



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™





PURPLE HEART POSTAGE STAMP UPDATE 02:

On May 5, 2011, aboard the USS Midway permanently docked in San Diego harbor, Ron Stroman, Deputy Postmaster General of the U.S. Postal Service unveiled the —Purple Heart with Ribbon— forever stamp. In his remarks, Mr. Stroman noted that —with the issuance of this stamp, the Postal Service, along with the rest of our nation, can pay tribute to those whose sacrifices have given all of us, a country that is truly the _land of the free and the home of the brave. Until now, the only _forever’ stamp has

been the Liberty Bell stamp, which is the symbol of our nation’s freedom. The significance of the Purple Heart forever stamp is that it now honors the symbol of the cost of our nation’s freedom. The Purple Heart Medal on every recipient’s chest is a reminder that the bill for freedom is paid in full. □ The stamp in one design (priced at 44 cents) is issued in a pressure-sensitive adhesive (PSA) pane of 20 stamps. With the issuance of the Purple Heart with Ribbon stamp, the U.S. Postal Service again honors the sacrifices of the men and women who serve in the U.S. military. The Purple Heart is awarded in the name of the president of the United States to members of the U.S. military who have been wounded or killed in action. The new stamp, designed by Jennifer Arnold, Washington, DC, features a photograph taken by Ira Wexler, of the Purple Heart medal awarded during World War II to 1st Lieutenant Arthur J. Rubin (1917-1978). In 2003, the Postal Service issued its first Purple Heart stamp. It featured a photograph, also taken by Wexler, of a Purple Heart awarded to Lt. Colonel James Loftus Fowler (USMC) in 1968 following an action on the border between North and South Vietnam. [Source: MOPH Press Release 5 May 2011 ++]



Letter from the President

Greetings!

We planned to get this issue out to the membership right after our most awesome San Diego reunion hopefully to show the members who could not attend that our get together this past month was the biggest, “the best-est and the fun-est” that we have ever had. The location on the West Coast was most definitely a good choice for those members who live west of the Rocky Mountains. I did hear from a few East Coasters that they could not afford the airfare...but they said that they’d be at the next reunion...given that it will be closer to their place of residence. Well, we have not inked the deal yet but it looks as if **San Antonio, Texas**, will be the gathering place for our 2013 reunion.

Now that I have reached the “ripe old age” of 64 - 1/2 and now that I am officially retired, I can reflect on my past life of the gainfully employed and as a parent. I was on Active Duty with the USMC for three years...but I will freely admit that I have been a Marine since my graduation from Bootcamp in October of 1966. After my discharge I had many different jobs in both the retail industry and in sales management over the ensuing 40+ years. I fully understand that I will never be the president of the United States, I will never be a rock star and I will never have a million dollars in my bank account. I am proud of the fact that my four children have grown into responsible adults and they are loving parents of their own kids. I am very happy with how my life as turned out. With all of that said, I can admit that my time in Vietnam as a Marine tank commander was perhaps the most responsible, most thrilling and yes, the most glorious time of my life. I too somehow understand how someone can miss war. The veteran organization of which I am privileged to serve as president, the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, does not glorify war...but we certainly honor the warrior. Once a perspective member “lets his hair down” and realizes that we do not relive the so-called glory of our time in combat, they understand that the bonds that we formed so long ago are still there. It is something that the “protected” simply cannot conceive or understand. This lack of understanding is perhaps the main reason that over the history of our wonderful country that civilians have always grown tired of our participation in any war from the Revolution to Afghanistan.

I am so excited that we are getting more and more members who feel compelled to write and submit their own stories about their experiences while serving in-country in Vietnam. I want to quote a statement that was in the Philadelphia Inquirer newspaper a few months ago: **“I have found that nothing in life is worthwhile unless you (are willing to) take risks...”** I interpret these words that were spoken at this year’s University of Pennsylvania commencement exercise in this way: If you want a more perfect and all encompassing Sponson Box then you will have to take the risk that your sea story will be “good enough” for the membership. I promise you that the reward of self-publication will pay off in spades! And perhaps your story will spark another member or two to recall a story that they want to feature here! I have spent countless hours on the telephone with members just talking about different experiences that they have locked away in their brains. My point to them is, wouldn’t it be a sad if you go to “The Great Tank Park in the Sky” without anyone being able to share in your story? Too many of our fallen heroes from previous wars felt that their story was not worthy and never passed it on. That is tragic.

Semper Fidelis,

John

“Winning does not always mean that you are first.
Winning means that you are doing better than you’ve done before!”

