes: I don't know if you are aware of this but FAKE DOG TAGS is a multi-million dollar business in Vietnam.

When the US abandoned Vietnam in 1975, the Army left behind hundreds of millions of dollars of equipment. Some of that equipment was all of the machines and materials to produce military dog tags. The unscrupulous Vietnamese then started producing fake copies. They got so good that they even used old steel and put chemicals on it to make it look like it was 50 years old. They sell those fake dog tags everywhere. The unsuspecting tourists buy them because their hearts are pure. Then they spend weeks, months and years looking for the veteran who "lost" his dog tags. The vast majority of veterans who are "found" say, "I did not know that I lost them." And you know what? They didn't...but the gooks pocket the money and laugh all of the way to the bank.

Do a Google Search of "Fake Dog Tags Vietnam"

Forgotten Tracks

The three volumes of Forgotten Tracks that I just ordered arrived yesterday. Have been browsing thru

them and find them utterly captivating. They sure bring back memories – some good, some not so good. But these stories remind me again of the bravery and commitment we all had.

Semper Par
Andy Traynor

Walker Bulldog Tank

Armando Moreno found this static display of an M-41



Walker Bulldog tank on Vandenberg AF base property in California. The membership might recall that the ARVN loved this little tank for the 75mm main gun. The diminutive ARVN soldiers could handle the smaller ammo far better than our 90mm ammo.

Thank you for your Service

Lee Dill writes: I have always been bothered by that phrase ... not that I didn't deserve it but because I volunteered to go, but I always thought it was on me. I tried the Army and then the Marines, so, yes it is on me. But this is not about me. I watched a movie on Amazon Prime today called "Thud Pilots." It is focused on the F-105 pilots of "Operation Rolling Thunder" rather than any other pilot groups. The show is extremely well done. It's narrated by Air Force pilots without any dramatics. It covers the risks they knew they were undertaking with a failed civilian strategy (McNamara-Johnson) and the very real possibility of getting shot down – POW – torture and they still went. They had to believe that they were "the best pilots in the world" and "the luckiest" in order to allow them to strap themselves into the F-105 Thunder Chief. It was a shit-hot plane but ...nearly 400 of all F105's were destroyed!

I have a cousin I never see who resides in Georgia. I was speaking to him on the telephone the other day about the USMC VTA; the stories that we write and that are published and how they seem to heal the writer. He told me he really enjoyed the writings that I had sent to him. I replied that I would like to read his stories. He said that all of his stories would read the same:

A hundred times he went north and thirty times he stayed in the south. He said the F-4 Phantom was an awesome weapon. The pilots would rise, have breakfast, fly north, maybe refuel, get shot at, do their job and then land back at Da Nang.

They'd then go to Officers Club for large amounts of Scotch and then hit the rack. Each mission was the same.

I then inquired about what he would do in case of being shot down. He responded that his plan was to safely leave the aircraft and float gently into the compound of an NVA battalion. I give him a massive amount of credit since the chances of my own capture was extremely low. I truly do not think that I could have participated in each day being given the choices of a successful mission or shoot down – POW – torture. So, "Thank you for your Service" and way to go, Captain Clifford Cole. I am proud of you!!!

Fill 'er up!



The former Sgt Grit sent me this Israeli tank filling up at a gas station...

I Got Choked Up

John Wear writes: I am reading a story about a dog and a homeless man who found her. The homeless man lives in the Colorado mountain town of Gunnison. They call the town "Gunny" and the winter temperatures are some of the lowest in the nation. At the very height of winter, a homeless man (Alex) accidentally (or on purpose) gets very drunk and then overdoses on injected drugs and then dies. For several days the dog stays with him trying to comfort him as the body heat dissipates from his lifeless body. When he and the dog are finally discovered, the following is the dog's version of what happened next:

Soon some men arrived, plus one woman, in big vehicles that had flashing lights on top. They came down to look in Alex's blankets. One of them slipped my leash loose and handed it to one of the boys, who accepted it gravely. He then took me down to the river and I drank deeply. I had been right; people always knew what to do.

Before long, Tom (the policeman) arrived and there were flashing lights on his roof, too. He came down and joined the circle of people.

"Overdose, if I had to guess. Won't know until we get him back," the woman told him.

"God."

They were quiet. Tom knelt down, "Oh, Alex," he murmured mournfully. I felt the grief pour off of him. He put a hand to his face, weeping. One of the other men put >>

an arm on his shoulder. “God,” Tom repeated. He raised his face to the sky. “What a waste. What a tragedy.”

“He was a great man,” the other man murmured. “He served his country in Vietnam and was awarded the Silver Star for bravery on the battlefield.”

“Was,” Tom shook his head in disbelief. “Yes. And look how he wound up.”

Other cars were arriving. They stopped and people got out and stood in the fading light, lined up on the road along the river. They were mostly quiet. Many of them seemed very sad. I saw men and women wiping their eyes.

“Okay, let’s get him out of here,” the woman declared.

They picked up Axel’s body and his blankets, then carried him up to the road and put him in one of the big trucks with lights on the top.

When I first heard the vocal tones, I did not understand what they were doing, but then I realized it was singing, just like Mom used to do when she was at the sink pouring water on the plates. Just a few people, and then more and more, until it seemed all of the people were joined in chorus. I did not understand the words, of course, but I felt the pain and regret and the sorrow in the voices.

We fight our country’s battles
In the air, on land and sea;
First to fight for right and freedom
And to keep our honor clean;
We are proud to claim the title
Of United States Marine.

Fifty Years Ago

Let me start out by introducing myself: My name is Carl Hokanson, I joined the Marine Corps right after High School in 1969. After boot camp, I was given the MOS of 1811, tank crewman. I was then sent to Camp Pendleton, area 21 Delmar, to begin my schooling for tanks. When I completed the training, I was sent to 1st platoon, Delta Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 5th Marines. There I was assigned to an M-103, 120mm (ramp queens). While serving my time, one of the officers I came in contact with was CW04 Robert Embesi.

Two years ago, before I joined the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, I researched the association to find out that even though I did not serve as a tanker in Vietnam, I could join since I was a tanker in the Marine Corps, and I am now happy to say that I am glad. When looking through the Committees & Chairman, I saw CW04 Embesi’s name with a telephone number. I called the number and, lo and behold, it was the same officer I served with.

This now brings me to why I am writing you: In February of 1970. CW04 Embesi took all Marine Tankers out to the Mojave Desert for what was called “Desert Operation One.” We (tankers) spent 30 plus days out there doing training and live fire on all kinds of targets. And now since February 2020 is right around the corner and the 50th anniversary, I

thought you may want to do an article on what he did and show what made tankers 1811s in the Marine Corps.

“Tanks” in advance:

Corporal Carl Hokanson
Tank Commander of Delta-12
Phone: (908) 966-7852

The Harold Riensche Top Tank Mechanic Award



On behalf of the Commanding Officer, LtCol Campbell, and the Marines of the Marine Corps Detachment, Fort Benning, I would like to thank your husband for his service and allowing us to use his name and story as a part of our graduation ceremony. The introduction of this namesake award will serve to both educate and motivate the junior Marines of the tank mechanic community. We look forward to those young Marines going on to do great things of their own accord.

The photos from the first awarding are attached. L/Cpl Eidson (pictured) was the honor graduate and first recipient of the Harold A. Riensche award due to his superior academic and physical performance. I was able to speak with him and his family for a moment after the ceremony and they could not be prouder.

We are finalizing the 2020 Mechanic’s Course schedule. I will pass this along to Mr. Wear once complete. Hopefully, he is able to align a future MCVTA reunion date to a course graduation. Please let me know what I can do to further assist in this effort.

Respectfully,

Captain Brian R. Miller
Operations Officer
Marine Corps Detachment, MCoE
Fort Benning, Georgia

CLASSIFICATION: UNCLASSIFIED

Tanks & Medals of Valor

John C. Chambers

HOME OF RECORD: Evanston, Illinois
AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Corporal

Battalion: 3d Tank Battalion

Division: 3d Marine Division (Rein.), FMF

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Corporal John C. Chambers (MCSN: 2178941), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Commander with Company A, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with operations against insurgent communist (Viet Cong) forces in the Republic of Vietnam, on 19 May 1967. During Operation HICKORY in Quang Tri Province, Corporal Chambers' tank was attached to Company E, Second Battalion, Twenty-Sixth Marines, when the unit came under an intense enemy rocket and mortar attack. In the ensuing battle, his tank was hit by hostile fire, wounding all crew members and setting the vehicle ablaze. Displaying exceptional presence of mind and leadership, he evacuated his crew and was assured that they had received first aid before allowing treatment of his own wounds. Despite the explosions from .50 caliber rounds aboard his



flaming tank, Corporal Chambers re-entered the vehicle, located a fire extinguisher and directed an infantryman in bringing the fire under control. Assisted by a companion, he then proceeded to deliver effective fire against the enemy, alternately firing the .30 and .50 caliber machine guns and the 90-mm. cannon. Although the heat and smoke within the tank twice forced him to leave to get fresh air, he resolutely returned and aggressively continued to fire on the enemy until he was evacuated. Prior to his medical evacuation, Corporal Chambers instructed an infantryman in the operation of the tank's machine guns, ensuring that the weapons could be used effectively in his absence.

His heroic actions and determined fighting spirit inspired his fellow Marines and contributed significantly in repulsing the enemy attack. By his superior leadership, bold initiative, and selfless devotion to duty, Corporal Chambers upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

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

Jim Littman



Littman, Jim of Champlin and Clear-water Lake, passed into light and energy August 26th. Beloved husband of Barbara for 46 years, love of her life for 50 years. Devoted father of Alexander (Jenny), Kara (Jason), loving grandfather to Matthew, Amanda, Justin, Sidney, Olivia and Lillian. Survived by father Rudy, sisters Mikki (David), Patti (Gerry), family and friends. Owner of Littman's Custom Fishing Rods, Marine Vietnam Veteran, Boy Scout Leader, Democrat who believed in equality, medical care and a livable wage for all. Optimistically and valiantly battled Idiopathic Pulmonary Fibrosis for 10 years. Memorial service Sat., Sept 16th, 12 PM visitation, 1 PM service, luncheon following. Lord of Life Lutheran Church, Ramsey MN. Memorials to family to be donated to IPF Research U of M. Private interment. 'wait for me' she said. 'forever' he said. Published on September 13, 2017

Remembering Jim Littman

Frank Carr writes: First off, I need to apologize to Jim's family and all my fellow Marines who knew Jim for not communicating his passing sooner; call it denial, I simply couldn't come to grips with reality. Jim came to Vietnam in March of 1968 and was assigned to 1st Tank Bn., "C" Company, 2nd Platoon where I was stationed. We served together for the next 13 months (I extended for an additional 6 months). We for the most part crewed on the same tank. At first, we had 1st Lt. Duffy as our Platoon CO and had various tank commanders including Corporal Ken Pollock, Corporal Sam Clemons. We quickly became close buddy's, we even were sent T.A.D. for 60 days. I went to O.P. 10 while Jim went to another O.P., though he visited me and I him at our respective locations.

Jim was gunner on a tank which hit a land mine and was also wounded on a night patrol operation which was ambushed just outside Nui Kim Sahn, a small village on the main supply route from Danang to our "C" Co. headquarters. We were ordered to run tanks back and forth all night to keep the enemy from setting mines. On our third night on

this "tiger patrol" they were waiting for us and hit us with RPG's and machine gun fire.

Jim was and always will be my buddy and life-long friend. We stayed in touch and I visited him



Jim and his buddy Frank

at his home in Minnesota. He and his wife, Barbara, drove to Maine and spent several days visiting with my wife, Kathy, and me. It was as if all the years were erased and we were able to pick up where we left off so many years ago. Jim and I bunked together at the San Diego Reunion and enjoyed seeing everyone. Rest in peace my friend and Semper Fi.

Thomas Edward Lauters 7/22/1948–12/10/2017

Thomas Edward Lauters of Coopersville MI, age 69, passed away peacefully in his sleep Sunday morning, December 10, 2017. Tom was born in Port Washington, Wisconsin. Tom proudly served his country in the US Marine Corps, 1st Tank Battalion. Tom was an outgoing and vivacious man who loved his family and treasured them as the greatest gift that God had given him.

John Wear writes: It is a shame that Tom never found the USMC VTA. This obituary was found in the Feb 2019 Leatherneck magazine.

Robert "Bob" Edward Totsky



Was born February 3, 1947 in Hawthorne, California to Arthur E. Tatosky and Thelma G. (Hargrave) Pratt. Bob passed away January 19, 2017 from aggressive kidney cancer. Bob loved his country and proudly served in the US Marine Corps as a tank crewman during the Vietnam War. After serving his country, Bob opened two auto body repair shops in Orange County, California. Along with the typical body

work, he also restored classic cars for many customers including John Wayne. Bob sold his businesses and spent some time traveling. He met his wife Pam (Goodlake) Tatosky in Spokane, Washington in 1987. They were married in 1991 and have a son, Nicholas.

Bill Laurent (1945–2018)



Bill Laurent, 73, passed away on Friday, November 2, 2018. Mr. Laurent was born on June 25, 1945 in Bowie, Texas to Joe Ben, Jr., & Inez Loraine Laurent. He married Sharon Murphy on May 24, 1963 in California. Mr. Laurent joined the Marines at age 17 and served 13 months as a US Marine tank crewman in Vietnam. After being discharged from the Marines he joined the Army reserve and was a Civilian Technician stationed at

Camp George West in Golden, Colorado. He then served in the Air Force Reserve as a civilian technician and retired as a Master Sergeant after 20 years of service. ■

Guest Opinion

NOTABLE & QUOTABLE: JUDGE T.S. ELLIS

As U.S. District Judge T.S. Ellis III began to speak yesterday, American flags fluttered in the breeze and military aircraft zoomed overhead. . . . Ellis had moved his Alexandria [Virginia] courtroom to Arlington National Cemetery to swear in immigrants from more than 30 countries as U.S. citizens, the first time a naturalization ceremony was held on the hallowed grounds in the cemetery's 144-year history. He wanted to impress upon the new citizens the sacrifices made for their freedom.

"This is truly a wonderful day," said Ellis, his voice cracking, as he gave an emotional tribute to the virtues of citizenship, U.S. history and the warriors buried around him. . . .

The judge's passion flowed from his past. Judge Ellis, 68, is also

an immigrant, born in Bogota, Colombia. . . . "I did it to honor our country's warriors and to give the new citizens a sense for what makes this country great," Ellis said. The judge, known for his thorough legal opinions and an occasionally irascible demeanor, said he "didn't want any politicians" attending the ceremony. After the immigrants took their oath, Ellis greeted each one personally, choking up as he hugged a new citizen wearing a U.S. Navy uniform. He then told a woman from Iraq that he was "honored that you chose to be an American."

From "Judge Offers Lesson In U.S. Citizenship" by Jerry Markton, Washington Post, June 12, 2008. ■

FORGOTTEN TRACKS – VOL. 1, 2 and 3

REMINDER: Forgotten Tracks Volume 1.2 and 3, contains important and meaningful stories of our experiences during the Vietnam War and a photo gallery of images supplied by Marines who served in-country.

They can be yours for the price of \$30 each (delivered).

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

You can also purchase any of the Forgotten Tracks series on-line
at our website store at <http://www.USMCVTA.org>

Your USMC VTA History Project Team is currently developing books and video interviews of your personal experiences in Vietnam and in the US Marine Corps. Please help us capture your Vietnam experiences so that future generations can learn from and better understand our war.

VIDEO INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR THE SEATTLE REUNION

Hey Marines, we are now scheduling video interviews for the USMC VTA reunion in Seattle. The interviews will be thirty (30) minutes in duration and will be held on Sunday, November 3, 2019, from 0900 to 1500 in the conference rooms at the hotel. If you would like to be interviewed, please contact Pete Ritch by phone: 850-734-0014 or via email: goldendog@mchsi.com. The interview schedules at the St. Louis Reunion were 90% full prior to the

reunion, so please schedule your interview now to insure you get a slot.

If you would like to view the wide assortment of interviews from our previous reunions, please go to the VTA website and click on "Members Stories, Reunion Interviews."

If you have any questions please contact Pete as listed above

Letter To Home

March 14, 1968, Khe Sanh Valley, Vietnam

My Dearest Darling “Mrs. Perkins,”
I love and miss you so very much, I hope my darling that you are taking very good care of yourself and your little Tiger. Sweetheart, as always, I hope with all of my heart that you both are enjoying the very best health and enjoyment together. I can’t tell you my darling how very-very much I enjoy the pictures of you and one Sherri Berry. I find myself looking at them and admiring my good-looking blonde.
I’d give anything to be able to put my arms oh so very tightly around you. Barb, this trying to write letters by flashlight is something else. Still no mail which makes 10 days now since any mail or ammo/chow resupply. Maybe today.
The VC have really been moving the last few days. We had another Marine from 2nd Platoon killed this morning. He is still on the LZ (landing zone) on our hill. We can’t get a chopper in to get the body out. Oh, here comes the chopper to try again – done. No. They just shot the chopper down. We went and got another chopper in and we got everyone out.
It’s been another long-long day, my darling, and here we are once again into this night and heavy fog. My dearest, even with as bad as things are and as often as we are hit, my most inner thoughts are of you, honey, and

this is coming from my heart. I just can’t wait [until] we are together in Hawaii and married. Boy, hon, we will have a super great time.
What is our little Tiger been up to lately? Have you ever been able to find her bike, honey? How is Tiger doing in school? Have you been helping her with her studies in the evenings? When I get home, we will both help her and our son together.
Well, my darling, I am going to have to close once again. I’ve got to go around the trenches and see how the troops on watch are doing. Will try and get another letter off to you, my darling, again tomorrow. Give our little Tiger a kiss form me, honey, and please give my best to everyone.
With All My Love Always,
Chuck
P.S, Sherri Berry, please give good old mom a good kiss from me. How’s our fish doing, Tiger?