Bonnie Blair (1994 US Olympic skating champion)

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ON THE COVER: The yellow footprints at MCRD San Diego

New Members for 2011 – 3rd Sponson Box

Bedoar, John (Jack) T

424 Vann Street
Syracuse, NY 13206

Phone: (315) 218- 6233

A Co, 1s Tanks, '65 – '66

MOS: 1811

DOB: 2/26/43

Wife: Margaret

Recruited by: VFW Magazine

Bell, Donald W

1635 S Primrose Ave
Alhambra, CA 91803

Phone: (626) 289-2374

B Co, 1st Tanks, '68 – '69

MOS: 1811

DOB: 1/24/49

Wife: Kathy

Recruited by: Website

Benner, David T

7675 NW 79th Ave (Apt 212)

Tamarac, FL 33321

Phone: (954) 726-0478

H&S Co, 3rd Tanks, '67 – '68

MOS: 2141

DOB: 7/4/45

Recruited by: Marvin Fortney

Bennett, Donald R

5019 Park Rim Drive
San Diego, CA 92117-1042

Email: None

H&S – C Co, 1st Tanks, '66 – '67

MOS: 1811, 1814, 1802

DOB: 8/15/31

Recruited by: Edwin Kues

Cramer, Monty

1562 Inca Drive
Laramie, WY 82072-5007

Phone: (307) 742-2756

B Co, 3rd Tanks, '68 – '69

MOS: 1811

DOB: 7/29/48

Wife: Vicki

Recruited by: Website

Esquivel, Albert A

21081 Miramar Lane
Huntington Beach, CA 92646

Phone: (714) 536-8054

H&S Co, 3rd Tanks, '68

MOS: 1811

DOB: 3/4/47

Wife: Daphne

Recruited by: John Wear

Fanning, James D

1856 Monarch Ridge Circle
El Cajon, CA 92019-3882

Phone: (619) 447-1059

H&S Co, 3rd Tanks, '64 - '65

MOS: 1811

DOB: 9/22/44

Wife: Montel

Recruited by: Ban Hanas

Howell, Daniel D

HC 64 - Box 740

Comanche, OK 73529-9419

Phone: (580) 439-2038

B Co, 1st Tanks '69 - '70

MOS: 1811

DOB: 6/16/41

Wife: None

Recruited by: Leatherneck Magazine

Rogers, Lawrence L

16978 CR 140

Coshocton, OH 43821

Phone: (740) 545-9726

Associate Member

Recruited by: Doug Ewers

Summerlot, Terry R

210 Gulf Pines Drive
Port St Joe, FL 32456

Phone: (850) 227-1828

A Co, 3rd Tanks, '67

MOS: 1811 - 0811 - 3300

DOB: 5/7/47

Wife: Diane

Recruited by: Bob Stokes

Tyson, Joseph P, Jr

PO Box 89

Abington, PA 19001

Phone: (267) 261-8623

Associate Member

DOB: 9/24/74

Wife: Christina

Recruited by: Joe Tyson, Sr

Please note: Most of these new members were recruited through a joint effort. The recruiters called or emailed John Wear or "Robbie" Robinson and the perspective member had a membership packet sent to them. The packet that was mailed included a sample of the Sponson Box news magazine, a membership application and a letter asking them to join. Anyone who knows a perspective member, please alert either Robbie or John.

Looking For

Edward Lee "Harry" Harrison

USMC 1811

From: Norfolk, VA

Enlisted from: 7 July 1965 to 23 June 1969

Sadly he went to be with his Lord on: 29 December 2005

His surviving family (including Harry's only son, a NC State Trooper) is looking for anyone who may have known him during his USMC enlistment, most especially Marine tankers from his deployment to Vietnam. According to his DD-214, Harry's last duty station was with Bravo Co, 2nd Tanks at Camp LeJeune. His skipper was, 1st Lt TE Hefner.

Please contact:

Name: Linda Harrison
Mailing address: 124 E Maple Street
Gatesville NC 27938
Phone number: 252-287-8305
Email address: pastor@uraog.com

David Paul Alvarez

Bravo Co, 1st Tank Bn

Served in the Vietnam: 1965

David J Alvarez, the son of Vietnam Marine tank crewman David Paul Alvarez is looking for anyone who might remember serving with his father. Sadly David 's father passed away in 2007 from complications of exposure to Agent Orange and he is buried in the Riverside, CA, National Cemetery. David says that his dad's best friend was John Frederick Ashman who was KIA on December 23, 1965 . David's contact information is below:

David J Alvarez
P.O Box 33
Sunset Beach Ca 90742
(951) 215-5945 (Cell)
Email: usc.chef71@gmail.com

Letter to the Editor

I just joined the USMCTVTA last month so it came as a surprise when I read your story of the grease gun discharge in my first issue of Sponson Box. Within a day or two of our arrive at Dong Ha, Pete Penfold and I were shaving out back of the tent when that round cracked over our heads. It

wouldn't be the last round to crack by either of us during our time in Vietnam but it was the first.

Terry Summerlot
Port St Joe, FL

Direct Deposit Update 02: The U.S. Department of the Treasury has stopped sending paper checks to all new recipients of Social Security and other federal payments. Henceforth, anyone applying for Social Security, Veterans Affairs or other federal benefits will be required to choose an electronic payment method. People who currently receive federal benefits by paper check must switch to direct deposit by 1 MAR 2013. For people already receiving payments electronically, no action is required. The Treasury Department touts direct deposit as safer than paper checks. Last year, more than 540,000 Social Security and Supplemental Security Income paper checks were reported lost or stolen. The Treasury Department says the change will save more than \$1 billion over the next 10 years. The GoDirect campaign is sponsored by the Treasury Department and the Federal Reserve Banks. For assistance, consult the website <http://www.GoDirect.org>. [Source: Billings Gazette article 30 Apr 2011 ++]

IN A WAR REMEMBERED

BY ROBERT STOKES

“Body bags, condos and casinos -- the new Gold Coast of Vietnam”

June 18, 2010

This is part of a series of articles by Westporter Robert Stokes, based on his recent return to Vietnam for the first time since he covered the war from 1966 to 1968 as a freelance journalist and later as a staff correspondent for Newsweek Magazine.

CHINA BEACH, Vietnam -- The last time I saw this pristine stretch of beaches along the South China Sea, known to the Vietnamese as the My Khe, My An, and Non Nuoc beaches, it was filled with GIs in bathing suits, on surf boards and drinking cold beer, taking a brief R&R (rest and recreation) from the war.

Today, nothing remains of the former R&R facilities, but China Beach is ground zero for one of Vietnam's most ambitious tourism development projects that includes several four- and five-star resort hotels and the recently opened Crowne International Club Casino and Hotel Resort. The European-style, 24-hour casino focuses on foreign tourists from China, Hong Kong and Taiwan. Only those with foreign visas are allowed to play. The government says two flights a week from Guangzhou, China, will bring in the gamblers.

Elsewhere in the DaNang area, Vietnam's nouveaux rich are splurging on 2- to 3-bedroom, beach-front condominiums that are selling for \$200,000 to \$400,000 (U.S.) each. Mr. Hung, our tour guide, informed us that the DaNang area is also building two-and-three-bedroom beach-front villas for a \$600,000 USD price tag, and 80 percent have already been sold pre-construction.

Mr. Hung, a fountain of information, also claims that Nguyen Cao Ky, the former vice president of South Vietnam under President Nguyen Van Thieu, is a major stockholder in the Crowne International

Casino. Whether this is true or not is beside the point. Ky only returned to his former country in 2006, after fleeing days before the fall in April 1975 and starting a business in Orange County, Calif. Ky's return is symbolic of other overseas Vietnamese who fled the country by 1975, but are now returning in increasing numbers to take advantage of the new free market enterprise system introduced in 1986 under “doi moi” (economic reforms) that set the stage for political liberalization.

The economic reforms have helped Vietnam to boast Asia's fastest growing economy with an annual growth rate of more than seven percent. In 1993, the World Bank declared 58 percent of the population to be living in poverty. By 2008, that figure was less than 16 percent. I can believe that statistic, simply by noting the increase in the number of people who own motorized scooters nowadays, compared to the war years when more than half the population in Saigon still rode bicycles.

Despite the tourism mecca that Vietnam has become (the industry has grown at almost 20 percent annually since 2000), I still have trouble accepting the latest bumper sticker produced by Hanoi's tourism marketing office: “Vietnam -- A Country, Not a war.” While I acknowledge the natural beauty of Vietnam and the friendly nature of its people, most of my reference points are filtered through my wartime experiences. Some examples:

When Mr. Hung took us to visit the ruins

of the Cham civilization that existed in the village of My Son between the 4th and 13th centuries, my attention was diverted by the B-52 bomb craters still visible in the jungle beside the famous Cham towers. I also took issue with the implication in tourism guides that the U.S. bombed the ancient ruins indiscriminately. I pointed out to Mr. Hung that the Viet Cong used the Cham ruins as sanctuaries during the war, thereby giving us the tactical argument for bombing there.

During our visit to the Cham towers, we walked down a narrow trail to exit the ruins that brought back vivid memories of following Marines on patrols, single file down jungle paths, waiting for an ambush or firefight to explode.

The visit to Hue, the ancient imperial capitol, and the Citadel containing the Forbidden City -- a three square mile complex of palaces, parks and residences built at the start of the 19th century by Emperor Gia Long -- was also full of connections to the war. For me, Hue will always be related to memories of covering the assault by Marines to take back the city, street-by-street, house-by-house and the olive-drab body bags that were piled up on the west side of the Perfume River waiting for transfer to Graves Registration.

Taking back Hue from the NVA during the Tet Offensive was one of the longest and bloodiest battles of the war for U.S. and South Vietnamese troops. It lasted 25 days and cost the U.S. Marines and soldiers 216 killed and 1,609 wounded. ARVN

casualties were 421 killed, 2,123 wounded, and 31 missing. More than 5,800 civilians lost their lives during the battle, including 2,800 South Vietnamese government officials, local civil servants, teachers, policemen and religious figures -- anyone considered hostile to communist control -- who were rounded up and systematically slaughtered by the NVA troops during the first 24 hours of the siege.