Note: GySgt GH Perkins sent this letter to his fiancée, Barbara Eddowes, two weeks before he was shot by a sniper on March 28, 1968. He died from his wounds on May 17. They had planned to meet in Hawaii to be married while GySgt Perkins was on R&R. GySgt Perkins was a widower and Mrs Eddowes, who sent the letter, had a young daughter, Sherri, whom Gunny Perkins called “Tiger.”
First published in Leatherneck Magazine – June ■

What Members Are Doing

John Hunter writes: The photo is of me (on the left) and my son, Michael, at the Fox/Pala Raceway on our dirt bikes. The track is located on the Pala Indian Reservation about 14 miles from where I live in California. We are riding what they call the “Vet Track.” I have never ridden the Pro Track. To be honest, haven’t worked up the nerve yet. But this is not bad for a 72-year- old grandpa! Riding dirt bikes is a lot of fun, and not as dangerous as you would think, as long as you keep it under control. ■



GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who this hard charging tank driver is in this photo?
The first person to contact John Wear (Phone: 719-495-5998) with the right answer will have his name entered into a raffle to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

John Grooms called on 4/10/19 at 12:30 PM to correctly identified Charlton Heston.
COMMENT: We are still waiting to see if anyone can identify the officer standing in front of the Ontos.



V. A. News & Updates

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

Personnel Files: Military Service and Pension Records at the National Archives

The National Personnel Records Center (NPRC), Military Personnel Records, holds most existing military personnel, health, and medical records of discharged and deceased veterans of all services from World War I to the present. Official Military Personnel File (OMPF) records may be requested online at <https://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records>, by mail (the appropriate address listed on the back of the form), or fax (314-801-9195) using the Standard Form 180.

Veterans and their next-of-kin (NOK) may request these records. According to the NPRC, for the Air Force, Navy, Marine Corps, and Coast Guard, the NOK is defined as the unremarried widow or widower, son, daughter, father, mother, brother or sister; and for the Army, the NOK is defined as: the surviving spouse, eldest child, father or mother, eldest sibling or eldest grandchild.

If you do not meet the definition of NOK, you are considered a member of the general public and may request military records via the Freedom of Information Act (FOIA). See Access to OMPFs by the General Public at <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/general-public.html>.

In 1973, a disastrous fire at NPRC destroyed approximately 16 million to 18 million Army and Air Force official military personnel files. In such cases where files were lost, NPRC uses alternate sources of information to respond to requests.

More information about obtaining military

personnel files can be found on the NPRC website, <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/>

Or by contacting the center at:

National Personnel Records Center Military Personnel Records
1 Archives Drive St. Louis, MO 63138
Tel: (314) 801-0816 congressional line
Tel: (314) 801-0800 public line

Status Update Request Form: <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/forms>

Older military personnel records (generally prior to 1917) are located at:

National Archives and Records Administration Textual Archives Division Washington, DC 20408
<http://www.archives.gov/veterans/military-service-records/pre-ww-1-records.html>

Military Awards and Decorations

The NPRC also provides information on how to request military awards and decorations online and by mail for veterans and their NOK; replacing certain military medals; and obtaining a Cold War Recognition Certificate. The general public may also purchase a copy of the veteran's OMPF to determine the awards due and obtain the medals from a commercial source.

Request information on Military Awards online at <https://www.archives.gov/st-louis/military-personnel/public/awards-and-decorations.html>. Military Service Records, Awards, and Unit Histories: A Guide to Locating Sources

Congressional Research Service 2

By military service (Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force including Army Air Corps & Army Air Forces) via mail:

National Personnel Records Center
1 Archives Drive, St. Louis, MO 63138

The NPRC will provide copies of DD-214s (or equivalent) or SF-50s to authorized requesters upon request. These documents may be used to apply for the Certificate. This is in accordance with the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 1998 (P.L. 105-85, Section 1084). This Certificate is awarded to all members of the armed forces and qualified federal government civilian personnel who served the United States during the Cold War era from September 2, 1945, to December 26, 1991.

Finding Unit Histories

The Modern Military Records office of the National Archives and Records Administration (NARA) has custody of records relating to World War I, World War II, Korea, and Vietnam. The records vary by conflict and branch of service. The records for Army units active during the interwar periods (1920-1939 and 1945-1950) are incomplete. For more information, contact the Textual Records office at:

Textual Records Office National Archives and Records Administration at College Park

8601 Adelphi Road College Park, MD 20740-6001
Tel: (301) 837-3510
Email: archives2reference@nara.gov

If a military unit record is not publicly available, a FOIA request may be submitted to the agency where the record is held. For example, for special access records held at the National Archives at College Park, contact the Archives FOIA office at:

Special Access and FOIA Division

The National Archives at College Park
8601 Adelphi Road College Park, MD 20740-6001
Tel: (301) 387-3190
Email: specialaccess_foia@nara.gov

For more information on how to submit a FOIA request, visit <https://www.foia.gov/how-to.html>

Auxiliary and organizational records, including morning reports, unit rosters, officer pay cards (Army), muster rolls (Navy), U.S. Army Surgeon General's office records and Veterans Administration index cards are maintained at the National Archives at St. Louis, Missouri. Further information is available at <http://www.archives.gov/st-louis/archival-programs/other-records/index.html>.

Certain published unit histories can be found in the collections of the Library of Congress or the military history center for the U.S. Marine Corps.

Marine Corps History Division
2044 Broadway Street Quantico, VA 22134
<http://www.history.usmc.mil>
(703) 432-4874 research inquiries
(703) 432-4877 general inquiries

Marine Corps Heritage Foundation
18900 Jefferson Davis Highway Triangle, VA 22172
Email: info@marineheritage.org

Understanding the Medicare Late Enrollment Penalty

When learning about enrollment, it's important to keep a few key things in mind when it comes to rules and risks. Medicare costs enough without additional penalty fees. Learn how to avoid these fees and make your Medicare experience as seamless and pain-free as possible. The most important thing to consider before you enroll in Medicare is that you are late if you did not join within 3 months after your Medicare Part A or Part B becomes

effective. It does not matter if you have private health insurance or are covered by the VA medical system.

Medicare Part A penalty

Most people eligible for Medicare are entitled to Part A for free. This is because you or your spouse already paid the Medicare tax when you were still working. (This is the FICA deduction on your paycheck.) If you did not previously work or did not work long enough, you can still get Part A but you may have to pay a premium.

If you did not get automatically enrolled or sign up during your Initial Enrollment Period, you will have a late penalty premium for Part A when you do sign up later on.

The enrollment periods and premium penalties are the same whether you are entitled to Medicare Part A or can voluntarily buy Medicare Part A.

The penalty premium is 10% of the current Part A premium. You will continue to pay the penalty premium for twice the number of years you were eligible for Part A but did not enroll.

Medicare Part B Penalty

If you sign up late for Medicare Part B, you will have to pay a late penalty premium every month for the rest of your life, along with your Part B premium. Your monthly Part B premium will go up 10% for each full 12-month period that you could have had Medicare Part B but did not take it. You will pay this higher premium as long as you have Medicare Part B.

You may not have to pay the penalty if you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP). You might qualify for an SEP if you had health insurance through your job or your spouse's job when you were first eligible to sign up for Medicare Part B.

You may not have to pay the penalty if you had health insurance through your job or your spouse's job when you were first eligible to

sign up for Medicare Part B.

Medicare Part D penalty

There is a late penalty premium for not joining a Medicare Part D drug plan when you first become eligible for Medicare. Generally, you are late if you did not join within 3 months after your Medicare Part A or Part B becomes effective.

You do not have to pay the penalty if you are eligible for the Extra Help with costs.

You may not have to pay the penalty if you qualify for a Special Enrollment Period (SEP) because you had other drug coverage that is as good as Medicare (creditable coverage) at the time you turned 65. Examples of creditable coverage include:

- Coverage through your job or your spouse's job, OR
- Retiree coverage, OR
- Coverage through the Veterans Administration.

The penalty premium is added onto the regular premium that you pay to your Medicare drug plan. The fee is calculated as 1% of the average monthly prescription drug premium (1% of \$35.02 in 2018) times the number of months you were late, rounded to the nearest 10 cents. This penalty is permanent – you would have to pay it for as long as you have Medicare Prescription Drug Coverage.

In 2018, the average monthly prescription drug premium is \$35.02. Therefore, the penalty fee will be calculated as 1% of \$35.02, times the number of months you are late enrolling in Part D. If you were 12 months late in enrolling, your penalty would be \$4.20, paid on top of your drug plan's monthly premium. This amount may go up each year you're enrolled in a Part D plan.

<http://www.marineheritage.org/>
(800) 397-7585 (703) 640-7965 ■

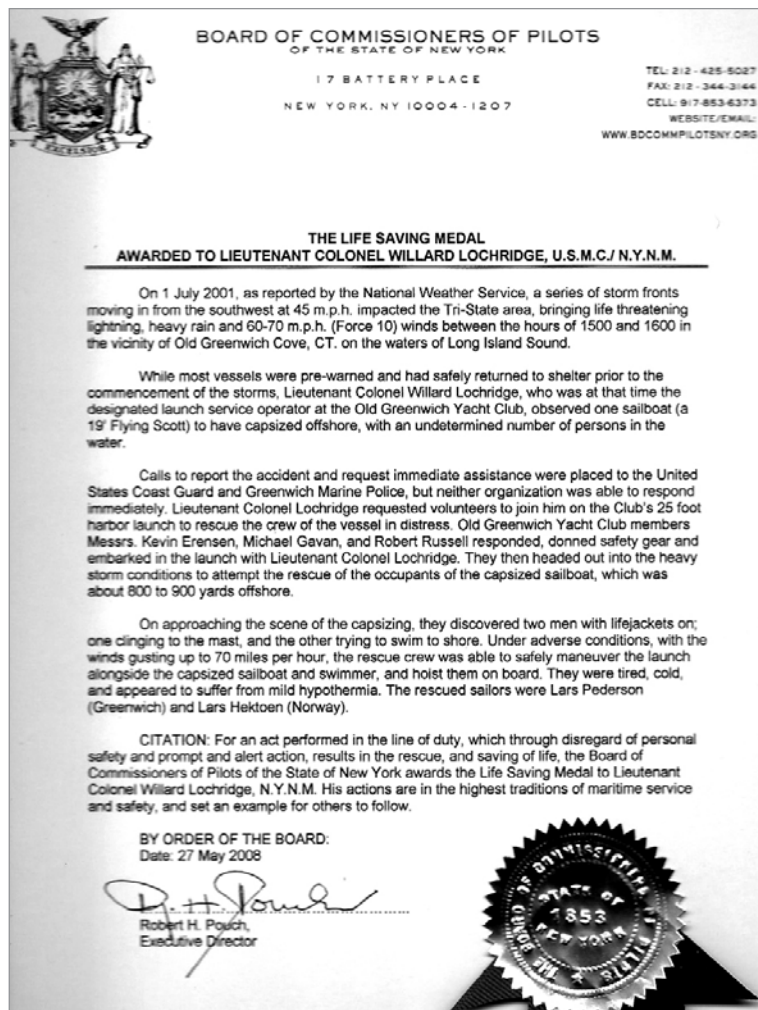
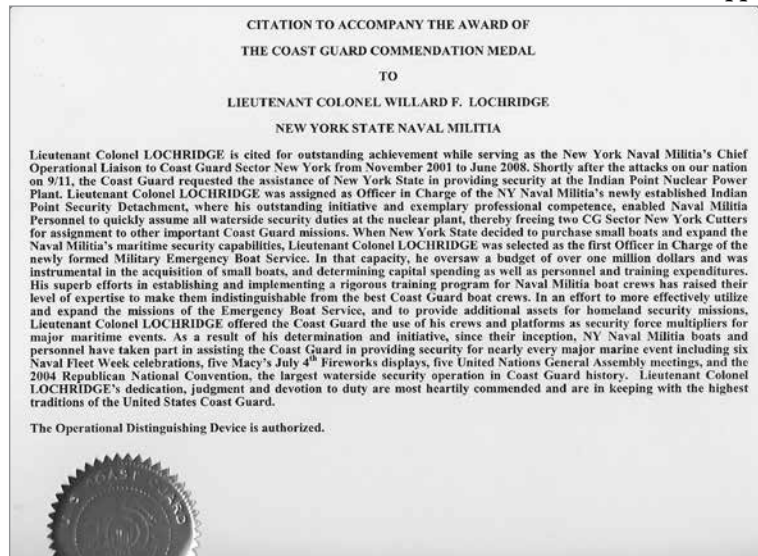


A letter to the Chief of Staff, New York Naval Militia:

Unfortunately, Colonel Willard (Bill) Lockridge recently passed away. Not only was he an officer in the New York State Naval Militia, but he was also a highly decorated US Marine Corps officer, Vietnam veteran, and a long-time member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. Bill wrote prolifically for our 48-page quarterly publication, the *Sponson Box* magazine. We want to honor Bill in the next issue that comes out in June 2019. His photo image will grace the cover and, even though we have many still unpublished stories that he wrote, I want to feature a story of how the NY State Naval Militia was involved during the 9-11 evacuation of Manhattan. I recall Bill writing something about the heroic efforts of everyone involved; but, for whatever reason, I cannot locate it. I am asking you, if you have it, to please send me a link to any material that I might use in a story about 9-11 in NY Harbor.

John Wear.
President USMC VTA

The reply: CAPT David Hawley, Chief of Staff, New York Naval Militia wrote: Unfortunately, COL Bill Lockridge was retired from the NY Naval Militia before I arrived. Col. Lockridge was our first Military Emergency Boat Service (MEBS) Commander. As such, he was instrumental in building the strong foundation of the 10 patrol boat fleet we have today. Many of our Na-



val Militia members were recalled to State active duty during the 9-11 World Trade Center Support Operations. These members provided pier security, hospital corpsmen supported first aid for our troops, and various other support operations that earned them the New York State Defense of Liberty medal.

Post Script: Major General Robert Wolf, the former commanding officer of the NY Naval Militia and I had a telephone conversation regarding his long-time friend, Bill Lockridge. It turns out that on 9-11, Bill went to the Connecticut Yacht Club and borrowed a yacht from a prominent CT family and sailed the boat down the East River to the 23rd Street Pier. For the next week or so Bill helped to coordinate with the US Coast Guard and the NYC Police in helping evacuate Manhattan. The general told me that during the first few days after the Twin Towers came down the Director of the NYC Emergency Management Office asked if he could “borrow” Bill, and then the director had Bill as an assistant for the next month in the aftermath of 9-11. The general added that, in the last days of Bill’s life, he visited Bill in hospice. The general said that he handed Bill a NYC Naval Militia challenge coin of which Bill held in his hand for the next few days until he passed away. ■

From Murderer and Baby Bomber to Pig In Less than a Year

BY S/SGT. JOSEPH P. KELLEY
Vietnam '65-'66-'67

I know, you’re probably thinking, what a strange title. However, I’m hoping by the end of this article you will have a better understanding of it.

I am relatively new to the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. I made application July 2017. It was shortly after the April–May–June issue of the *Sponson Box* that I had the pleasure of speaking with John Wear. During the conversation, John found out I was a former trooper in the State of New Jersey. John advised me that several guys that are in the association also had careers in law enforcement and had written articles in the above-mentioned issue. He then requested that I do the same and to send one in. So here goes.

Since my time in Vietnam, and my career in the New Jersey State Police, I had written a book titled “Wounds of the Heart.” I haven’t been able to get it published; however, that’s a long story for another day. I’m thinking it may have something to do with the content because it basically says that all those who protested the Vietnam War committed treason against the United States. The book is not based on my opinion but an investigation conducted by me showing that they committed this crime according to the law. Yet, our elected officials never charged these people with the crime of treason, allowing them to get away with it, of which many of them prospered greatly and many others have reached high levels within our government showing that history is relevant, and it dictates the future.

I guess by now you are wondering what this has to do with law enforcement. Well, it was shortly after the beginning of my second tour and just after Third Tank Battalion moved north from Da Nang to Gia Le, that was

between the towns of Phu Bai & Hue. Fred Goger, another member of this association and I were having a conversation, and he advised that when he was home on leave that he met a New Jersey State trooper who told him that law enforcement liked getting ex-serVICemen. It was right then and there that I decided if I make it back to the World that I was going to pursue law enforcement ... specifically the New Jersey State Police as a career choice.

When I got back from the Nam, I had 10 months to do in the Corps. I got out on a Friday in July, 1968. By Monday I was working, and within two weeks I had two jobs. I was lucky because by the end of that month the New Jersey State Police had a walk-in test. I passed the written test and all subsequent tests that were given between July 1968 and March 1969. So, I entered the Academy in March and graduated in July. For my first four years, I served at various road stations in North Jersey. I was then promoted to detective for the rest of my career. I served as a crime scene investigator out of the North unit. The crime scene units handled all crime scenes for the New Jersey State Police. However, our services were also offered out to all municipal, county and federal agencies who required our expertise. That gave us an extensive amount of experience. Burglary and thefts, hold ups and robberies, rapes, assaults of all kinds, suicides, and for me, well over 700 homicide investigations.

It was during my 26 years of service to the New Jersey State Police that a few cases that I have worked on involved several members of the more violent factions of the anti-war movement. The Vietnam War for me did not end in 1967. The war for me

ended in 1992. For many of us who entered law enforcement we’d would find ourselves right back in the fight in Vietnam. The only thing that changed was the geography and the color of the uniforms that we wore.

The jungles and the rice paddies turned into concrete sidewalks and black-topped highways. The more brazen of Uncle Ho’s buddies here in the States consisted of the Students for a Democratic Society, Student Peace Union, Black Liberation Army, New African Front, United Freedom Front, Anti-Vietnam War Moratorium, Black Panthers and the various religious groups that assisted the communists with their quest for world domination. The tactics were the same, covert and guerrilla in nature.

Those of us who became law enforcement agents, from time to time we would meet up with and engage, usually violently, with the members of these groups as they waged their war against the United States. They hid themselves among the other dregs of society who found it easier to break the laws of the country rather than conform to be a lawful and productive citizen.

The Weathermen, headed up by Bill Ayers and Bernadine Dohrn, issued a “Declaration of a State of War” against the United States Government in 1970. In the declaration of war, Bernadine Dohrn, the now wife of Bill Ayres, made statements such as: “Revolutionary violence is the only way. Now we are adapting the classic guerrilla strategy of the Viet Cong and the urban guerrilla strategy of the Tupamaros to our own situation here in the most technically advanced country in the world.”

Ché Guevara taught us that >>

“revolutionaries move like fish in the sea.” The alienation and contempt that young people have for this country created that ocean for this revolution. The hundreds and thousands of young people who demonstrated against the war and for civil rights in the Sixties grew to hundreds of thousands a few weeks after Nixon’s invasion of Cambodia and the so-called “attempted genocide against black people.”

In 1969, this group, along with the Student Peace Union, Black Liberation Army, New African Front, United Freedom Front, Anti-Vietnam War Moratorium, and the Black Panthers formed an alliance they called the **May 19th Communist Organization**. They chose the date May 19 because it is the birthday of both Ho Chi Minh and Malcolm X.



In May 1973, JoAnne Deborah Byron (aka Assata Olugbala Shakur), born July 16, 1947, had a married name of *Chesimard* and a

member of the Black Panther party (BPP) and Black Liberation Army (BLA). She became involved in a shootout on the New Jersey Turnpike, during which time a New Jersey State trooper, Werner Forester, and BLA member with the last name of King were killed. Assata Shakur (*JoAnne Chesimard*,) and Trooper James Harper were wounded. Trooper Harper stopped the vehicle for speeding on the Jersey Turnpike. The driver, Zayd Shakur, and trooper Harper were in conversation when Trooper Forester pulled up on the scene and engaged. Trooper Harper moved to the right side of the vehicle to check the passenger who was female. Trooper Forester evidently found a magazine on the driver and announced to Trooper Harper that *Chesimard had her hand in her purse*.

Trooper Harper suspecting something bad started to back up.

The subject by the name of King in the backseat, shot through the back window hitting trooper Forrester in the right arm, breaking his arm, allowing Shakur to get control of trooper Forrester’s gun and killing him with his own weapon.

The gun battle between troopers Harper, *Chesimard*, and King resulted in *Chesimard and trooper Harper being wounded and King being killed. All three of these individuals were wanted by the FBI. A trial was conducted and Chesimard and Shakur were convicted.*

I was still in uniform at the time this gun battle took place and was detailed to Interchange 10 of the New Jersey Turnpike as part of a blocking force. None of these individuals came to that location and they were captured by troopers at the southern end of the incident.

Another case I was involved in was with BLA member Marilyn Jean Buck (born 1947 in Jasper, Texas) She was a white woman and a so called “American.” A self-described anti-imperialist activist and a convicted felon who was convicted of conspiracy in a number of violent crimes, she had also been convicted for her participation in the 1979 prison break of Assata Shakur (*Chesimard*). She was also convicted of conspiracy to commit armed robbery as a participant in the Brinks robbery of 1981 in which members of The Weather Underground and Black Liberation Army used a car owned by her and apartments rented in her name as safe houses and provided the perps weapons.

During the investigation into the armed robbery and the subsequent attack, I was part of an investigation team that found a supply of automatic weapons, shotguns, ammunition, bomb-making material and something else—detailed blueprints of six Manhattan police precincts—in a safe house apartment in East Orange, New Jersey that was rented by “Carol Du-

rant,” an alias that Buck used. We also found papers there that led us to an address in Mount Vernon, New York, where they found bloody clothing and ammunition. Investigation later revealed that the bloody clothing belonged to Marilyn Buck, who had accidentally shot herself in the leg when she tried to draw her weapon during the shootout at Mountain View.

This woman was also convicted for her role in the 1983 U.S. Senate bombing, “conspiracy to protest and alter government policies through use of violence.” Buck received an 80-year sentence for the Capitol bombing that she is still serving at FCI Dublin in California. Her Federal Prison register number is 00482-285. Due to my involvement with the safe house in East Orange, I testified in her trial in Federal Court in Brooklyn, New York.

When the last American combatant left Vietnam in 1973 and the Draft became a thing of the past, most of the anti-war dissidents left the garbage-strewn demonstration fields of America and scurried back into their holes like the cockroaches they are. This was done only after they found out they wouldn’t have to serve their country or go to war, which many of them probably wouldn’t have had to do anyway. The more violent scum of the earth continued their war against America.

That war lasted well past our involvement in Vietnam. It lasted well past the seventies into the nineties.



On December 21, 1981, the war on the streets of the United States continued. Thomas William Manning and Richard Charles Williams, two members of the United Freedom Front also allied with the “May 19 Communist” organization, had been continuously conducting

their war against America since 1972. I was on vacation December 21, when these two mutts gunned down a friend of mine, Trooper Philip Lamonaco. Phil was a US Marine Vietnam veteran continuing in the defense of his state and country. He surrendered his life on a snow-covered black top at the western end of Route 80 attempting to bring these two mutts to justice. Phil had recovered an illegal gun from Manning and was involved in conversation with him when Williams jumped out of the passenger side of the vehicle firing is automatic at Phil, hitting him 13 times. In the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and the New Jersey State Police, Phil did not go down without a fight, emptying his six-shot revolver in the process.

My last battle of Vietnam ended 1992 in the second courtroom battle in Somerville, New Jersey, regarding this case. This is where, after many days of testimony, a guilty verdict was

received on Richard Charles Williams. My tour in Vietnam lasted 27 years due to these cases. This makes it very difficult for anyone to forget they were ever in such a place as Vietnam, especially when it was the Americans that continued the fight for communism long after we left there.

Shortly after I retired from the NJ State Police, I was watching a documentary on television about the 1980 Olympic hockey game with the Russians called the “Miracle on Ice.” It was during this broadcast when the narrator stated, “There were a lot of hotspots in the Cold War and this was just another one”.

I don’t know why, but that statement sent me over the edge to the point where I jumped out of the chair screaming at the television saying many, many, bad words. It was during this tirade that I heard my wife’s voice say, “If you kick that TV, I will kill you.” Now, Victor Charlie didn’t scare

me much but my wife could be fierce. So, my response was, “That fucking tears it.” I went to my computer and wrote a poem called “Wounds of the Heart,” which turned into a one-hour music video and an 800-page book by the same name. Although it hasn’t been published, I think it has served as a bit of a catharsis for me, to know that I was right.

We, as veterans, don’t forget the time that we spent in war or the people that we served with. That, coupled with the actions of these people who continued to show their contempt for the United States of America during and long after the Vietnam War by continuing to use the war as their reason for committing these crimes as well as the crime of treason makes it twice as difficult to forget that we were there.

It is an honor to have served with you, as well as being part of this group. Thanks for letting me tell my story.



Both Sides of the Fire

B: L/CPL TERRY WALLACE

When I was six, I poured some lighter fluid into the basement coal stove to see what would happen. I found out, and the story is still in my family. Thankfully, the house didn’t burn down. This was a bad start to my firefighting career.

When I was sixteen I joined the Falls Township Fire Co. No. 1 in Pennsylvania as a junior firefighter. The rush of the alarms, riding the back step, laying hose, taking hydrants, fire suppression, and everything about it was right up my alley. These were the days before SCBAs were mandatory and Nomex hadn’t been invented yet. A wet towel over the face had to do sometimes for a quick search. There was a lot of company training as well as the State Fire Academy, where we

learned the technology of the day. It was primitive compared to today’s fire science and fire ground management.

After high school came the Marine Corps. My MOS was 1811, Tank Crewman. My wave of FNGs came in mid-1966, where I ended up in 1st Tank Battalion near Chu Lai. H&S Company was getting set to rotate north to the Da Nang TAOR, so I had limited tank experience there. After the move I was assigned to H&S gun and flame tanks, usually as a gunner in flames or gunner or loader in guns, in addition to plenty of foot patrols and guard duty. Mid-tour, I was transferred to C Company, where I also worked on both gun and flame crews. I thought about my early firefighting experience while I was in flames, and

thought it was insane to be delivering the fire instead of putting it out. Still, flame tanks were awesome. It’s a good thing that firefighters seldom encounter napalm on scenes.

A month before I left for the World, I was driving a C Co. flame tank in a small convoy heading westward toward an assignment at a bridge we had traveled to before. I was driving the second tank in the column, and we were moving pretty fast. I thought it was a perfect day for a road trip as I carefully tracked behind the lead tank. Suddenly, everything went black. I could see or hear nothing. All I felt was a slow upward rolling motion as if riding a roller coaster. I could distinctly smell the odor of cordite or some kind of explosives. I came to somewhat >>

after the tank had rolled to a stop. Confused, I started to climb out of the driver's hatch just as guys were climbing down to check on me.

The next thing I remember was getting extremely pissed. Normally, I am an unemotional guy. I jumped down and started to run up and down the road, examining the tank tracks, eyeballing the damage, and telling everybody I saw that I had been tracking the tank in front. I didn't calm down until some Marines shuffled me safely off the road to the side of the tank where a crowd of guys were standing. They assured me that I had been tracking. Someone, maybe a TC or someone in authority looked me over and asked if I wanted him to put me in for a Purple Heart. That enraged me again, insisting I'd seen much worse injuries so I didn't deserve one. Everything else about the incident, how I or the tank got back, any medical treatment, I don't remember. I also don't remember my crewmates or the guys in the Company except a few who have been in touch with me.

The rest of my tour was tank maintenance. I took many pictures of my damaged tank, a couple of which are attached. I don't remember much of the rest of my tour except being told

my tank had to be dead lined with a cracked hull and ejected escape hatch, in addition to losing most of the port side suspension and wheels. I had long filed the incident away when I began my civilian career until I started having significant memory problems several years ago. The VA found that I had suffered a TBA in the mine incident, something I never considered until I started treatment. They have been treating me for it for several years. Of course, the claim is still pending a final decision. The VA is another story.

My work with fire did not end there. From 1990 to 2000, I served as a volunteer firefighter in the Jackson Fire Co. No. 1 in New Jersey. Starting as a probie, I worked my way through Fire Academy and got all of the required certifications for interior fighting. It was a busy department with many vehicle fires, entrapments, and brush and structure fires. I was so involved with it that I continued to train and study, working my up through the ranks of First and Second Lieutenant, Captain, and finally Assistant Chief of the Department for the final two years. I liked the Captain's job the most, running the training programs and drills.

Most firefighters know that there is a big difference in responsibility

between firefighting and fire ground management. They are different skill sets. Where it is a firefighter's and line officer's job to save lives and put the fire out while ensuring safety and controlling assigned operations, the chief's role is to be the incident manager. The chief is the first on scene. Unless there is a closing window of opportunity for urgent rescue that cannot wait for crews to arrive, the chief provides a realistic size up, requests additional resources, establishes priorities, sectors, and divisions, staffs them with line officers, delegates water and other resources and is responsible for the entire operation. Where line personnel and officers do the work, the chief is the manager. I believe that was the most difficult job I have ever encountered.

Because of work demands and a move, I had to end my tenure with the Department. I did serve for a while as a commissioner (a different beast altogether). I am grateful and proud to have served in both the Marine Corps and in the fire departments. My early interest in fire has led me to learn about and work on both sides of it in my own lifetime. I have never since poured flammables into a fire! If anyone asks me about that, I will deny it.

basement. I lived at home four more years until I was married. I had a new car and enough money for my needs, but where would I go from here. I had enough self-respect to know I wasn't going to hang around with those I left behind, still hanging around bars and on the street. After four years of Marine Corps life, and the order and discipline it provided, civilians scared me. This whole discharge thing was a mixed bag and not what I thought it would be.

I decided to enroll in a school to study electronics and possibly work for IBM. That sounded like a good idea, since one of my uncles did that and seemed to be living a good life. Within three months after discharge, I was sitting in a classroom learning electronics. I discovered I had great aptitude for the theory and mathematical formulas, but none for the hands on lab work. I realized this was not for me, but I stayed with it for nine months to get a certificate of completion, for the first part of the course.

Sometime during the latter part of my schooling, I realized I was more cut out for police work, or something similar. As I was getting information to file for the New York City Police Department, a man who lived on my block, a Korean War Marine, and recipient of the Navy Cross, who was a New York City firefighter, told me the filing for the firefighters test was open. This whole concept took me by surprise. I could identify with police, but I never thought of being a firefighter. He explained to me that I had nothing to lose. It was only a job and I didn't have to take it, but it would be smart to at least take the test. I had nowhere else to go, so I bought books on past tests and studied from them. I took the test in the late spring of 1968 and was appointed in the first class of 250 that September. There was an immediate need for 700 new people, since the World War II and older firefighters were retiring. I could see, while I was

taking the test and going through the physical and medical testing, the people I was with were just like me. Many were veterans, former police officers, people from the trades and a variety of others. It was the same type of group I experienced in the Marine Corps. I felt at home and safe.

After the training school, which lasted two months, I was assigned to a ladder company in Midtown Manhattan. I was single, living at home, and I loved going to work. I learned how dangerous the work could be, but you always knew someone had your back and was right there with you. I realized how much this was like the combat I experienced in Vietnam. The little sneaky people replaced by the "Red Devil." Just like any team, we all had a different job to do to accomplish the mission. Engine companies stretched hose lines and extinguished the fire, and ladder companies forced entry, ventilated and searched. Battalion chiefs and deputy chiefs determined the strategy and issued orders to the units.

I stayed in my first ladder company for two years, and then transferred to another Midtown Ladder Company, which was more active and had a more interesting response area. We were first due at the Empire State Building and Madison Square Garden, as just a few of the prominent spots. I remained here until I moved out of the city to a small community, 60 miles north of Manhattan. I then transferred to the Bronx, in 1973. I went from civilization to the "Wild West," both in and out of the firehouse. The Bronx was mainly a tenement area as opposed to mainly commercial in Midtown. There were many more fires in tenement areas, but they were usually visible and not as large an area and dangerous as commercial buildings.

All through my time, I was amazed at how Marines could sniff out each other. Maybe it was because we talked of our service more than

others. There were many Marines I worked with, and for the most part they were squared away. These Marines were anywhere from WW II to Vietnam and later to the Gulf War. Although there were many Marines from Vietnam in the Fire Department, I would come across relatively few that I worked with. It didn't really matter, because any Marine from any time was a just as good, active, or reserve. This is something only a Marine would understand.

After 5 years in the Bronx, I studied for and was promoted to lieutenant and reassigned to Queens, where I remained for five years until I was promoted to captain and reassigned to the Harlem area of Manhattan, where I stayed two years before returning back to the Bronx. After five years as a captain, I was promoted to battalion chief and returned to Harlem, where I stayed for ten years, until promoted to deputy chief. Harlem was a special place. It was similar to the Bronx in activity, but was a community with deep roots, as opposed to the Bronx, which was in a state of great transition. It was in Harlem that I became good friends with several former Marines. One in particular was a machine gunner with "A" 1/7 in 1967 in Vietnam, who was medically discharged from the Marine Corps for wounds, as the result of tripping an IED. How he passed the fire department physical and overcame severe wounds is an amazing story for another time. When I was around these Marines, we spent more time talking about the Corps than the fire department.

Upon promotion to deputy chief I spent two years in Queens, then back to the Bronx. All was going well until the morning of September 11, 2001. I was on vacation, having just returned, late night of the 10th, from visiting family in Florida. In the morning, I received a phone call from a friend, who told me to turn on the TV. I did and was in a state of shock, seeing the North Tower of the >>



From The Marine Corps to Firefighting

BY: MICHAEL GIOVINAZZO

"A" 1st AT's VN '66

The date was June 27, 1967, my discharge date after serving four years in the Marine Corps. I looked forward to this date for the last four years, but now that it was here it wasn't as good as I thought it would be. For the first time in my life I was uncertain what

the future would bring. My past life consisted of school, and then three days after high school graduation came, Parris Island, at the age of 17 and 3 months. I was following my simple road map and had no worries, or major decisions to make. Now, it

looked like the road of being taken care of ended. I had to do something.

I did not have to worry about any of my basic needs, since I went back to from where I came – living with my parents. I guess I was a 21-year-old "snowflake," living in my parents

World Trade Center on fire. Soon I saw another plane hit the South Tower. I couldn't believe what I was seeing. I knew one thing – I had to go in. After I left home, the recall for all members to report to their units was activated. At this time I was the division commander of a Bronx division. I organized those reporting in and held on to them until a call came from headquarters to send men to the site. We would commandeer city buses to transport members. It was pure chaos, as many members reported directly to the site upon the initial incident. About 100 off-duty members were killed, who took it upon themselves to help. Amongst them were two battalion chiefs I worked with for years in Harlem. One of them took my place when I was promoted to deputy chief. He was scheduled to work and was called to the incident, and the other rode along to be of help. Neither of them were ever found.

Sometime around 4PM, I was told to come to the site to supervise a sector. What I saw was surreal. It was 16 acres of destruction. White dust was inches high and nothing was recognizable. Everything was pulverized to dust. I could now see how there would be few injured. We would be lucky to find a body. This turned out to be correct. I stayed at the site until the next morning and then went back to quarters. By this time some sort of schedule was figured out. It was necessary to have people at the site and also to man the fire companies, throughout the city. All the spare apparatus the department had was used, since many were destroyed in the collapse.

I could not then, nor can I now accept what had happened. I found that the best defense was to block it out, as difficult as it was to do. It was the same feelings I had in Vietnam when people were killed and wounded and your life flashed before you in terrifying moments of fear. If you didn't use some blocking mecha-

nism, you would lose your sanity.

The numbers of the dead were coming in and it was an unthinkable amount. The most the New York City Fire Department had ever lost was 12, in a collapse in 1966. I was thinking in line with that number. It was then reported to be over 300 dead and going up. The final total would reveal 343 firefighters, 37 Port Authority Police, 23 New York City Police, 8 Emergency Medical Technicians and of course 2,192 innocent civilians, who were killed while at work. The terror they must have experienced is unthinkable. My oldest daughter was at work within three blocks of the collapses and had called me when the first plane hit. I told her she would be okay where she was. Then the second plane hit the South Tower and now I was worried, especially after both towers came down and all of Lower Manhattan was obscured by thick smoke and dust. At this point I had to leave it up to God. A few hours later, when things cleared up, she was told to walk north with the masses of people.