I offer these statistics as a reminder to anyone who believes that the U.S. was guilty of excessive destruction of the city and the Citadel. Yes, our guns and bombs wreaked terrible damage on the city and its populace. But, we were confronted with a committed enemy that fought to the last man, rather than surrender. We had no choice but defend ourselves and take the fight to them. As we toured the Forbidden City and the massive stone

walls of the Citadel, with our guide pointing out the bullet holes in the walls and brass urns, it was difficult to view the place without remembering the wounded and the dying and the sacrifices by all sides that were made during those 25 days in February 1968.

I finally had had enough of Hue and memories and was glad when

Mr. Hung led us back to the car. As I looked once more at the Citadel, my last glimpse was of the red Vietnamese communist flag with the yellow star flying from the flagpole. It bothered me and then I remembered why.

The last time I was in Hue some 42 years ago, the same red flag with the yellow star was flying over the Citadel. We had not yet driven out the last NVA hardcore troops and captured their flag. That would happen a week later on

Feb. 24 when members of the 2nd Battalion, 3rd Regiment, 1st ARVN Division raised the South Vietnamese flag over the Palace of Perfect Peace. By then,

I was already down south covering another battle. I always regretted not seeing the South Vietnamese flag flying once again over the Citadel. And now the regret has come full circle.

Robert Stokes, a Westport resident, covered the war in Vietnam for nearly two years in 1967 and 1968, first as a freelance journalist, and then as permanent staff for Newsweek magazine. He later joined Life magazine, where he served as an associate editor and covered the Attica State Prison riot in 1971. In 1980, Dell published Stokes' first novel, "Walking Wounded", which was based on his war experiences. ♦

The Gunny's Night Out



Last night, some of my Marine tank company and I went to a gentleman's club. A Platoon Sergeant wanted to impress the rest of us, so he pulled out a \$10 bill. When the dancer came over to us, the Staff Sgt licked the \$10 bill and stuck it to her butt cheek!

Not to be outdone, a platoon leader pulls out a \$20 bill. The Lieutenant calls the girl back over, licks the \$20 bill, and sticks it to her other butt cheek.

In another attempt to impress the rest of us, the skipper pulls out a \$50 bill and calls the girl over, and licks the bill. I'm worried about the way things are going but fortunately he just stuck it to one of her butt cheeks again.

My relief was short lived. Seeing the way things are going the girl gyrates over to me! Now everyone's attention is focused on me and the girl's egging me on to try to top the \$50.

My brain was churning as I reached for my wallet. What could I do?

Then the Gunny in me took over! I got out my ATM card, swiped it down the crack of her butt, grabbed the 80 bucks, and went to the bar.

Ooo-Rah!!! ♦

HEROES OF THE VIETNAM GENERATION

The rapidly disappearing cohort of Americans that endured the Great Depression and then fought World War II is receiving quite a send-off from the leading lights of the so-called 60s Generation. Tom Brokaw has published two oral histories of "The Greatest Generation" that feature ordinary people doing their duty and suggest that such conduct was historically unique.

Chris Matthews of "Hardball" is fond of writing columns praising the Navy service of his father while castigating his own Baby Boomer Generation for its alleged softness and lack of struggle. William Bennett gave a startling condescending speech at the Naval Academy a few years ago comparing the heroism of the "D-Day Generation" to the drugs-and-sex nihilism of the "Woodstock Generation." And Steven Spielberg, in promoting his film "Saving Private Ryan," was careful to justify his portrayals of soldiers in action based on the supposedly unique nature of World War II.

An irony is at work here. Lest we forget, the World War II Generation now being lionized also brought us the Vietnam War, a conflict which today's most conspicuous voices by and large opposed, and in which few of them served. The "best and brightest" of the Vietnam age group once made headlines by castigating their parents for bringing about the war in which they would not fight, which has become the war they refuse to remember.

Pundits back then invented a term for this animus: the "Generation Gap." Long, plaintive articles and even books were written examining its manifestations. Campus leaders, who claimed precocious wisdom through the magical process of reading a few controversial books, urged fellow Baby Boomers not to trust anyone over 30. Their elders who had survived the Depression and fought the largest war in

(Continued on page 15)

This is a new section we are starting called, "What Vietnam Taught Me". We hope members will submit their stories of what they learned in Vietnam. We are certain there are many thought provoking stories out there. Please send your stories to John Wear (see his e-mail and or his mailing address on page 4).

What did Vietnam teach you?

The following article appeared in the Philadelphia Inquirer on Sunday, April 23, 2000. A few weeks before it was published, the editor of the paper's Community Voices section had asked the readers: What did Vietnam teach you about America... its values and its people?