I was soon to find out this was only the beginning. As the days went on, only a few bodies were found. What was found were pieces of bodies and, in many cases, no body. Schedules were developed and everyone took turns at, what was to become known, as the "Pile." In addition to this we worked our regular tours at the firehouse, and on the few days we had off attended memorial services for the firefighters who died and were not recovered. There were very few funerals. Many days there would be 10-12 memorial services. We went to as many as possible, helped by the attendance of firefighters from suburban communities and out of state. It was at these services that one could not block out what happened. Not after seeing the families, especially the children, who would now have no father. The biggest and toughest broke down. This was far more

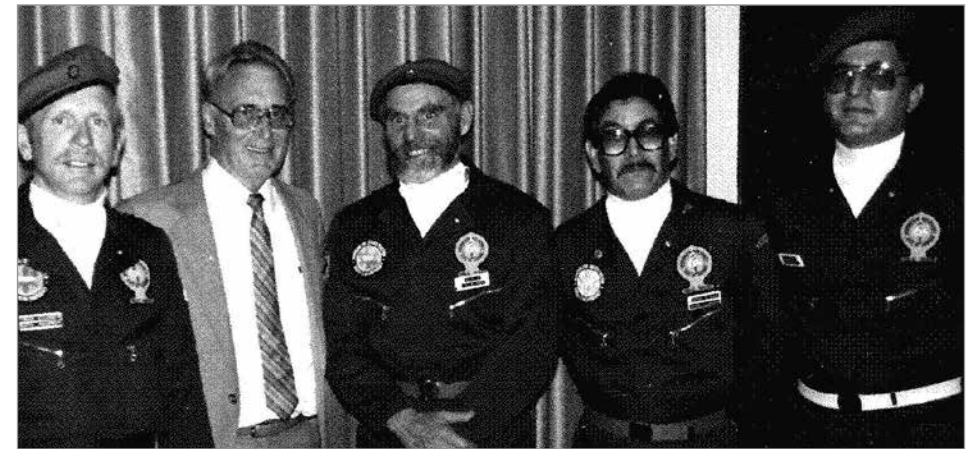
personal than experiencing the dead in Vietnam. Many were friends for years and now there was the family in front of you. Probably, what made this more difficult was the age of us survivors. Being in middle age and having children of your own is very different than being 19. Additionally, this was never expected to happen. Speaking of age making a great difference in how one perceives loss of friends, I noticed myself and others, after Vietnam, being young and busy exploring life, and it was easier to block out than when one is older and life slows down. Now, many of the sad memories from 50 years ago come back to haunt. If you don't have a good blocking mechanism and have the ability to put the past in some perspective, you can really suffer.

I retired from the fire department in 2003, with just under 35 years of service. I still keep in touch with friends from those years. Unfortunately, I have no contact with friends from Vietnam, or from other duty stations in the Marine Corps. This is why the Vietnam Tankers Association is so important. Regardless of MOS, to be in the company of Vietnam Marines is something only a Marine could completely understand.

This is why I can say, of all the success I have had, none can ever mean more to me than to say I served as a United States Marine.

"Firefighters, in my experience, are a lot like the Marines I've met over the years. No matter how badly led, ridiculously underequipped, underappreciated, no matter how doomed their mission, they take a bizarre and quite beautiful pride in at least being screwed more than everybody else and doing it with style ... It's not a job. It's a calling."

- Anthony Bourdain, Chef and Host of TV Food Shows ■



The author is on the far right in the photo

Mountain Search and Rescue

BY JIM COAN

The most challenging and rewarding experience I had during my 30-year career with the former California Youth Authority was being selected to supervise my institution's Mountain Search and Rescue Program for three years. It was back in the 1980's, and I was a program manager in a large correctional facility in Northern California. The inmates selected for this prestigious program had to be over age 18, within six months of their parole release date, and not have any disciplinary actions taken against them while incarcerated in the Youth Authority. They also had to have a medical clearance and pass a rigorous physical fitness test before they could even be considered for the program. All of the staff selected to assist with this program also had to have a medical clearance and be seen as regular participants at the gym and running on the track during their noon-hour or after their morning shift.

Besides myself, the only other military veterans on the team were a former Navy corpsman, and an Army Medical Corps reservist. Another team member was Chuck Sipes, a former Mr. America and Mr. Universe. At age 50, he weighed 220 pounds, yet still had a 34-inch waist and 21-inch biceps.

Before an inmate or staff member could go along on a mission, likely to

Yosemite, Tahoe, or another Northern California mountain area, he had to be trained in first aid, tracking, repelling, rock climbing, map and compass orienteering, and snow-storm survival.

When notified by National Park authorities of a missing hiker or hikers, The California Office of Emergency Services would contact our correctional facility, who in turn would contact me at home. I would proceed to notify my team members. Then, we would all meet up at our facility, wake up the inmates, and load all of our equipment into the Search and Rescue van. On more than one occasion, we had to drive through the night and didn't reach the search site until daylight. Loaded up on coffee, we'd meet with the park rangers, get our map and compass oriented (GPS wasn't invented yet), and head out to the hiker's last known location. Usually joining us on the searches would be a few air-scent dogs and their handlers, plus park rangers.

Often, we would return home, drained and exhausted, knowing that the missing hiker had not been found, and that would be disappointing. But there were enough memorable searches to keep us motivated. We saved three lives during my time with the program. We also recovered three bod-

ies that would likely never have been found without our efforts.

I'll never forget one search we went on at Yosemite. A park employee had vanished late one night. He was last seen by his roommates stating that he was leaving the party and going outside the cabin for a "smoke." When we arrived at the scene the next morning, the first thing I noted was a nearly vertical 20-foot drop off a few yards behind the cabin. While searching for any tracks leading away from the area, one of our search team inmates spotted what appeared to be drag marks. We followed that trail down a steep hill for over 100 yards until we came to a creek. Sitting beside the creek was the missing young man, barely coherent and on the verge of hypothermia. He had suffered compound fractures of both ankles and a concussion when he tumbled off the cliff. He said that when he came to, he yelled for help but no one heard him. He then dragged himself downhill to the creek. We got him onto a stretcher and hauled him back to the road where an ambulance met us and took him to the hospital.

Two weeks later, while we were holding a Search and Rescue Program graduation ceremony in the gym, here comes this same young man being pushed through the gym doors >>

in a wheelchair. It so happened that the Director of the Youth Authority and some of his staff were in attendance. By the time this young man got through speaking of his ordeal, there was not a dry eye in the building. I told my superintendent that he wouldn't ever have to worry about the Search and Rescue Program being cut out of the budget.

Another memorable search that sticks in my memory is the time we were called out to help find a three-year old boy who had wandered away from his family's camp site at Kings Canyon just before dark. When we arrived at the park about 2 a.m., we were told that the child was only wearing shorts and a t-shirt. As I climbed into my sleeping bag to catch a few winks before daylight, I was feeling really bad that I was snug and warm, and the

child was likely freezing cold.

The rest of the team felt the same as me, so as soon as we had enough daylight we dispensed with breakfast and commenced our search. I noted a bloodhound and its handler were also along on the search. Not an hour later, we got the wonderful news that the boy had been tracked down and located by the bloodhound. Somehow, he had wandered almost a mile from the campground. He said he had "found a large, warm rock and went to sleep in the arms of Jesus."

Preliminary examination by paramedics found him to be in good condition, probably in better shape than his parents who had agonized all night over their missing child. A local television news crew was there that morning to see the child and his overjoyed parents reunited. Myself and some of our

search team were also interviewed.

My tour of duty as Mountain Search and Rescue Program Supervisor came to end shortly after that incident when I received a promotion and was transferred to another correctional facility. I have no doubt that the positive publicity the Youth Authority received through our program was a major factor in my receiving that promotion. And it didn't hurt either that my superintendent was a Marine who had served in Korea.

I subsequently followed the progress on parole of all the young men who had successfully participated in our Mountain Search and Rescue Program. Without exception, every single one of them eventually completed their community parole obligation by receiving an honorable discharge. You can't do any better than that.

a bit hard to believe, but very true. I walked back to the vehicle and looked in. This fella was maybe 23 years old and, if I recall, he was very much a hippie. Long hair, beard, stinky looking with John Lennon wire frame glasses. Yes, I am profiling! LOL

Next to him was a long blonde-haired woman. She was very pregnant and was looking like the baby could pop any moment. Now this is 1972, very much hippie-time USA. Also, there was a huge mama cat and baby kittens all over the car. Holy shit!

These people are my age. I got out of the Marines and Nam in 1970. I asked the fella for his driver's license and proof of insurance. I also asked him to step out of the vehicle.

He replied, "I can't."

I said, "What?"

He said if he takes his foot off of the gas and clutch the car will die and may

not start. Cats all over. Very pregnant women. Illegal illumination! They didn't teach this shit in the Academy.

He also told me the driver's door was broken and that it did not open. There are many tickets and violations that were mounting up here. I took his data and told him to sit tight. He did tell me they were college kids and were headed home and that they only had enough money for gas to get home to Arizona.

I went back to my vehicle and ran him via NCIC, he was clear. I sat there and thought: "What the fuck do I do? I can't let them drive with a faulty vehicle. I can't haul them in. It would be more of an expense to the state or county. Pregnant woman in a hospital. Veterinarian for the cats. House the hippie in a room or in jail." Nope, I decided to not even put this one on my daily incident report.

I went back to the vehicle and told him what we were going to do. "I am going to lead you to a well-lit campground. You are going to sleep in your car. At day break I will give you a jump and you can be on your way and out of my state." I also told them I would do drive-byes in the night to make sure that they are safe. He agreed since he had no other choice. We went to the KA campground and they parked. I drove to the nearby A&W restaurant and bought burgers, fries and cokes for them. I then did drive-byes all night. The next morning I woke them and gave them a jump (which with my communication equipment should not have done). I got their car started and walked away. He called me back and this is what he said, "You know for a fucking PIG you are alright." I threw him the peace sign.



FIRST RESPONDERS

FROM A US MARINE VIETNAM VETERAN GRUNT

BY FRANK RODRIQUEZ

When I got home from Vietnam on April 15, 1970, it was bad. I had a 1969 Triumph Bonneville scooter, chopped to the max with extended forks. I was easy sleazy rider. I grew hair to my shoulders. I smoked herb, drank Coors and Jack. And I fought anyone that wanted a piece of me. It was a groove. Fucking drinking, smoking and fighting! Did that for a year. Since I had saved lots of money while in-country, I did not need to work. One night I fucked up a hippie pretty bad, broke his collar bone, shoulder and arm

amongst other things. My boys got me out of there. Deputies came to the place I was shaking up and they told the broad that I was to be at the Sheriff's office in the morning. I never was arrested. So I show up, the Sheriff's office. He was very good friend of my familia and was a decorated war hero from the Korean War. He read me the riot act, told me he understood that I was fucked up and that he was the same way when he came home. But he said he got over it in a month or so. And since I had been doing it for

a year, he gave me a choice of going to Arvada, Co. where my mom was ... or go to jail. He had a bus ticket for me. Well, I chose going to my mom's.

As I was leaving his office he said, "Son, as good as you are with weapons and fighting, why don't you join us and be in law enforcement?"

I laughed and said, "Me a pig?"

He told me to get the fuck out. Six months later I was a Colorado State Patrolman. LOL I could still drive fast and fight drunken Indians. LOL

HIPPIES AT THE FOUR CORNERS

BY: FRANK RODRIQUEZ

One evening I was out patrolling US 6/50. Two-lane highways not like these Interstates in the big cities. I was stationed at the Four Corners area. That is where four states meet, Colorado, Utah, Arizona and New Mexico. Also famous for the Wolf Creek Pass.

At about 1830 that evening as

I was headed north and it was just about dusk, just getting dark, I was approached by a vehicle that appeared to be a VW Bug. But what caught my eye was the lighting situation. One of the car's head lights was much higher than the other. I flipped a "brody," got in behind the vehicle and turned

on my overheads. After we stopped, I approached the vehicle and told the driver I wanted to look at his illumination. I about fell down. The left front light was normal, but for the second he had somehow managed to put a kerosene lantern mounted on some boards attached to the hood of the vehicle. It's

True story.

INDIAN TERRITORY

BY FRANK RODRIQUEZ

So here I was patrolling out near Pleasantville in Southwest Colorado. I was headed towards Delores and I thought that I would set up some radar and make the state a few bucks and maybe catch an early drunk driver. You see, where I was stationed was Indian country. We had the Southern Utes, Navajo and a few others. And lots of "fire water" drinkers. I averaged about four fights a week. I had a SAP. It was my protector.

Anyway, I am driving along and I observe this station wagon with Texas license plates. As I watch the vehicle, I see it varies in speed from 65 to 90 MPH. The speed limit at that time was 70. Up and down 75, 80, 90 and then back to 65. No big deal. So I decided I was lonely (Ha! Ha Ha!) and I decided to stop him and visit. He actually hit 100 a couple of times.

This vehicle is a nice Ford station wagon, a family vehicle all the way. I saw that a man was driving, a lady in the "shot gun" side, and in the back it

looked like two teens, a boy and girl. I turned on my overheads and pulled the vehicle over. As I approached the vehicle the driver's window was down and all I could hear was the Mormon Tabernacle Choir singing about Jesus!

I hollered, "Hey, turn your music down; I need to talk with you." He turned it down and then it started. His wife (or the lady with him) started screaming things like, "We are devout Mormons!" And "We do not commit crimes or do anything against Jesus! We are believers and not a sinner like you."

I said to myself, "Holy Jesus and Chesty Puller; what am I in to?"

She just kept it up.

My thoughts when I stopped this vehicle were to give thema lecture and a warning ticket. No money, just a pink ticket and a lecture. A good lecture!!!!!!

Well this holy lady changed my mind.

I had the man step outside and told

him that my intentions were to lecture and give a pink ticket and that he could go on his way! But I told him in the best English that I know that his wife with her abusive mouth talked me into writing a monetary ticket with points if they applied in Texas. I emphasized to this nice man that his old lady fucked up his day and it cost him money. I really wanted him to know she was bad news. I do not believe in domestic violence, however, so I was hoping when they got to the hotel or wherever they would spend that night that he might give her a big slap on the ass.

True story. Cops can be talked into tickets, so shut the fuck up!!!!!!!!!!!!

The author, Frank Rodriquez is a US Marine Vietnam veteran grunt who served in-country with the 7th Marines in 1969 – 1970. He was also an officer with the Colorado Highway Patrol.

New York City Firefighter: How September 11, a day of tragedy, can be a day of inspiration 17 years later

BY: TIMSULLIVAN

“Tim, get to work,” my brother solemnly said over the phone. “It’s going to get worse.” I had received the call just as the first tower was struck, and we didn’t know all that was yet to come. Like so many other Americans on September 11, 2001, I had simply been getting ready for another day, eating breakfast and reading the newspaper.

As I jumped in the car and began driving downtown as fast as possible, I called my wife Colleen, who was eight-and-a-half months pregnant with our first child. I let her know that something was happening in Manhattan, I needed to be there, and I didn’t know when I’d be home again.

Next I called my buddy Jeff, who my wife and I had asked to be the godfather of our unborn child. I told him, too, that I was headed into the city, and added I had a bad feeling firemen were going to lose their lives. If something would happen to me, he would have to care for Colleen and his godchild.

By the time I arrived on scene, the North Tower had also collapsed. Over the next several days, we started the work of putting New York City back together.

This year, on the anniversary of September 11, 2001, I will concentrate on the words: “If Not Me, Then Who...” and hope others will too consider this call to action which exudes America’s national character.

Years later, I was stationed at Rescue Company #1 in Midtown Manhattan, which had lost eleven men on September 11, 2001. I was humbled to be one of several firefighters who would help continue their legacy.

With visitors to the station, I was always eager to relay acts of bravery by everyday people in that fateful moment. They remain emblematic of our country’s resilience as well as a fundamental testament to our character. So when two Ma-

rines knocked on our door one evening in late 2006 — and as a Marine veteran myself — I was especially enthusiastic about swapping stories.

One of them, a US Marine First Lieutenant, reflected on the deployment he had just returned from, and spoke passionately about the challenges that awaited him in several weeks on his next deployment. He truly believed in his mission, and was certain he was the right man for the job. I admired his resolve. I wished him luck, and sent him off with a few hats and t-shirts.

Eight years later, in December 2014, a friend and fellow firefighter handed me a book, *Brothers Forever*. It’s the account of two best friends and Naval Academy roommates who went on to become a Marine and a Navy SEAL. Both gave their lives in service, and are now buried side-by-side in Arlington National Cemetery.

I was so compelled, I tore through it. But midway through, I was stopped immediately in my tracks. I read about how, before his last deployment, the young Marine made a trip to New York City to visit Rescue Company #1. He recounted spending time with a firefighter and, after sharing stories, having been reminded of why he was soon deploying to Iraq. The Marine also mentioned that he had returned with a hat for his father, a memento to remember him while overseas.

In that moment, I realized the Marine I had spoken with in 2006 was 1st Lt. Travis Manion, the subject of the book and a hero who had gone off to Iraq to never return home. I also learned that, during the ambush in which he was killed by sniper fire, he drew fire away from his two wounded teammates, allowing them to be rescued. For this, Travis was awarded the Silver Star and Bronze Star with Valor.

I immediately reached out to the Travis Manion Foundation, the organization

that now bears that Marine’s name. I was taken by their commitment to supporting veterans and families of the fallen and ensuring that the strength of character these men and women demonstrated — and continue to demonstrate — lives on in succeeding generations of Americans.

Scrolling through the organization’s website, I stumbled upon the foundation’s motto: “If Not Me, Then Who...” Those five words were Travis’s response to a family member who had joked that if Travis were to break his leg, he wouldn’t have to return to Iraq. Reading them took me back to my frantic, 100-mph drive into Manhattan on September 11, and the sense of duty that kept me, my colleagues, and fellow citizens strong in the following days, weeks, months, and years.

It also took me back to that evening in late 2006, when I met Travis. And though I had not even caught his name, I knew that he was driven by a sense of duty to country. Since then, I’ve been honored to be a part of Travis Manion Foundation alongside other volunteers who have posed Travis’s question to themselves.

Today, our country seems divided more than ever. But as I look back on how our great nation united together seventeen years ago in the face of adversity, my hope is that we can rekindle the support and care for one another that seems to have faded. This year, on the anniversary of September 11, 2001, I will concentrate on the words: “If Not Me, Then Who...” and hope others will too consider this call to action which exudes America’s national character. And by doing so, I pray that we will remember the heroes we’ve lost, and just as importantly, that we will find the strength to live and defend what they stood for.

TimSullivan is a Lieutenant with the Fire Department of New York’s (FDNY) SpecialOperations Command. ■

JOKES

The Police/Fire Community

This T-shirt was given to me at an Ontos reunion in Quantico by a former Ontos crewman and retired Cleveland, Ohio police officer. The writing on the back of the shirt pokes fun at the long standing rivalry of the two professions. This is a rivalry based on respect for each other. They are both in the business of protecting life and property of the general public and often work closely toward that goal.



Many come from the same family, much like brothers who served in different branches of the military. Many have a military background, which is the underpinning of both departments. One example of such a

family was that of John Viggiano, a former Marine and retired captain in the New York City Fire Department. He lost both of his sons at the collapse of the World Trade Center on September 11, 2001. His son John was with the fire department and Joe was with the police department. Both jobs can be extremely dangerous and have the death statistics to prove it. It is precisely this

danger that each side sees first hand that draws them together.

Michael Giovinazzo
“A” Co., 1st AT’s

Looking Back in Time



“Look in the mirror and tell me what you see.”

Old Fire Chief’sPhilosophy

I think I might have screwed up. Several of us local retired police officers were asked to address a junior high gathering put on by the PTA. I was the only speaker to show up, so I had the stage to myself. I talked about staying in school, getting good grades and all that usual bullshit; and since I had plenty of time because those other guys didn’t show, I threw it open for questions.

The last one asked was, “Can you give us a couple of your life’s philosophical beliefs?”

I said, “That’s an easy one. Looking back over my almost 7 decades, I believe I’ve spent close to 90% of my earnings on booze and whores. The rest I just wasted.”

I was escorted out without getting to finish my last two rules to live by:

- 1) If it flies, floats, or f*cks, it’s cheaper to rent it.
 - 2) If it’s got tits or tires, you’re gonna have problems with it.
- I hope they invite me back next year so I can finish. They need to know this stuff! >>

Why Italians Can't be Paramedics...

Vinny and Sal are out in the woods hunting when suddenly Sal grabs his chest and falls to the ground. He doesn't seem to be breathing; his eyes are rolled back in his head. So Vinny whips out his cell phone and calls 911. He tells the operator, "I think Sal is dead! What should I do?"

The operator, in a calm soothing voice says, "Just take it easy and follow my instructions. First, let's make sure he's dead."

There is a silence. And then a gunshot is heard. Vinny's voice comes back on the line, "Okay... Now what? "

From a US Marine Vietnam veteran grunt:

When I got home from Vietnam on April 15, 1970, it was bad. I had a 1969 Triumph Bonneville scooter. Chopped to the max with extended forks. I was easy sleazy rider. I grew hair to my shoulders. I smoked herb, drank Coors and Jack. And I fought anyone that wanted a piece of me. It was a groove. Fucking drinking, smoking and fighting! Did that for a year. Since I had saved lots of money while in-country, I did not need to work. One night I fucked up a hippie pretty bad, broke his collar bone, shoulder and arm amongst other things. My boys got me out of there. Deputies came to the place I was shaking up and they told the broad that I was to be at the Sheriff's office in the morning. I never was arrested. So I show up, the Sheriff's office. He was very good friend of my familia and was a decorated war hero from the

Korean War. He read me the riot act, told me he understood that I was fucked up and that he was the same way when he came home. But he said he got over it in a month or so. And since I had been doing it for a year, he gave me a choice of going to Arvada, Co. where my mom was ... or go to jail. He had a bus ticket for me. Well, I chose going to my mom's.

As I was leaving his office he said, "Son, as good as you are with weapons and fighting, why don't you join us and be in Law Enforcement?"

I laughed and said, "Me? A pig?"

He told me to get the fuck out. Six months later I was a Colorado State Patrolman. I could still drive fast and fight drunken Indians. LOL!!!

My Kind of Firefighter!!!



Ohio school resource officer used Taser to wake sleeping student

An Ohio school resource officer, an honorably discharged US Air Force

veteran, was placed on unpaid leave after activating a Taser to wake a sleeping student. The Smithville Police Department said Officer Maryssa Boskoski, 32, was called to a classroom at the Liberty Preparatory School in Smithville on Aug. 30 to help wake a sleeping student. A teacher and the interim principal failed to stir the male student, who is a junior at the school.

Chief Howard Funk said Boskoski removed the cartridge from the Taser and "arced" it. Authorities said the sparking sound and noise from other students woke the napping student.

Jenna Parnell, the school's interim principal, said she was "stunned" by the incident. She said Boskoski did not give a warning before activating the Taser.

"I was a little surprised by it. Our interest is in the safety of our students, so hearing that go off was a little

alarming," Parnell told FOX News. No probes were deployed and the teen was not injured.

Funk said he will meet with the Smithville solicitor to determine if any charges should be filed against the officer. He said Boskoski violated the "use of the Taser policy" and the incident could jeopardize her job. "It's unfortunate and I'm disappointed that this took place. It's something I would not have expected from any of our officers," Funk added. ■



Officer Maryssa Boskoski was placed on unpaid leave for activating a Taser to wake up a sleeping student.

The Marines and the Boy Scouts

BY: LEE DILL

When I got off active duty in March 1970, you would have thought I had just served my time in prison. Everyone was a little standoffish, no one wanted to find out where I was or what I did, and I was in the wrong place in the wrong time with the wrong people.

Luckily, I found Boy Scouts of America in 1997. Yes, I treaded water after the Marines to find home 27 years later. My skills and experiences were needed in the BSA. My son joined and I was actually recruited two months later. My job was outdoor activities, which meant organizing skiing – camping – hiking – rafting – caving – summer camp – shooting – archery – all activities I enjoyed. I also became The "Citizenship" merit badge counselor later on – Civics 101 for young people. I was encouraged to relate "War stories around the campfire" or just explain about the Marines. It seems my history, which was not needed at all in 1970, had become interesting and unique later in life.

Steve arrived along with Tom, Phil, Dan and Dan, George and George, Wayne, Bill and more. So, it was a perfect storm for 15 years of Men\Scouts and a determination between both to build Leaders, and Holy Crap, did we ever!

After 7 years, Dan recruited me to be "the Eagle Advisor" working directly with the Life Scouts in their quest for Eagle. It was in this position that parents were thanking me for my time, effort, and dedication. I coached 26 Life Scouts to Eagle. They became leaders and mentors to the younger scouts. I received more recognition for my efforts than I ever deserved and would do it again in a heartbeat for all the personal satisfaction watching these Scouts grow up and mature. Our team put out some awesome Eagles; some went military, almost all went to higher education,

and all became leaders and men that made us proud.

While a BSA leader, I was asked to lead a delegation of 12 Scouts and 2 adults to Japan for 2 weeks, plus a trip to Sea Base and a trip to Yellowstone. My Marine Training and Discipline helped me on all 3 trips immensely!

One of the other benefits of the Boy Scouts was meeting other Marines. My friends, Steve and Kris Bauer, I met thru Boy Scouts. Steve was committee chair of Troop 451 and I was the outdoors activity director (great title—I set up trips).

Steve was new to the area and didn't know many people so he settled on me as a friend, especially since he found out I was in the Corps. We started doing things together (all leaders went on the weekend trips). I learned that Steve's dad was an Iwo veteran. Naturally, I started to pepper Steve with questions about his dad. Usually the reply was he doesn't talk about it, but I do know he was in the 2nd wave. Steve had done some research and found out his dad was in 13th Marines, "E" Battery attached to 2nd Battalion, 5th Marine Division. Now my interest is up.

Over the next couple of years I got to know Mr. Bauer better. An old Marine, the father of my friend, who had survived Iwo Jima without a purple heart. I would tell him about Vietnam, and he would listen politely but never offer much.

BAR men were big people so Mr. Bauer was a BAR man, 6 feet 3 inches and during the battle of Iwo Jima 200 pounds (when he landed, obviously lighter each day).

Then, a breakthrough; we were eating crabs (yes, steamed hard crabs from the Chesapeake bay with Old Bay seasoning, and they are expensive and delicious for you foreigners out there). Mr. Bauer was in an exceptionally good mood, and for a change, talkative.

He told us he was on Iwo Jima the entire time the battle was raging with an artillery gun section, 13th Marines, E Battery, 105 guns. He was never wounded and carried a heavy ass BAR. He never mentioned any kills or anything gory, but for us this day was a big deal. Mr. Bauer was actually opening up and telling history. Steve decided to push his luck and he asked, "Dad, did you see any hand-to-hand combat?" Mr. Bauer didn't say anything for a minute, then he glanced at me and said "a little" and he smiled! My mind exploded!!

What the hell consists of "a little" hand-to-hand combat on Iwo Jima!!! I spent 20 months in Vietnam and never came close to hand to hand combat (Thankfully!).

So, Mr. Bauer drops this bombshell on us; I am stumbling for a follow up question, and he then gave me a look that said basically, "That's all you're getting, it's enough."

Hand to Hand combat on Iwo Jima—how GUNG HO is that? He never mentioned the war again to me, but believe me he impressed the crap out of me...a little hand to hand.

The history doesn't end here. Each year I have a Kentucky Derby party (an excuse to see friends). This year we had a special guest and his fiancée Jessica attended (I work with Jessica). Matt has done one Iraqi and two Afghanistan tours, as a machine gunner. He is off active duty but still of course a Marine. I introduced him to Steve and Kris and mentioned that Steve's father was on Iwo Jima.

It was one of those old Kodak moments, his eyes got wide, his jaw dropped just a little and he looked to me, but before he could speak, I asked "Do they still teach that battle in boot camp?" He replied, "Yes, Sir!"

God bless the Marines and Mr. Bauer! ■

MARINES DODGING DEATH

USMC CORPORAL JOHN F. WEAR II

“There is no armor against fate”
—Shirley James

1 July 1968

The Demilitarized Zone—Operation Thor

Operation Thor was a seven-day joint operation conducted by the United States Army, Navy, Air Force and US Marines against the North Vietnamese enemy artillery, rocket and air defensive positions in the eastern end of the DMZ. In the summer of 1968, the NVA dominated the DMZ with

their long-range, flat trajectory 122mm and 130mm guns and 152mm howitzers. The NVA had more than 100 artillery pieces that could out range all U.S. artillery except for a select few Marine (8”) and Army (175mm) gun batteries. The NVA could control the Marine logistical base at Dong Ha and

the supply routes along the Cua Viet River and Route 9.

The first three days of Operation Thor were dominated by 210 B-52 arc-light strikes, followed by Marine and Army artillery, naval gunfire, and 350 fighter-bomber sorties.

7 July 1968

North of Con Thien, Vietnam—Operation Thor

By now, I was a tank commander and flame-thrower tank section leader and we were working with Foxtrot Company, 2/9. We were involved in a search and destroy operation, sweeping in a huge arc around Con Thien. Later, I also learned the “brass hats” wanted us to observe the devastation that the B-52 arc-light bombing raids had made on the countryside. We had very little enemy contact on the first few days of the Operation.

July 7 was very hot and muggy; some saying it even reached 114 degrees that day. As we headed out in the morning with grunts alongside our tanks, we hit a massive amount of shit about 2,000 meters in front of our nighttime position. There were NVA .51 caliber heavy machine guns, RPG teams, and so many AK-47’s on full automatic that we could not count them all. There were also enemy 60mm mortars exploding everywhere. Due to the loud tank noises, communication radios blaring, and the sounds of firing on both sides, I found it very hard to focus. At first, I didn’t really see anything specific that was going on. I did observe some grunts standing up, firing from the hip like John Wayne. Some Marines were lying down and keeping out of the firefight, while others were just running all over the place not knowing what to do. The platoon sergeants and

lieutenants tried their best to assume command, but the huge amount of enemy fire made it very difficult.

I called over the tank intercom to my driver, “Steffo,” to pull up past the prostrate grunts in front of our tank so that we could take the gooks under fire. As the tank lurched forward, I peered out of the tank commander’s cupola when all of the sudden, a hot rush of air passed over me and I felt as if my face was burnt. I didn’t have time to think about what had just occurred since there were many wounded Marines all over the place. Most of these men had been hit in the legs, arms and neck by shrapnel from mortar rounds.

The standard MO of the NVA who are about to be overrun, was to shoot like crazy and then fall back firing off their 60-mm mortar rounds, which was exactly what they did. I looked in front of our position and saw Sergeant Tewes standing inside of his cupola, frantically pointing to his left. There was a tree line and it appeared as if there were NVA firing between two large trees. I told Steffo to head over towards the tree line and said, “Charge the bottle, ‘Flash,’ we are going to burn some gooks!”

As we pulled up to the trees, we started to get intense incoming arty from 152mm cannons that the enemy was firing at us from the mountains to the

north. I mean, big impact blasts were now happening. Just as we were passing, Sgt. Tewes caught a mortar blast off the side of his tank. We got maybe another 50 meters closer to the tree line when two grunts held up their hands to stop us. I yelled at the top of my lungs, “Get the fuck out of my way you stupid assholes, we got to kill us some bad guys!”

All of a sudden, the tree line in front of us exploded with a “shit pot full” of NVA shooting at us. Wounded grunts fell all around us. The two gun tanks on either side of me were firing their main guns while Flash was making our .30 sing like an opera star. Sgt. Tewes came over the radio and said, “Foxtrot 3-1, I just got hit. I’m going to get medevaced but I want you to come over to my left and hose down the tree line from that pos., over.” I replied, “Roger, Alpha 1-2.”

“OK, Steffo, kick it in the ass. Flash, get ready to work the main gun and keep hosing the tree line with the .30. We pulled right next to Sgt. Tewes tank and he called over the radio, “Foxtrot 3-1, there are RPG teams all in the tree line. Hose them as I cover you with my .90. Again, I replied, “Roger, Alpha 1-2.”

“Ok, Steffo, kick it in the ass but be ready to stop for Flash to work his magic.” We approached the tree line

(Continued on page 32)

THE SANDS OF GO NOI ISLAND

BY LT. RICHARD PEKSENS



It was May of 1968 and here I was circling the war above Da Nang Monkey Mountain from thousands of feet up in a commercial airliner with stewardesses and cocktails. We had been rigorously training for almost a year, which had morphed us from chubby college graduates to supposed trained killers with vast knowledge of squad, platoon and company weaponry and tactics. Soon, as newly minted “brown bars,” we would be facing the “Yellow Horde” of communists who had invaded across the 17th Parallel to wreak havoc amongst the bucolic populace of the South. Still in a khaki uniform and wearing a single ribbon, I was awaiting the great adventure. Thinking back on movies such as “Sands of Iwo Jima,” my introduction to the combat zone was far different from the landings at Tarawa under intense incoming fire from the entrenched Nipponese defenders. Rather than “gung ho,” the announcement was “Stewardesses, take your seats and prepare for landing.”

Exiting the plane onto the hard tarmac, we were met with oppressive heat reflecting off the cement while we waited for our duffle bags to be unloaded. There was activity everywhere with trucks, jeeps and buses zig-zagging around the airfield. As we entered a nearby hanger, we were met with jeers from the outgoing passengers who were finishing their 13-month tour. They wore jungle utilities along with unshaved faces and hair that was often outside the bounds of Marine Corps “regulation.” They yelled and called us names like “rookies” and FNG’s which stood for fucking new guys. It was obvious that a war was going on somewhere, but, certainly not at the Danang Airport.

I had arrived “in-country” with two other tank officers from three days of debauchery in Okinawa, and we were now being escorted to the First Marine Division HQ adjacent to the huge Danang PX. We would be billeted for the first night in a multi-story wooden structure where we would be introduced to the secret “Rules of En-

gagement” policy. Essentially, this was a policy to reduce civilian casualties by requiring certain procedures to be met before utilizing destructive firepower. There were, of course, many areas in I-Corps, the northernmost Corps of Vietnam, which had no rules. These zones were given the name “Free Fire Zones” and required no authorization before commencing slaughter.....sort of a “007 rating” for infantry units. At Division, we were subsequently given assignments to either infantry or tanks. All Marine officers graduate with a specialty in infantry, but some, like me, are assigned additional skills such as tanks, artillery or amtracks. My two associates were assigned to the 3rd Marine Division which was currently headquartered in Quang Tri, while my assignment to 1st Tank Battalion was only a short jeep ride from my current location. My battalion was located on the south side of Danang adjacent to the 11th Marines artillery and close to the Danang airfield. All the roads were dirt and the various compounds were surrounded by man-made berms

fronted and topped by concertina wire and manned at intervals by bunkers built by timber and the universal green sandbags.

I reported to the S-1 administrative office and was told that I would be taking over the 3rd platoon that had just returned from the Cua Viet River on the DMZ where the platoon had been in significant combat, and the lieutenant had received the Silver Star for heroism. First, I was sent to supply where I was issued jungle utilities, a K-Bar combat knife and the M1911 .45-caliber pistol that was standard issue for Marine lieutenants. Later that afternoon, I met the commanding officer, Colonel Bentley, who welcomed me to his command. Also in the office was a Major Garcia, the S3, or Operations Officer, who looked me over as a rattlesnake observes a mouse. The major informed me that he demanded a “tight ship” and would be expecting that I keep a sharp eye out for dwindling decorum within the ranks. “Being in a combat zone provided no excuse for failing to enforce strict >>

grooming.” I cringed at the thought of my own disheveled outfit still wrinkled from the packing container. The major’s uniform was crisply ironed and starched by the local “mama-sans” that provided daily laundry services to those lucky enough to live within the huts and tents of the battalion. I thought to myself that this major was a real asshole and I would need to do my best to avoid him in the future. I would go south the following day to the HQ of 2/26, which was located in a region called the Riviera that was bordered on the north by Marble Mountain, the west by Route 1, the south by Hoi An and the ROK Marines, and west by the South China Sea. Reputedly, it was the most heavily mined TAOR in I Corps.