I grew up as an Air Force "brat." My father (may he rest in peace) was a 30-year career US Air Force officer. I was raised as an "America, love it or leave it," right-wing, conservative Republican. I graduated from a military preparatory high school with the "America, my country, right or wrong, my country" attitude. President John F Kennedy's words, "Ask not what your country can do for you, ask what can you do for your country" still rang in my ears as I joined the US Marine Corps in mid-1966. After completing Bootcamp, I was practically rabid in my belief that America could do no wrong. During my enlistment (in 1967), Time magazine published a letter that I had written to the editor where I chastised (then) Cassias Clay for saying that he had no quarrel with the Viet Cong and for his not submitting to the draft. In that letter, I wrote that we should "fight now and love later." Not much later, I spent twelve months and twenty-nine

days inside a flame-thrower tank "playing hide and seek" with the North Vietnamese Army in and around the Demilitarized Zone (DMZ) in Vietnam. I saw a lot of unpleasantness (to say the least) but I came home physically unscathed. I arrived in Vietnam a proud "gung-ho" American fighting man, I came home a disillusioned and ashamed "old" man.

Luckily I was never spat upon nor was I called a "baby killer." For years I perceived that due to the lack of interest by the general public, I avoided any and all confrontations and conversations about "Nam." What did they know anyway? They weren't there. I did not join the Veterans of Foreign Wars, the American Legion, the Marine Corps League or any other of the veterans groups. Why? I imagine that my inner conflict of a proud warrior versus an ashamed loser could not be resolved. Killing the enemy was practically a mechanical thing. You see them, you point and you shoot. The Marine Corps trained us to do this, it was our job. But seeing brave American fighting men killed and/or horribly wounded in battle was one of the most traumatic things anyone can imagine. I also had a very good

(Continued on page 25)

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky



Master Gunnery Sergeant Norman A Thompson Jr., USMC (ret)

Died Dec 29, 2010 of injuries sustained in a motorcycle accident. He was 66. He was born June 21, 1944, in Bend, OR, to Norman, Sr & Irja Wuori Thompson. He married Stella Hunter in 1974 in Tampa. They later divorced. He married Gloria Cantino in Tampa in 1995.

He attended Springfield schools. Norm joined the Marine Corps in 1961. He was a 2143 Ontos Repairman until the Ontos was disbanded. In 1962-63, he was at Ordnance Maintenance Company, 3rd FSR, Okinawa. 1963-64 he was at Ordnance Maintenance Company, 2nd FSR, at Camp Delmar. He left the Corps, and then rejoined, and was at Camp LeJeune, N.C., with H & S Co., 2nd AT's, 1966-67. In May 67, he was sent to Vietnam with H & S Co., 1st AT's, Hill 34. Then was transferred to the 1st Tank Bn. in Quang Tri and a SeaBee base in Hue City. He was involved in the TET Offensive in Hue City in 68. He left Vietnam in May 1968. He was stationed at LFTC in Coronado, California, as an instructor teaching waterproofing the Ontos. He did this until the Ontos was taken out of service. He then chose to be a 2142. He went to many places and jobs in the

Marine Corps after that. He retired from USMC on 21March1988, spending the time as a reserve in retirement, giving him 30 years. He was buried with full military honors at 9:30 AM on Friday, January 7, 2011, at Willamette National Cemetery in Portland, Oregon. His father, Norm Sr, a Cpl. in the U.S. Army during WWII, passed in 2005, and he is buried at the same cemetery. Survivors include his wife; three sons, Norman III of Trinidad, Steven of Lafayette, LA, and David of New Zealand; a daughter, Jacquelyn Muncy of San Diego; a brother, Greg of Portland; four sisters, Carol Gibson of Salem, Dorothy Smith of Prineville, Debra Cain of Eugene, and Lana Hobbs of Springfield; and three grandsons.

GARY GIBSON

After battling pulmonary problems, Gary passed away last month just before the reunion. His wife Connie survives him.

Gary was not only a tanker with two tours, but also spent time with a CAP unit for several months. We were fortunate enough to see him last at Gunner Embesi's reunion in Montana.

Membership Information Changes for 2011 – 3rd Sponson Box

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Maple Shade, NJ 08052

John Harper
1488 – 20th Ave
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Billy J Laurent
2563 East 131st Ave
Thornton, CO 80241

Greg Martin
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Jon A Morrison
1717 Sagebrush Dr
Sheridan, WY 82891
Phone: (303) 902-1793

Ev Tungent
350 North 190th St (Apt 313)
Shoreline, WA 98113
Phone: (206) 546-3206

Herb Whittinton
Address correction:
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Cottonwood, AL 36320
Phone: (334) 691-6533

2005 RETURNING MEMBER:

Gigliotti, Michael S
501 Clubview Drive
McMurray, PA 15317
724-941-8447

Wall Street Journal, May 2, 2011. Pg. 15

Why We Still Need The Marines

BY MACKUBIN THOMAS OWENS

THEIR UNIQUE COMBINATION OF SEA, LAND AND AIR CAPABILITIES MAKES THEM AN INDISPENSABLE RAPID RESPONSE FORCE.