A platoon of tanks, the M-48 Patton tank, consisted of five gun tanks. Each gun tank had a 90mm main gun which was coaxially mounted with a .30 caliber MG and a .50 caliber MG available to the TC, or Tank Commander. Each tank weighed 52 tons, with 13 inches of homogeneous steel protecting the turret. The underside of the tank was the weakest point having only a few inches of armor. Knowing this, the VC or NVA would wait for tanks to cross over rice paddy dikes which made the weak underside momentarily available as a target for the Russian-made RPG....a rock-

et propelled grenade launcher which fired a shaped-charge explosive capable of penetrating 8-10 inches of steel. Tanks could also be stopped by mines which had the capability of blowing off either road wheels or the rubber and steel tracks which propelled the armor. Once disabled, the enemy could sneak forward with RPG’s to destroy the stranded crew. Because a disabled tank was a “sitting duck,” the tanks always worked with protective infantry who would provide cover against oncoming enemy with either RPG’s or satchel charges destined for the opened hatches. A phone on the back of the tank allowed infantry to talk directly with the TC. An escape hatch could be dropped under the driver to allow all four crewmen to escape—the TC, driver, loader and gunner. Escaping through the turret exposed the crew to gunfire and made easy targets at 10 feet above the ground. Tanks always travelled in pairs which allowed one tank to “scratch the back” of its companion by using MG fire to keep enemy soldiers from mounting the tank. The 90mm gun had five types of rounds that consisted of HE (High Explosive), WP (White Phosphorus), shotgun, flechette, and HEAT (a shaped-charge anti-tank or anti-bunker round). The most feared was the flechette which

could be set to open a particular distance up to 4000 feet and would spray a deadly swarm of pins covering a width of 200 and a depth of 50 meters. This, together with the shotgun round, was excellent for creating havoc amongst an advancing force or sappers and infantry.

My first night would be spent in Battalion where I found an open bunk within the tents known as “officer country.” A chaplain introduced himself and asked if I would be attending his morning services. I responded that my dog tags identified by religion as NO PREFERENCE and wasn’t planning to get out of bed that early. I was wrong, as I was rudely awakened in the late hours to the sound of sirens indicating, according to the chaplain, that we were experiencing what they called “Incoming.” I was quickly “Outgoing” to bunkers along the berm with neither weapon nor a 5-paragraph order. I quickly assumed the attitude of SGT Striker from “Sands of Iwo Jima.” Those dirty “Japs” wouldn’t take me alive. This was a movie actually shown at OCS to encourage newly minted LT’s to sign on for grunt duty. Later, I found myself travelling all over the 1st Marines TAOR in search of the elusive enemy. We found them mostly hiding in tunnels or behind gravestones on Go Noi Island, but that is a new story. ■

Marines Dodging Death (Continued from page 30)

as the two gun tanks pumped round after round from their main guns into the enemy lines. By now, the grunts are also pouring it on. I saw tremendous explosions everywhere. “Ok, Flash, let her rip!” The liquid napalm shot out of our gun tube from left to right, and then all of a sudden Flash hit the igniters and ... KA-BOOM!!! The whole tree line ignites in flames. The NVA then started to isolate their fire on my tank. “Steffo, back out of here on the double! Flash keep up the firing into the tree line!”

The grunts were now up charging, as were the two gun tanks. “Get some!” It was over before it began. The gooks took off and left only a few charred bodies behind. We continued to move throughout the day.

Later that evening, the grunt platoon sergeant asked me, “Did you see that RPG that almost took off your head?”

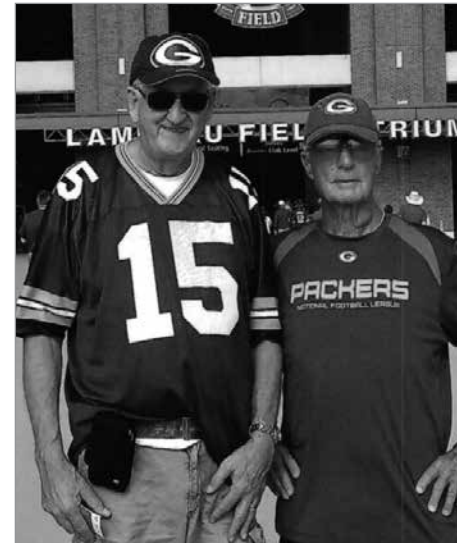
I blurted, “Huh?”

He then proceeded to tell me that the “warm air” that I felt on my face earlier had been a gook B-40 rocket that almost parted my hair. Holy Mother of God! I had almost “bought the farm” right then

and there! They had been either trying to take me or my tank out, or both of us. Whew! If our tank had stayed still and not lurched forward right at that moment, I would most likely have had my head taken off by the most powerful anti-tank rocket in the NVA’s arsenal.

Post Script: Operation Thor resulted in 3 friendly KIA’s and 25 WIA’s. The joint attack destroyed 93 enemy field, coastal and air defense artillery weapons and neutralized the North Vietnamese offensive potential in the DMZ area for the next 3 years. NVA manpower losses were unknown. ■

Old Buddies Reunite



Jim Cowman writes: This is my old Michigan high school buddy, Tom Quinn (on the left) and me at Lambeau Field in Green Bay, Wisconsin, to watch the Green Bay – Vikings tie game.

Now for the backstory: In 1967, while serving with 1st Tank Battalion, I replied to a written request from a 9-year old elementary school girl named Tami Nelson. Tami requested some information and photos from Viet Nam. The information was to be used in an elementary school project in Kenosha, Wisconsin. Tami is the daughter of Pat Nelson. Pat was a cheerleader at my old high school in Manistique, Michigan in the 1950’s. Pat and I are members of the Manistique High Class of ’55.

I read in a Manistique alumni newspaper that Pat’s husband died in Jan., 2018. Since I had recently lost my wife, Sharon, after 55 years of marriage, I called Pat to let her know that she was not alone and that things would get better. As a result of that call, Tami and her mother located one of the letters that I had written in-country in 1967 (a copy is below). Not much later, Tami and I got in

touch and had a nice conversation. It turned out that both of us were Green Bay Packer fans. Tami mentioned that her family had had season tickets to all of the Packers home games and asked if I would like to attend a home game with them. And, of course, I was interested.

So as of August 2018, and as a result of a letter that I had written in 1967 from Viet Nam to a nine-year-old girl, I planned to attend a Packers home game with her and her mom. And, hopefully, it would lead to more home games in the future. So at least one neat thing came out of Viet Nam!!!

February 6, 1967

Dear Tammy,

Your very nice letter arrived this eve-



Jim Cowman handing out presents

ning and I was very happy that you would take the time to write me. I have sent you two newspapers that are printed over here. I’m sure that they will contain many pictures you can show your friends at school. I have also included a photograph taken at the

Christmas party we gave for a village in Chu Lai. As you can see, the people do not have the best of clothes and the toys they are getting are probably the first dolls they have ever seen. It was raining that day but the people still came, and as you can see by their eyes we made them happy.

We have since moved from Chu Lai and are not near Da Nang. I am sure you see these names in the newspaper. I also put in a photograph taken of me this morning. It’s cold in the morning but by noontime it’s very hot. Please ask your mommy to mail the picture of me back later on because I want to send it to my children.

You asked me about the weather over here. Let me say that monsoon is almost over. While the monsoon is with us it rains all of the time. It rains so very hard and so often we wonder where all of the water can go. Now it is starting to get hot and it will remain hot throughout the summer. The afternoon temperatures of over 115 degrees are not uncommon.

Our Christmas over here was as nice as we could make it. Of course we all missed our families and friends. As I recall we had a party on the beach that day and I went swimming and played football on the beach. Kind of a funny way to spend Christmas and as I recall it rained most of the entire day.

I sure do envy you for spending the holidays in Manistique. It will be another couple of years before I get back there but I’m planning the trip already.

Many thanks for your very nice letter. I hope you will write me again.

Best of luck,

Jim Cowman ■

Returning to the Classroom

BY: STEPHEN FALK, H&S, 1ST TANKS, 1967-68

After Vietnam, I returned home, got married, and sought college admittance with the hope of becoming a high school teacher of English. I returned in February of 1968, and my active duty enlistment would end July 5th. I had signed up for a Two-two-two; that is two years active duty, two active reserve, and two inactive reserve. Checking into my Reserve Unit, the S1 took one look at my SRB, smiled, and said: "Do you really want to do this?"

Unaware of his meaning, I sought clarification: "Do what?"

"Do Active Reserve time."

"Don't I have to?"

"Any other Reserve unit in the country would probably love to have an E5, 0441 with your experience, but we already have two...we don't need you, and, if you want, we can transfer you to inactive reserve." I opted for the inactive reserve.

In September, I started my program and graduated in May of 1971. I was fortunate to have several job offers, and took a position with my local high school district: Northern Valley Regional High School. I would be teaching in the school in Demarest, N.J.

Fast forward, I retired from Northern Valley, now assigned in the Old Tappan building, in January of 2001. The reasons for my early retirement, I was fifty-five, are another story. I settled down, quite easily, to the retired lifestyle. I did some work with my church and its parochial school...but not much. I spent about four years running the service projects for the

high school youth group at the parish, and really loved working with the kids. My help with the parochial school involved projects, service, and substitute teaching.

A neighbor and friend, [I had moved some years before to the Union County town of Berkeley Heights from my "hometown" of Northvale, in the Northern Valley of Bergen County] an Army veteran of the Vietnam era was heavily involved with the local VFW and encouraged me to join. He told me it would be good for me...and that he thought I would be good for the Post.

I had joined the VFW years earlier in Northvale. In Northvale I was very active with kids sports; was on, then headed the Recreation Committee; was fairly well known in the small hamlet; and a friend, similarly, thirty five years earlier, asked me to join. He also mentioned that I would instantly head the color guard because there was no other Marine sergeant active at the Post.

I joined and became an active member. The color guard was comprised of all Viet Vets, the others Army and Navy veterans. We got new uniforms, looked pretty damn good, and were a fine tribute [he said modestly] to our Nation's Bicentennial.

The problem, there was a definite problem, was that most of the Post's membership were World War II veterans, and they considered us lesser beings; after all, they had been in a "real war!" So many of us experienced like or similar treatment [thus the forma-

tion of the VVA.] I was out of there in a few years. I had tried; they had, I thought, failed me, failed us, failed.

I rejoined the VFW in Berkeley Heights. Most of the active members were Vietnam vets, a few of them Marines. I became the Post Commander after a few years, and the chair of the committee for both the Voice of Democracy and Patriot's Pen essay contests. A good match for a teacher of English. These positions brought me to a place I had previously avoided, a place not only visible to the public eye; it was at times the focus of public attention. The Mayor and Council members now knew me by name, as did the local school officials. Whenever I spoke publicly [Memorial Day, Veterans Day, etc.] I became the voice of authority, wisdom, and purpose... sort of like being in front of a class full of kids. I did fairly well.

Each year, I made public presentations of the awards for the winners of the two contests. I got to know and get along well with the educational staff involved. There was also a bond based on the reality that I had been a classroom educator for thirty years. The School's Supervisor for Social Studies approached me one day I was in the high school and asked if I would be willing to speak with students.

"About what?"

"I'm not sure"...but then he rattled off eight or nine possibilities. He had given it some thought. I said I would do it, that he only had to let me know. Here is where it got interesting.

The school offers an Honors Course in Contemporary American History. One of the instructors asked that I make, at the end of her unit on the Vietnam War, a presentation about being a Vietnam Veteran. I acceded to her request, and planned the lesson with her to be presented in two segments about a week apart. I now have been doing this for a few years.

I introduce myself to the kids and tell them about whom I had been as a child, teen, my schooling, and up until I faced the reality of military service. I talk about the activities, regularities, and absurdities of life as a Marine in Vietnam. I reveal that, though many looked at me as just a pogue in S-4, my reality, as it was true for my buddies, was that though I had a "day job," in S-4, First Tanks had the TAOR [Tactical Area of Responsibility] for the Southern Sector defense of I Corps. That translates to service and support to every operation in the Southern Sector, deploying into operations, named and unnamed. That included the mundane of bunker watch, manning outposts at night, and taking part in combat operations on many levels. I, as did most of my cohorts, earned the CAR.

I also tell of my own haunting by the specter of Chinese rockets. The manifold, unplanned, unanticipated jolting of my being that, in fact, resulted in PTSD. My aversion to wet surfaces, my concern for who is behind, or might end up behind me, and a multitude of other manifestations of being little more than a kid fourteen thousand miles from home.

I also speak, with pride, about the Marines with whom I served. I tell of the reality and tenacity of Esprit de Corps, and the inner strength with which I have lived because I AM a Marine.

At the end of the hour, I give them the assignment [sounds as if I am teaching again] to write down any questions they might have directly related to what I have said, or not, perhaps from their lessons about the war,

and bring them to class the next week.

The second lesson or class period, is, in fact, a question and answer panel. I bring three or four other Vietnam Vets [usually from the local lost, but I brought my friend Monte one time] and we are open for business! I have repeatedly been impressed by both the astuteness and number of questions. The other guys are soldiers or Marines with individually different answers, different backgrounds, different circumstances. Universally, the students go away with a far deeper grasp of what it means to go to war, to, in fact, be warriors.

The teacher in me wants to know "how'd we do?" I, lastly, assign a written evaluation of what each individual student thought of the presentations. I assign written homework. These responses have been my [and the other Vets] reward. I have gotten responses such as, "This was a highlight of my high school years," "This was the best lesson I have ever experienced," "I now believe I better understand what going to war means," "I have considered serving my country in the military, and these men have led me to believe it is something I should do." The multi-starred reviews go on and on.

I also asked for criticism and suggestions from their points-of-view. The biggest negative, with many in agreement, was that the class was over. They wanted more time. They wanted closer ties with these men who, they surely believe [as stated in their response], have preserved the freedoms they enjoy.

I was subsequently approached by another teacher who presents a college level, advanced placement course on psychology. He had heard that I don't avoid PTSD, and wondered [hoped] that I would make a similar presentation in his classes. I did that, using the same presentation and format. This, of course, though the presentation was the same, elicited student questions and response on a very personal level. I modified the second phase by being a panel of one. I have had experi-

ence in helping a variety of Vets with PTSD write and submit their claims. I have learned that, although there are lists of like or similar responses to life with PTSD, there is no box into which any one victim fits. I felt my years in the classroom allowed me the skills to direct and handle high schoolers' questions and approaches. I am not implying others' inabilities, but rather asserting my own confidence here. Because of the thrust toward the psychological, it seemed unwise to place another within the web that I had spun.

The take-away for the psych class kids was very much parallel to the history kids. Most of their written responses were on the level of enlightenment, seeing with a clarity not offered in movies or books or any prior exposures the kids had had about the realities of war.

Two last points I need to make concern my evaluation of the kids themselves. I taught for thirty years and was pretty much known by my own students [those assigned to my classes] as firm but fair...and often funny and sometimes endearing. For kids not actually in my classes, I was firm, perhaps strict, often NOT someone with whom they wanted to interact. The kids at Governor Livingston were, almost universally, kind, polite, and respectful, with very many of them greeting me and smiling toward me in the corridors, library, and classrooms. It was repeatedly a very nice experience.

Sadly, though, aside from their warmth and respectfulness, I sensed a sheepish belief, not universally, in the standard media alignment to views that are spewed as truth no matter how they lacked formation or foundation in reality.

I have been asked to return...and I will.

Editor's Note: Very regrettably Steve lost his life in July 2018. He was a really prolific author and a very loyal friend of many VTA members ... including the editor and publisher. ■

C O W B O Y S AND B U F F A L O E S

A Marine Squad in Viet Nam

BY: JAMES S. RENFORTH

Our squad was attached to the S-2 Section of Headquarters. Our charter was primarily snoopin' and poopin'; executing ambushes and working patrols. Bad-ass shit. We were pretty much left alone, otherwise.

We'd just been assigned the lovely task of manning and securing an eleven-hundred-yard front along a mushroom-shaped peninsula jutting out into the Da Nang River.

There were five bunkers. Yeah. One squad. . .1,100 yards. We just came in from a nighttime ambush. Sun was up, hot as hell—walking single file along the path back to the CP. Steam was rising from the backs of everyone. We could hear the usual morning activity, which meant the command post was coming to life and we could smell the mess tent in all its glory. The heat had become nearly unbearable already. Our clothing was drenched; white lines of perspiration in every bend and crease, and there was no relief in sight. We stopped for a breather. I took a long drink from my canteen. Even with the iodine tablets dissolved in it, it was delicious. The smoking lamp was lit, so I did and drew the smoke deeply into my lungs. God-damn! It's just too motherfuckin' hot! The monsoons would be starting soon and with them a certain amount of relief from this cursed heat. Soon afterward I'd be cursing the rain too. This country was the asshole of the earth. Even the farmers, who you'd think were most accustomed to the weather, ceased their activities when the sun had reached its peak.

Suddenly a noise.....dogs.....bark-

ing. We had learned quickly to place a great emphasis on the sounds we heard. At night, on an ambush, the sound of barking dogs would tell us without a doubt that movement was occurring.....Charlie was moving.....because every swingin' dick in this country had a curfew. If he was out after curfew, he was VC. But this was daytime. At night it would be a different story.

Now we're walking up the hill to the CP and mess tent. Fuckin' sand! The Nam has sand like no other place on earth. Even in jungle boots with their tire-like tread, it was one step forward – two back. I had developed great strength in my leg muscles. Finally, after much labor just to get to the mess tent, standing in line to get your share of the swill, scooping ants out of the way to dig a spoonful of sugar out from under them, all the while sweating profusely, great drops of perspiration dripping from your nose and chin into your food, finding a place to sit and hating to even chew because it created just that much more body heat. I was just not ready to eat at the moment. I field stripped my cigarette butt, took another drink of water, and it was time to mount up.