In Washington these days, the Defense Department is looking to cut its budget and the Marine Corps especially is reviewing its future role. Defense Secretary Robert Gates has spoken of “anxiety” that the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan have turned the Corps into a “second land army,” and he has cancelled major Marine weapons systems, such as the Expeditionary Fighting Vehicle. No institution is sacrosanct, so it’s worth asking: Why should we maintain the Marine Corps in the future?

The utility of any institution must be balanced against the opportunity cost of maintaining it. In arguing against maintaining a Marine Corps in the future, one must prove either that what the Marines do isn’t necessary, or that it is necessary but that another organization can do it more efficiently and effectively.

In 1954, the political scientist Samuel Huntington argued that each service was built around a “strategic concept”—“the fundamental element of [a] service . . . its role or purpose in implementing national policy.” A service’s strategic concept answers the “ultimate question: What function do you perform which obligates society to assume responsibility for your maintenance?”

The current Marine Corps strategic concept envisions an expeditionary force in readiness capable of responding rapidly to the full range of crises and contingencies, primarily but not exclusively from the sea, with integrated and balanced air, ground and logistics

teams. To this end, the Marines provide a responsive and scalable “middleweight” force that is light enough to get to where it is needed quickly but heavy enough—and with sufficient logistics support—to prevail against an adversary upon arrival.

Due to the proliferation of high-tech defensive weapons, the most controversial element of the Marines’ strategic concept are amphibious assaults against defended littorals. What most people envision when they think of an amphibious assault is a World War II scenario with landing craft churning toward a defended beach. But today’s amphibious assaults seek to avoid the strength of the enemy’s defenses, exploiting seams and gaps in those defenses in order to achieve surprise.

For example, in October 2001, Naval Task Force 58—commanded by then-Brig. Gen. James Mattis, who is now commander of U.S. Central Command—conducted an amphibious assault to seize the airfield at Kandahar, Afghanistan. Gen. Mattis’s force of two infantry battalions, along with fixed-wing aircraft, helicopters and logistics support, thrust 450 nautical miles from ships off the coast of Pakistan to Kandahar in only 48 hours.

In addition to conducting amphibious operations and providing forces for two wars, over the past decade the Marines have also been engaged in the Caucasus, Africa, the Pacific and Latin America. They have provided training and support for friends and allies and have responded to numerous crises: noncombatant evacuation operations

in Liberia (2005) and Lebanon (2006), as well as humanitarian assistance and disaster relief operations in Indonesia, the U.S. Gulf region (2005), Haiti (2008 and 2009), Pakistan (2010) and Japan (2011).

Marines routinely split amphibious ready groups into smaller packages to provide a variety of capabilities over a wider geographic area, reassembling to conduct larger operations. Marine assets are currently involved in aircraft-recovery operations in support of NATO forces in Libya.

So it would seem that what the Marines do is of value to the United States. But could another service do what the Marines do? The answer, of course, is yes. But the opportunity cost would be very high.

All of the U.S. military services are carrying out missions in support of their own strategic concepts. Asking another service to do what the Marines do risks crowding out what they already do. Each of the other services operates primarily in one “domain”: the Army on land, the Navy on water, and the Air Force in air and space. The Marines operate in a “lane” that intersects all three domains. In that lane, the Marines possess what economists would call comparative advantage.

What about the charge that the Marines have become a second land army in Iraq and Afghanistan? As the assistant commandant of the Marine Corps, Gen. Joseph Dunford, recently remarked, the Marines have no reason to apologize for sustained operations ashore.

Such operations, he observed, are part of the basic “sticker price” of the Marines: the requirement to carry out missions as directed by the president, an obligation Marines have met in Korea and Vietnam as well as in Iraq and Afghanistan. In addition, an important part of Marine Corps tradition has been to prepare to fight the kind of small-unit wars we have confronted over the past decade.

The Marines are an expeditionary force with a maritime soul. Of course, the current security environment requires all services to become more expeditionary than was the case during the Cold War. But as former Marine Commandant Gen. Carl Mundy was fond of saying, “Expeditionary’ is not a mission. It’s a mindset.” The Marines have developed this expeditionary mindset over decades,

and it is something that will serve the nation well in the future.

Mr. Owens is professor of national security affairs at the Naval War College, editor of Orbis, the quarterly journal of the Foreign Policy Research Institute, and author of “US Civil-Military Relations After 9/11: Renegotiating the Civil-Military Bargain” (Continuum, 2011). ♦

Thanks Docs!

I have read a few stories about the great deeds the Navy Corpsman’s have done and decided to share one of my own.

My wife and I purchased a new car while on vacation in Oregon. We live 800 miles away in Utah. So we had to take two cars back home with us. My mother volunteered to help us drive both cars home. We normally make the trip in one day so we appreciated the extra help.

We were in the middle of nowhere in the desert. I was sleeping shot gun and my mother was driving and my wife and kids were in the care behind us. We were going approximately 77 MPH.

Anyway, I was sleeping with my seat fully reclined with my seat belt on. It felt like we were driving on a dirt road for a minute. My mom shook my shoulder and woke me up. She kept saying, “I’m so sorry. I’m so sorry.” We were in the median. The car got back on the road. She over corrected. The car went into a power slide. I grabbed the “Oh Shit!” handle and looked at the steep dirt hill we were about fly up. I kept thinking to myself, “Not today! Not today!” My wife and children were going to watch us die.

The car flew up the hill and we

rolled violently. My head hit the side airbag so hard I passed out for a second. I saw an iPod and sunglasses and many other things flying around inside the car. I heard a distinct sound of breaking glass and the car being crunched up. We rolled twice and landed right side up with the wheels on the ground. I had the taste of metal in my mouth.

I checked to see if I still had all my fingers and toes. I made sure I could still move my legs. I looked to my right and saw my mother’s head slumped on the steering wheel. I got out of the car and stood up. I tried to walk around to my mom’s side but I was having trouble moving my legs. My mom woke up and told me she was ok. I saw a car pulled over on the side of the road and a man running towards me. I noticed his kid get out of the car to chase his dad across the highway. I tried to run to grab the kid out of the road but again, I couldn’t move my legs. The man was able to turn around and rush his kid back to the safety of his car. I had a few people around me asking me questions. I saw the stars and felt the signs. I told them all I was going to pass out and needed to lie down.

I pointed my legs up hill and laid

down because I knew I was going into shock. I felt better within a minute. A man jumped over me and was talking to me. He said, “Everything’s going to be all right Marine. I’m a Navy Corpsman.” Enough said. My mother and I were safe and alive and being looked over by a Corpsman. What a feeling knowing a Corpsman was in total control of the situation. I wasn’t even worried anymore. He stayed until we were loaded onto an ambulance.

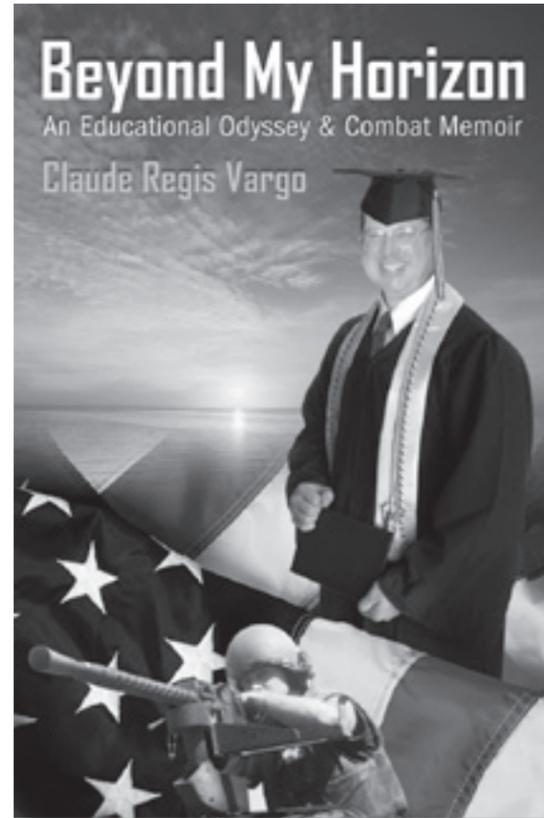
Such a simple thing of a Corpsman being there for me in a devastating situation was beyond words. I hope you’re reading this Doc. Thank you for being who you are. Thank You for being what you are.

Semper Fi Doc!

Jeff Steiner
JSteiner@slco.org

From the Sgt Grit’s “American Courage” E-Newsletter reprinted with permission by the author,

BY CHRIS VARGO



Claude “Chris” Vargo has generously permitted the reprinting of four chapters from his new book, *Beyond My Horizon*. These chapters cover his Marine Corps experience including Khe Sanh as a tanker.

You can purchase *Beyond My Horizon* at your nearest Barnes & Noble and Books-A-Million stores or order it online through Amazon.com. The book’s ISBN number is: 978-160844-565-3

ATOMIC BOMBS AWAY

The siege of Khe Sanh was a never-ending cascade of bombs, artillery shells, and mortars from both sides. The amount of munitions expended during the siege at Khe Sanh is staggering. It is estimated that the North Vietnamese fired over 40,000 rocket, artillery, and mortar shells on American positions during the Khe Sanh combat phase, which were responsible for a large percentage of the American and allied casualties.

Then there were the munitions we fired at them. Our artillery fired back around the clock, 24/7, from Camp Carroll. The big guns fired around the perimeter an estimated total of around 150,000 rounds into NVA positions from inside the base during the siege. Also were the nonstop sorties from carrier-based A-4 Intruders, and the DaNang-based F-4 Phantom tactical aircraft.