After we gathered up all our shit, a six-by took us as far as it could and dropped us off. After another hour of walking in this goddamned heat we reached the "stem of the mushroom." The peninsula was in reality no more than an overgrown rice paddy dike and the 'island' – more abandoned paddies. Eventually reaching what we pre-

sumed to be bunker number three, we stopped. The sky was a deep, clear blue, the river shitty-looking. The breeze – wonderful. Strange, I thought, how the absence of pain can almost be ecstasy. Bunker number three was eight feet high, eight feet wide, and ten feet long, half buried in the sand; facing the river approximately thirty yards away. A four-foot-thick roof covered the bunker that consisted of wood and sandbags. Several of these had lost their contents, the latter spilling down like a cascade frozen in time. Bullets had done that, I thought. Good old boot camp discipline stepped right in there to cease such thought processes.

I sat there atop the bunker for a moment, looking first to the left then right and noticed what was odd about the "eleven-hundred-yard front" we were here to secure. First of all, the front was anything but straight. Second, "Where's the other goddamned bunkers?" I said. "I don't fuckin' believe it!" Jackson responded. "Where IS the other goddamned bunkers?" "Hell, they could drive a fuckin' tank between 'em!" Murphy then spoke up, "We're gonna fuckin' die out here. GODDAMN FUCKIN' ROTTEN CROTCH!" That was his pet name for the Corps and I don't remember ever hearing him call it anything else.

Everyone was on his feet now, vocalizing his disapproval of the arrangement to God and Sergeant Harris, who finally squelched the uproar with his "AWRIGHT.....SNAP OUTTA YER CHEAP CIVILIAN SHIT! Dance, Murphy, Reed, this one's yers. Get the repair work done on it before you settle in. Empty sandbags are inside. The rest of you MOUNT UP!" Divide and conquer. Well, that goes both ways. We're pretty damn divided out here, I would say.

We found number two bunker about two hundred and fifty yards from the one we'd just left. Leaving three men here, we headed out for number one, which we located three

hundred yards further down the river bank. "This makes no sense to me at all," I said, "these posts are so far apart how in the hell will we ever secure this space?"

"I reckon that's how Charlie got to C Company," Harris replied. "Some consolation."

Sergeant Harris assigned two men to bunker one. From this position we could see the river plainly, being only a stone's (or grenade's) throw away. Easily visible also was the point at which the river met the South China Sea. "Everyone inside!" shouted Harris. Once inside, he picked up the handset to the mag-line and gave the handle three sharp cranks. Bunker two answered, "Joe's place." Number three came on line also.

"Okay, listen up....." he spoke to us as well as into the handset. "You will check in every half hour during daylight and after dark to bunker number one. Renny and I will be moving continuously from post to post so don't any of you wild-assed cowboys get too fuckin' trigger happy, ya hear?" He ended with, "We hope you enjoy your stay." He replaced the handset to the tune of some rather uncomplimentary remarks regarding his parentage and the legitimacy of his birth emitting therefrom. Those of us remaining then departed and headed for the fourth and fifth bunkers. Passing sober and scrutinizing faces in the other two bunkers we found number four in shambles approximately two hundred yards from number three. After damn near rebuilding this sonofabitch and leaving two men in it, we struck out for the last stronghold.

There was terrible terrain and a hell of a distance between four and five. It'll be tricky negotiating this shit in the dark, I thought. We climbed a narrow trail that was bordered on one side by a stand of trees and thorn bushes and on the opposite side, twenty feet below, and the river. At the crest of the hill we could see the number five bunker squatting on a small beach below. We estimated the distance from the

last bunker to be four hundred yards (as the crow flies). Sergeant Harris, Corporal Lance, Private Jackson and I sat atop this final outpost in our area of responsibility for several minutes, gazing out at the river, silent, each man deep in his own thoughts.

My Mother had suggested the Air Force. My Father, whom I knew only slightly since the divorce when I was five years old, had insisted on the Navy. I had already received a Congressional appointment to West Point by virtue of a congressional sponsor and an uncle who had been an instructor there during WWII. Notwithstanding, when we're a kid we know everything, right? I was my own man, wasn't I? And besides, I wanted to be a real bad-ass. So, my choice was simple – had to be a U.S. Marine. Now here I sit, on a pile of sandbags, in the asshole of the earth, a God-forsaken land whose people didn't want me here anyway. But I was still patriotic, proud to be a Marine, proud to be serving my country, proud to be standing tall for decency, democracy, capitalism, and apple pie.....for now.

"Fuck it," Sergeant Harris said as he jumped off the bunker, went inside, grabbed the handset from its resting place, and gave the magneto its customary three sharp turns. The other four locations responded in succession. We joined Harris inside. "We're all set," Harris said, "everything okay?" "Keep alert.....check in.....keep quiet.....and one last thing. Our orders contain additional instructions that I've waited until now to give to you."

As he was saying this, he removed a small, folded piece of paper from his right breast pocket, unfolded it and began reading; "From Intelligence Officer.....blah, blah, blah.....to.....blah, blah, blah.....and the five outposts are to be considered forward LPs (listening posts). Therefore, no enemy contact shall be initiated or made except under extreme defensive response, unquote."

"DIRTY ROTTEN FUCKIN' GODDAMN SONOFABITCHIN'

POLITICIANS!!!!!" yelled Jackson, throwing his rifle into the dirt. "AND THAT MEANS," Harris continued, "you DON'T FIRE that FIRST shot unless Charlie has his rifle up your ass and has fired at least ONCE. THAT CLEAR? YOU GOT IT?" "We sure as hell GOT IT alright. Right in the fuckin' ass we GOT IT." Jackson said. "Why don't we just BLOW EACH OTHER'S BRAINS OUT NOW AND SAVE CHARLIE THE TROUBLE?" "Knock it off Jackson. Those are the orders. That's all," Sergeant Harris ended. He then returned the handset to its holder.

Nightfall came quickly after that. No matter how hard I willed it not to, the sun finally sank out of sight. Sergeant Harris and I made our rounds as planned. And it was, despite my apprehension, a relatively quiet night. Of course, there was an occasional sporadic firefight, a solitary report of a rifle or carbine off and on, and the always-present parachute flares here and there. But as far as our positions were concerned, the night was uneventful except for the tight-lipped curses that went to the mosquitoes; smack! ummph! "Goddamn you little bastards", etc.

I spent my second night re-affirming my patriotism. I am an American and being here is the 'American Thing' to do, isn't it? The third night was blacker than pitch. There was no moon. I'd been in nights before where you literally could not see your hand in front of your face – this was another one. We made our way from post to post over the old rice paddy dikes and paths very slowly and with great difficulty, nearly busting our ass more than once. Morning came. We all met at the third bunker. This morning we finished off the remainder of our C-Rations. At noon a party of six of us assembled to walk back to the old C Company area to pick up supplies. Our radio man contacted the camp and confirmed that portions of Eighth Marines had moved in and that supplies and ammunition >>

had been set aside for us. Water had to be carried back also.

Ready to start.....except the backpack frame with an empty five-gallon water can strapped to it still lay on the ground. No one had volunteered to put it on and carry it. Sergeant Harris spoke, "Any o' you fuckers plan on drinkin'?" A couple of grunts, Uh-huh's and Yep's responded. "Well, who's gonna carry the fuckin' water can?"

No answer. Harris and I were about the same size, and both of us were far from the size of any of the others.

I shed my pack, opened it, took out a handful of .45 caliber ammo and put it in my pocket. Then started for the water can. "Whoa, hoss. You can't carry that sonofabitch," Harris said. "That motherfucker weighs damn near eighty pounds full."

"I'll carry it," I said.

The trip was about seven miles, through sand, muck, mud, over rice paddies, shit I'd never noticed on our way out the first time. And I'm carrying my M-79, two bandoleers of grenades, cartridge belt, canteen, .45 caliber semi-automatic on my hip, helmet, flak jacket, and a backpack frame with an empty five-gallon water can strapped to it. Hell, this is a breeze, I was thinking. No contact was made while enroute to the base camp. We ate lunch in the mess tent; Salisbury steak, mashed (instant) potatoes, peas, lots and lots of bread and gravy, cup after cup of ice cold (instant) milk, and peach cobbler. We all thought we'd died and gone to heaven.

The trip back was more like hell.

After eating all that food and loading up our supplies; me with a (now full) water can, we started back. Now I thought I really was going to die..... Harris was right, that motherfucker did weigh eighty pounds. I never said a word all the way, but I was sure thinking plenty. Never again.....never again.....never again.....Oh God, never again will I voluntarily carry this fuckin' can. My back was permanently bent at a forty-five-degree an-

gle forward for at least an hour after I shed that water can when we arrived in our area again. Near the end of the trek, I had actually wished that a sniper would see my grenade launcher and shoot me; put me out of my misery. I never carried that can again.

This night was nearly as miserable as the day had been. Besides being so dark, the air was heavy and humid making even the simplest movement an exertion. I could have taken consolation in that it was going to get worse.....I had acquired that good old apprehensive chill. Upon arriving at bunker number five, Corporal Lance met us at the entrance and said shakily, "Number one says they see two craft in the river and they think they're sampans!" Turning back the way we'd just come, Sergeant Harris replied, "Tell 'em to sit tight..... we're on our way."

We made our way over the entire length of our 'front' more sure-footedly than I thought possible and in record time. I noticed that I was no longer cold, in fact had broken out in a sweat, adrenalin pumping through me, readying me for.....whatever. Slipping into the bunker, Harris says, "Where are they?"

"There, 'bout eighty yards out."

"Challenge 'em yet?" The challenge for this night was a white parachute flare; the correct response from any friendly troops was a red one.

"Do it." This does not align with our orders, I thought. Sergeant Harris had made a decision within himself that would affect us all.....for the rest of our lives. Someone scrambled out the rear of the bunker and a moment later we heard the dull 'thummmp' of the flare being launched. As soon as our challenge had extinguished, we heard from in the distance, out on the river, the same kind of sound in reply. For what seemed an eternity we watched their response float down through the midnight sky.....finally dropping into the black water. It had been white, too.

"Fuck." All the while, I'm thinking, "We're LPs.....no contact.....

LPs.....no contact.....what the fuck is he doing?" "Oh Jesus," I said, "are you sure it's white-then-red?"

"GODDAMNIT OF COURSE I'M SURE!" Harris snapped. He grabbed another white flare and raced out of the bunker to send another challenge aloft, as if by doing it himself none but the proper response would dare come. Our second challenge soared. The response came seconds later.....white again. "Fucking Cong," he growled. "There's no moon.....think you can get 'em, Renny?"

"But Sarge, our orders were to....." Alvarez of all people had raised the question, and before he could finish, he found himself on the receiving end of a rocking jolt from Sergeant Harris's rifle butt.

Harris then said, "Look. I'm sorry. Okay? I've been in the Nam longer than any of you right? I already have ONE Purple Heart, right? That's damn sure fuckin-A enough too. Now I don't know 'bout you guys, but from where I stand, I think we've all sucked ass long enough, too. We're here to fight a fuckin' war right? And I'm tellin' ya I'm sick of it. Clear up to here (raising his hand to his forehead). DON'T SHOOT TIL SHOT AT.....CAN'T STOP AND INSPECT TRAVELERS.....CAN'T CHECK THIS.....CAN'T DO THAT.....might piss 'I Corps off.....BULLSHIT!!!"

We all remained silent for a few more seconds, his attitude and his enthusiasm both becoming terribly contagious (maybe infectious is a better word because we stood there witnessing a breakdown in discipline and were about to join right in). To us, at that moment, his were the only words that made any sense. We were here to do a job.....Kennedy had said so hadn't he? Even our Commandant had said that we were "..... here to kill Cong." Right? At this we agreed. He took the folded piece of paper from his right breast pocket and tore it to pieces.

"Okay. As I was saying (glaring at Alvarez), can you get 'em Renny?" "Yes." I heard myself answer. Someone followed me out of the bunker and around to the side closest to the river. Maybe it was Harris. I didn't know at the time. I was too absorbed in thought. Oh Jesus, Harris was disobeying orders and so was I by following his.....we all were. I crawled to the edge of the rise, raised the front sight of the grenade launcher. My palms were wet, my heart was pounding, and I was cold again; cold from my guts out. I could barely make out the shape of the two craft out on the river, no more than silhouettes against the slightly lighter horizon. I fixed on the nearer of the two, squeezed the trigger ever so lightly (no jerking now).....my throat was as dry as a bone.....my head throbbed.....and then there was a dull roar in my ears.....the projectile was away. A HEAT (high-explosive anti-tank) round can definitely tear up some shit. I watched.....the shell exploded.....then nothing. The night sounds ceased completely. Dead silence. It was as if I was not really there; rather I was a distant spectator watching myself in a movie or something.

"Again," Harris's voice beside me. Loaded.....sighting.....squeezing.....away.....watching.....waiting.

Another explosion! Then as if an echo a thousand times repeating, I heard something ripping into the dirt around and ahead of us. Then the sound of the fifty-caliber machine gun reached our ears. FUCK! THEY WERE RETURNING FIRE. AND WITH A BIG-ASSED GUN! The person beside me said humorously, "Wish I could cut the buttons off my shirt so I could get closer to the ground!" I thought they'd never stop. It was only the small incline of land between us and the river that saved us from being torn into shreds just like the paper Harris had torn. The rip.....rip.....rip of the bullets tearing into the ground had become so

continuous it seemed like the sound the pull of a plow makes as it rapes the earth beneath it. Suddenly it stopped. When it did, I heard something else from out on the river that made my blood run cold. "Did you hear that Harris?" "Wait....." It came again.

This time it was unmistakably English. "YOU SONS-O'-BITCHES!!!" the voice from the river yelled.

"WHO ARE YOU?" Harris yelled back.

"FOURTH AMTRACKS..... WHO THE FUCK ARE YOU?" came the answer from the river.

"NINTH MARINES. WHY DIDN'T YOU ANSWER THE CHALLENGE RIGHT?"

"WE DON'T HAVE ANY FUCKIN' RED FLARES, ASS-HOLE!"

"WHAT THE HELL YOU JUST SITTING IN THE GODDAMN RIVER FOR?"

"STUCK.....CAN'T GIT OUT TIL THE FUCKIN' TIDE COMES IN!"

"ANYBODY HURT?"

"NO.....SCARED THE FUCK OUT OF US AND PISSED US OFF REAL GOOD."

.....silence.....then.....

"IT'S A GOOD THING YOU'RE SUCH A LOUSY FUCKIN' SHOT!!!"

.....silence.....then Harris said, "Sorry."

(I wondered if he was sorry for ordering the attack or for missing)

"FUCKIN'-A YOU ARE!!!" the river answered.

"Well, Renny," Harris said, "in the tradition of the Old West you'll have to paint an Amtrack on the stock of your grenade launcher." Then he laughed. I did not. Returning to the inside of the bunker, Harris and the others had a good laugh at my expense. Meanwhile, I sat by the entrance and my thoughts carried me away.....discipline be damned.

I remembered being young and at home. Young seems like so long ago. There were some pretty damn rough

times, as I guess is not so unusual in a single-parent home. I came to realize how damn hard it was for our mother to raise us four kids alone. All in all, I think she did an admirable job. I also remember growing up, and I suppose we all do it, the self-imposing of certain moral attitudes; things we would "never" do. As we grow and mature, however, the one thing we learn, sometimes quite unpleasantly, is to never say "never." The dogmatic credos that we grow up with place plenty of restrictions on us in their own right. Things like "bad associations spoil useful habits" and "God will only answer your prayers if you do so-and-so" is another. I had known in my heart, at the beginning, that I'd make it back home when all this was over. Now I'm not so sure. My faith in that is pretty fuckin' shaky.

I had no real 'sweetheart' waiting in the wings back in the World. Oh sure, there were a couple of girls who wrote to me from time to time. It was probably a big deal for them to know and write to somebody in the Nam, but so many people just didn't have any fucking idea what was going on here. One girl had written that she "knew there were a lot of pretty Oriental girls around....." and that she hoped I ".....would not date too many of them." I must've been a wee bit rough in my reply to the dumb bitch because she never wrote to me again. Every chance I got while we were in a CP area, I'd write home to my mom. Sometimes it would just be a note saying hi and that I was okay. Other times a full-blown letter would find its way home. She would share my messages with the other family members. She wrote to me every day of the year, I think.

My mother and three sisters were my whole world. There had been a brother, but he died before I was born. Daresay, I enjoyed the attention I received from being the only male in the family. We five had a great relationship and shared a lot of love. There were those people with >>

whom I associated prior to enlisting in the Marines that urged me to use the “Sole Surviving Son” clause to legally avoid military service in its entirety, but my love for America and tradition had permeated my being; thereby nullifying any such notion. Big deal – I was a fucking patriot. I looked forward to the passage of time at any rate, for this experience to be over.....to go home. But as I said before, my faith was wavering and at this hour I had doubts.

Yes.....Serious doubts. Here I am. An American. In this shit-hole of a country, proud to be serving mine? Other Americans blasting the hell out of each other. The reasons were simple. No one was accountable.....and we are responsible. How goddamned difficult would it have been for somebody to have gotten the word to us that there were two goddamn fuckin’ Amtracs stuck in the middle of the goddamn fuckin’ river, and, “please.....don’t shoot ‘em.” The Amtracs most assuredly had radio contact with Eighth Marines and we damn sure did. Did they think we simply would not notice each other? Then what? Get our asses raked over for lack of security? For fucking sure – no one was accountable, but I was responsible. My honor had begun to wane. I shot at the motherfuckers. Nobody else.....I did. We were becoming mercenaries; fighting our own damn war with anyone who happened to get in our way; no rules; no order; no chain of command; no fucking discipline. What the hell business do we have disobeying orders anyway.....no matter who they came from. We’re still United States Marines.....aren’t we? What if.....

The mag line sang out. Harris reached and picked up the handset. Suddenly his expression dramatically changed from concern to distress. “Okay. Let me try. Hang up. GET OFF!” He gave the magneto several sharp turns. And then again.....again.....I thought, “It only works with three cranks,” and almost laughed at the irony. The macabre humor of the situation was short-lived

however, when Harris looked up at me, replaced the handset in its holder and said, “Bunker five is cut off. Three says they were talking to them and the line just went dead. Let’s go.”

SHIT! This asshole is gonna get me killed if it’s the last thing he does! On the way, all sorts of morbid thoughts ran through my mind. I could see our comrades, lying in their own blood, throats laid open disemboweled, or even worse.....they may not even be there. Suppress.....suppress..... suppress, my disciplined mind kept repeating. But now I had doubts. Doubts concerning not only the man leading me at this moment, but about the whole fucking chain of command.

In other wars the generals were leaders of men, not just commanders, as in this one. Chesty Puller did not win fifty-three medals by sitting on his ass in some rear (now there’s an appropriate word) position, but by leading his men and regiments into combat. I wondered where our generals were..... probably sipping sherry and smoking big cigars thinking about banging the little whore serving them their supper. I was really getting pissed with this whole train of thought. Orders, discipline, blind obedience to orders; “FIX BAYONETS!” That fucking Harris.... disobeying orders and then coercing us into following him had nearly gotten us all killed. What if that Amtrack had responded with a grenade launcher instead of fifty caliber machine gun rounds? How in the hell were we going to explain firing on two goddamned Amtracs when we were supposed to be LPs? What if my HEAT round had killed our own people? What if they had killed US? What if.....

I fell into Harris, who had stumbled ahead of me.....down we went face-first onto the rock-hard dike. Something warm was running down my face and into my mouth – the taste of blood. I must’ve hit the ground pretty hard. My nose was bleeding profusely. “What the fuck!” Harris exclaimed as he went down. I thought at first

he’d been shot. I lay where I’d fallen, waiting for the sound of a rifle report. There was none. No other sound save our own labored breathing. Harris was on his feet now, groping in the darkness for whatever had ceased his forward motion a moment earlier. He found it and held it up.....the wire that connected the mag-lines together.

“That wasn’t there before, was it?” I asked. A whispered, “Nope.” He then started walking very slowly with the wire draped across his palm, following its path. We both realized at the same instant where the wire now led. The breath caught in my throat and that big sour ball dropped like a lead weight straight to the pit of my stomach when I saw that wire trailing off.....INTO THE RIVER. Fear didn’t stay around long here in the Nam. It was replaced almost immediately time and time again with RAGE! “When we reach the ledge, you hold up,” Harris whispered, “I’ll make my way around the tip, down to the beach along the tree line. You go over the top and down the other side towards the bunker. And if I start shooting, you get your motherfuckin’ ass down there.....got it?”

“Right, Sarge.”

I climbed the rest of the way up the hill, reached the top and stood, with the river now twenty feet below and to my right, trees and scrub brush to my left, on a ledge no more than three feet wide, listening. My God, what the fuck am I doing here? I’m not even twenty goddamned years old, hell I can’t even vote yet. I can’t get served a beer in my own home town bar. I silently wished that I was in my tent asleep and that this was only a nightmare (it would become a nightmare – over and over – for decades to come), one of so many, but still only a dream.....suddenly time stopped.

[Movement in the woods] A rustling sound of something moving through the brush. I wondered if they really could smell us. Someone told me once that a captured Viet Cong Regular had stated that “Amer-

icans smell like wet chickens,” and that they (Charlie) “.....always knew where we were.” Footsteps.....unmistakable. Oh, what the hell, “HALT! DU MA!” (Motherfucker). “What a stupid fucking thing to do, you idiot,” I derided myself.

That’s about the dumbest fucking order ever invented. Not only do you reveal the fact that a live human being is in the area, you damn near pinpoint your exact location!!! The movement stopped. Silence.....

I raised my .45 caliber, semi-automatic, hand-held, air-cooled, sidearm and aimed at the place where I knew the sounds would resume from and waited. It was not a long wait. By the second footfall, I fired. If you’ve never heard, in the dark of night (and I mean DARK), the racket that a frightened and wounded water buffalo will make as it tries to escape something that hurt it, you have really missed out on a ‘rush’! I thought the whole goddamned woods had exploded. It’s lowing and crashing through the brush would have diminished the sound of a tank. In the midst of the excitement I heard Harris’s voice from down below.

“Renny, get down here!” Down I went – gladly. “What the hell you shootin’ at cowboy?” Lance asked laughing. (Knowing all too well they knew exactly what had happened from hearing all the ruckus). Harris, Lance, and Jackson were in tears from laughing so hard. “Just practicin’ my Buffalo Bill Cody impersonation.” I answered.

It was such a relief to see these three okay that I momentarily forgot the reason we came to this bunker in the first place. Harris brought the subject up after their laughter had subsided; it (their laughter) had reached a fever pitch at one point, probably as much a vent for their emotions as anything else.

“What happened to the mag-line?” He asked. “D u n n o,” Lance answered. “We were talking and it just went out.” Harris and I headed back towards the ridge with

a flashlight borrowed from Lance, looking for a break in the line. “They were scared shitless, weren’t they?” I said with a chuckle. “You bet your ass,” Harris said, “but you’d never git ‘em to admit it.” We found the break. It appeared to have just worn in two on the edge of the cliff from the tide raising and lowering the wire day in and day out for however long it had been in place between the bunkers. It just so happened that the men were talking on it when the break occurred. Harris repaired it while I held the flashlight; then we headed back to the bunker. Upon arriving, Harris went inside, plucked the handset from its cradle, and gave the magneto its customary three turns, then spoke to the men in the other four bunkers simultaneously after they all came online. “SNAFU, motherfuckers, SNAFU.” Which translated means ‘situation normal – all – fucked – up’. “Except for Renny blasting away at a fuckin’ cow. Ha, ha, ha.....Don’t know what to do with him. We’re going to stay the rest of the night here in bunker five. If you need us.....we’ll call you.”

We spent the remainder of the night alternating two-hour watches, so we all faired pretty well as far as sleep goes; we each had about five hours before daylight burst forth.

On the morning of the sixth day, we saw troops coming from the direction of the old “C” Company area. There were thirty Marines from the Eighth Regiment – our replacements. We were instructed by the second lieutenant in charge of this detachment to return to the CP. Gladly, we relinquished command of the eleven-hundred-yard front. The attack on the Amtracs was never mentioned. The following months are shrouded in a fog. Pieces and snippets return from time to time – mostly at night. Marching to the mess tent for morning chow consisting of such delicacies as green eggs, instant potatoes, corned beef hash, powdered milk, gallons and gallons of coffee with pounds of

sugar to ward off the real hunger, and oatmeal; motherfuckin’ OATMEAL. At night came the usual harassing sniper fire, the frequent firefight between a patrol and ambush we were executing (many of which our squad was working), and in-between, I can remember the deathly boring routine of command post life. Up at dawn, formation and inspection, dismissal, daily work assignments, special work details such as burning off the heads (shit-house, outhouse if you will), dumping lye down the four-holers or setting the contents ablaze. What a STENCH!

I realize at some point in time I’m now in my short-timer period; countdown to my RTD (rotation tour date), when I was scheduled to leave this shithole and go home. Little did I know then, some of the most tragic and chilling events were yet to occur. The stuff nightmares are made of. Time passes.....conscience fades.....

During my next-to-last perimeter watch in the Nam, Charlie was out to get me because (he) somehow knew my RTD was near and I was going home. [Paranoia? NO fuckin’ way] The order-of-the-day (it changed every fucking time you turned around – sometimes they would collect magazines and ammo from us. “No shooting today, Marines.”) was “..... No shots will be fired from the perimeter unless first fired upon.” Fuck. Here we go again. (Just after midnight I picked up the sound of footsteps from SID (seismic intrusion device) number three. He was about fifty yards out. He was carrying a carbine slung over his shoulder, and the motherfucker was climbing a tree.....”Yes sir, I know the order of the day. Yes sir. No sir. Yes sir – can’t fire unless fired upon. Sir, no offense intended, but does the Lieutenant know the difference between the report of a carbine versus the report of an M-14?” A pause.....“Nope. Thank you, sir.”

S/F that’s another story. . . ■

Photo from Vietnam



Dick Peksens writes: I loved the sky-mounted .50 cal. I once shot an NVA who had jumped behind one of those semi-circular grave stones. Shot him right through six inches of concrete. I Also sprayed many a tree line from the turret. We did lose some people shot while riding "high." I had a sniper bullet hit the CP hatch when I had bent over to ask a Korean captain about the location of the sniper. I then exited the tank head first and landed on the Korean.....no more shots were fired.



Ooops!!!



A-24 East Side of Khe Sahn – April 1968
Updike, Garcia and Harrell



1st Platoon, Alpha Co., 3rd Tanks, March 1969
The group photo is (L to R): "Snake," Virgil Melton, Eddie Miers, Bruce "Foxy" Fox, Jack Pierce, Tom McGee and "Mo" Clanin, our mechanic.

John Hunter writes: This is my flame tank F-31, named "Hot Stuff," when we were in Da Nang. I was the driver; Sgt. Gladney was the tank commander and the flame section leader; A.O. Bellanger was the gunner. I was between cameras in Da Nang, so I didn't get many photos. That thing on top of the copula is a .30 cal., Sgt. Gladney liked using it instead of the .50.

TIME IS RUNNING OUT

PLEASE NOTE: You don't have much time left to submit your reunion registration paperwork. While we discourage "walk in's" ... we won't turn you away. The "\$30 Early Bird discount" and your ability to guarantee the purchase of a reunion t-shirt will end ... and your envelope must be post marked no later than Aug 30th. So you have less than 30 days to reap the benefit of early registration.

PLEASE HELP!

We would really appreciate it if you would scour your attics, your garages, and your basements to see if you have any treasures that we could use for our fund raising auction. We have had simple items like canteens, steel piss pots, tank comm. helmets, books about the Vietnam War, t-shirts, covers, and jungle utilities all the way up to hand-built scale models of tanks, demilled-90 mm shells, and beautiful antique plaques and commemorative K-Bar knives. We even had a tank's ballistic computer one year!!! Some members find items on E-Bay or other Marine-related websites and they obtain items for our auction which they donate to us. As most of you know, all donations to the USMC VTA ... [which is an IRS sanctioned 501 (c) 19 non-profit] ... are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law. If you have a great item or two, please contact any of our VTA Board of Directors and let them know that they will be available for the auction. You can find your board members' contact information on Page 3 of this issue. If the items are too heavy or bulky to carry on the airplane and if, after you contact us, we think it is a viable auction item, we may be able to help you with the shipping to the reunion; but we need to hear from you at least two months before the reunion...that's by August 30th.

Your Story Is Vital to the Vietnam Tankers Association

By Francis "Tree" Remkiewicz

The Sponson Box is a vital part of our communication with everyone in the Vietnam Tankers Association, especially during the time our reunions are not in session. The story you tell in the Sponson Box has the same effect on the rest of our group as if you were talking face to face with us. Truly, we need your stories, serious, funny, and odd, in the rear, on R&R, what has happened to you since our time in country, your story is very important. Could very well change a life. So serious is this endeavor, the Vietnam Tankers Association will provide two writing seminars for your help. These seminars are not grammar, spelling, proper paragraphs, or any other English type of seminar. These seminars will help you write your story. We will provide you time and resources for you to accomplish writing your story. I think you will find that it is not as hard as you might think. You should also feel very good once your story is done that you have helped so many in the VTA. The timing of these two seminars will also occur during the same time that the "Torsion Bar" hospitality room is open so that there will be break time for drinks and you are welcome to bring drinks and snacks into the seminar. Our seminar coordinator will be Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz. We will have sign-up sheets at the door at the time of check-in so that we can get a rough idea of the numbers but rest assured you do not need to sign-up in order to attend. Drop-in's are welcome and encouraged.

USMC VTA REUNION 2019

October 31 – November 4, 2019
DOUBLE TREE SUITES BY HILTON–SOUTHCENTER
16500 SOUTHCENTER PARKWAY, SEATTLE, WA 98188
Front Desk Phone: 206-575-8220
www.seattle.doubletree.com

Room reservations are being accepted by the hotel now.

The special reunion room rate will be \$129 per night which includes a Free full, hot breakfast. There is a Free airport shuttle that runs 24/7. Free Wi-Fi. Free use of the hotel Fitness Center and the Business Center. Free daytime parking and discounted overnight parking
You are responsible to book your own room, using your credit card. This card will remain on file for your room and tax charges, incidental charges, and any “no show” charges should you not arrive for your reservation and haven’t cancelled 48 hours in advance.

TO MAKE ROOM RESERVATIONS ON LINE:
Your on-line Hilton Link is: <http://doubletree.hilton.com/en/dt/groups/personalized/S/SEASPDVT-20181026/index.jhtml>

TO MAKE ROOM RESERVATIONS BY PHONE:
Toll-Free reservations assistance: 800-222-8733. Please provide your group code (VTA) and please let the reservation agent know what hotel you are staying at. Make sure is it indicated as the DoubleTree Suites on Southcenter Parkway in Tukwila, Washington.

■ GUESTROOM RESERVATION CHANGES / NO-SHOW:
If for any reason you have a reservation change on their first day of arrival to the hotel, you must notify the hotel directly of that change. Hotel room changes without notification cannot be guaranteed. Please have your confirmation number available when you call, 1-800-222-8733.

■ FREE AIRPORT SHUTTLE INSTRUCTIONS:
Our complimentary Sea-Tac Airport Shuttle Service runs 24-hours a day on an every-half-hour schedule. Guests should call us when they arrive at the waiting areas at Island # 1 or Island # 3 only. The pickup zone is located in the SHUTTLE BUS area one floor above baggage claim, after you cross over the “sky bridge.” You then go down one floor to floor # 3 in the parking garage area. Please call us on the “call board” from island #1 or #3. All return shuttles are scheduled with front desk. **Important note:** Be sure to get on the smaller shuttle van for the Double Tree Southcenter and not the larger buses for the Double Tree Airport. Our shuttles are middle sized white vans with a large brown stipe down the side of the van with a “SOUTHCENTER” sign in the front window.

■ DOUBLETREE SUITES OVERVIEW
• The Doubletree Suites is an All-Suite hotel

- Each guest room has either one king size bed or two double beds
- With a separate living room parlor that has a pull out sofa bed
- Two telephones, a coffee maker, a refrigerator, two televisions with in-room movies
- High-speed internet access in all guest rooms and in business center
- 100% non-smoking
- ADA Accessible rooms

- LOCATION–FREE AIRPORT SHUTTLE**
- Centrally located at the junction of I-405 and I-5, main highways in the Puget Sound area
 - FREE Airport Shuttle service
 - FREE shuttle to the Light Rail Station & FREE shuttle services within a 1 mile radius
 - Business Center with computers, printers & Fax and High Speed Internet Access
 - Located across the street from Westfield Shopping Center, with more than 140 stores, over 40 restaurants plus banks, a theatre and many other services and amenities nearby.

- INDIVIDUAL FOOD AND DINING:**
- **Cyber Café** Featuring Starbucks Coffee, Espresso drinks, pastries, fruit and more. Hours: 5:30am-5:30pm.
 - **Northwest Landing Restaurant:** Full Service restaurant for breakfast, lunch and dinner, opens 6:00am and closes at 10:00pm
 - **Atrium Lounge/Bar:** In the evenings, your guests can relax and enjoy an inviting atmosphere, Open from 2pm-11pm
 - **In Room Dining:** Additionally, we do offer in-room dining services (room service).

- POOL AND HEALTHCLUB:** Our complimentary health club offers the following:
- Indoor Swimming Pool: Open from 5:30am-12:00am
 - 24 hour Fitness Center
 - Two Racquetball Courts
 - Sauna
 - Spa Tub
 - And more! ■



OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM
2010 Seattle Reunion
Double Tree Hotel–Southcenter
October 31 – November 4

Want to save \$30?
Mail your registration before August 30

Please Print all information

Member’s Name: _____

Guest’s Name (s): _____
and relationship _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Cell Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Vietnam Tank or AT Bn: _____ Co: _____ Years in-country: _____ to _____
(Circle “Tank” or “AT” above)

Are you a first time attendee? YES _____ NO _____ MOS _____

Would you like to participate in our personal interview program? YES _____ NO _____

Your USMC VTA membership dues must be **current** in order to attend the reunion. If your membership is delinquent please mail your dues with this registration (or the dues will be collected at the sign-in desk). No partial payments of the registration fee are accepted. Fee covers planned food functions (banquet), bus transportation & lunch, meeting facilities, hospitality room, beer & sodas and other expenses associated with the cost of hosting the reunion. Registration fee does not include your sleeping room, taxes or air fare..

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the Seattle reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to Aug 30, 2019. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

NAME(S) as you want them to appear on your reunion name tag

Men's T-Shirt Sizes S – XL = \$15 each
(\$5.00 extra for XXL & XXXL)

○

○

○

○

○

SHIRT SIZE

○

SHIRT SIZE

○

SHIRT SIZE

○

SHIRT SIZE

TOTAL REUNION FEES

My Registration Fee:

\$170

\$

(After Aug 30th the late registration fee is \$200 each)

My T-Shirt

\$15/\$20

\$

Number of guests

X

\$170 =

\$

(Early registration fee for each guest is \$170.00 and late registration is \$200 for each guest)

Guest T-shirt

X

\$15/\$20 =

\$

SUB TOTAL

=

\$

Optional: Would you like to donate a few dollars to help with expenses?

\$

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:

\$

You must make your own hotel room reservations by October 17th to get the low room rate! Call: 1-800-222-8733 and be sure to mention both the “Double Tree Southcenter” and “Group Code -VTR” for the special room rate of \$129.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$190 per night.

CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has an Aug 30th deadline.

HOTEL REGISTRATION MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY BY YOU BY OCTOBER 17

HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$30.00

Submit this form along with your payment by Aug 30th to purchase a reunion t-shirt and save \$30 off of the Reunion Registration Fee.

Send check or money order made out to: USMC VTA and the completed registration form to:

USMC VTA

c/o Ron Knight

6665 Burnt Hickory Drive

Hoschton, GA 30548-8280

Bob Haller took these Pro-Viet Cong posters during his tour in Vietnam.

Bob writes: These pictures were taken between October 1965 and March of 1966. I had more but I damaged my camera and after I wrote home for another, it did not get to me until May of '66. I had an untold amount of pictures on film but lost them all when I was hit. Who knows what happened to them? I also had a second album that I lent to someone years ago and it was never returned to me. I cannot remember who the f*cker was. All tolled I had well over a thousand pics but lost them all but the few I have now.



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

Please note: If the last two digits of “EXPIRE” on your address label is “18” then your 2019 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.**