Between March 22nd and 23rd 1968, the NVA decided they had a real treat for us and unleashed the mother of all artillery and mortar attacks. During a tenhour period, a record 1,109 rounds were unleashed and fired on KSCB, for an average of more than 100 incoming rounds per hour.

But the granddaddy of them all were our B-52 Arc Light raids dropping racks of 2,000-pound bombs, each one of

which left a crater big enough for a tank or two. According to John Prados and Chaplain Ray W. Stubbe in the book *Valley of Decision: The Siege of Khe Sanh*, “That amounted to almost 1,300 tons of bombs around Khe Sanh, the equivalent of a 1.3 kiloton nuclear weapon, every one of the 77-day siege.”

It has also been said that “All the bombs hit their intended target 100% of the time, because they all hit the ground.” While we were in our cave during the arc light raids, the bombs were so close that we were popped around in that cave like the corn popped to make our popcorn.

The final push to relieve us and the besieged 26th Marines was named Operation Pegasus. The Army, headed by the 1st Air Cavalry, had been staging with the 1st Marines at Ca Lu and arrived at Khe Sanh on April 1, 1968. By the end of that month, the NVA had finally decided they’d had enough of this direct confrontation and would take their four divisions, or what was left of them, to the east along the DMZ. We would now have a great chess move, in that we would be going from a defensive to an offensive position and would be going from the prey to the predator.

Oddly, the first thing a supper gaggle of Army choppers brought in to us was boxes of apples and oranges. We thought

this was all too funny but welcomed the fresh fruit that we had not seen in many, many months. Upon seeing the crates of fruit, I immediately remembered from my health class in high school that scurvy was a result of a vitamin deficiency, and I had to chuckle. When it was our turn to take our tank from our Rock Quarry nook down to the CP, we dismounted and ran to the choppers, where we were given a selection of a couple of apples or oranges. The guy in front of me bit deeply into his apple and left half his teeth in it, spitting out the other teeth and dripping blood. After seeing this, when my turn came, I told the guy passing the fruit out to give me two soft oranges. I savored them slowly, slice by slice, as my gums were mushy and my teeth were wobbly. It had been months since I had last seen my toothbrush, which we had used for cleaning weapons.

PRESIDENTIAL RECOGNITION

The 26th Marine Regiment had been reinforced by elements of the 9th Marine Regiment, and, to a lesser degree, various elements from the Army, Air Force, and Navy personnel, and our five tanks from Bravo Company, Third Tank Platoon. Of the approximately 230 Marines in Tanks alone, there were almost one hundred medals awarded for heroism, from Purple Hearts upwards, including Bronze Stars, Silver Stars, and Navy Crosses.

The twenty-plus tankers who were at the siege of Khe Sanh, along with the 26th Marines and attachments, were awarded the Presidential Unit Citation (PUC). (See Appendix A.) During the entire Viet Nam war, only eleven PUCs were presented to Marine units—the Walking Dead were awarded two. The degree of heroism required for a PUC is the same as that which would warrant a Navy Cross to an individual, which is second only to the Congressional Medal of Honor. For the 700-plus Marines who died and the several thousand more who were wounded at Khe Sanh I have always thought everyone deserved a little bit more public recognition than just the front cover of Time magazine. I have also always wondered what the North Vietnamese received for their part.

The total estimated number of bombs dropped, artillery fired, and mortars tubed during the siege of Khe Sanh exceeded 100,000 tons of ordnance during the seventy-seven day siege. The total number of casualties is very hard to determine for various and obvious wartime reasons, but unofficial estimates put NVA casualties at between 10,000 and 15,000 around Khe Sanh and thousands more in the surrounding trails. Official estimates of American dead at Khe Sanh are put at 730 soldiers, and counting. Because soldiers were medevaced directly from the base to expire elsewhere, it has been difficult to account for them accurately.

Operation Pegasus would officially end the siege, but not the fighting, within the valley or the plateau. The siege of Khe Sanh officially ended on April 11, 1968, when the main supply road, Route 9, was finally cleared and the combat engineers reopened it and supplies began moving through the enemy lines again.

Khe Sanh Combat Base was dismantled and officially abandoned on June 23, 1968.

The battle for Khe Sanh is historically recorded as the turning point in the Viet Nam War and one of the most notable and proudest battles in Marine Corps history, but one for which both sides have since claimed victory.

CHAPTER SIX

Semper Fi or Die Hard

MY SECOND “SEE THE WORLD” TOUR

It was a warm Sunday afternoon along the sun-drenched mountains that bordered the DMZ in South Viet Nam, and so far, a relatively quiet one for the spring of ’69. I was on my second tour in ‘Nam and based at Camp Carroll, about three clicks below the DMZ. I was just between Con Thien—the “Hill of Angels”—and the “Rockpile,” a jagged but beautiful, almost-800-foot-tall piece of rock that overlooked three river valleys and two of Charlie’s trails. We used this huge chunk of granite as an observation post and a chopper and artillery base. From here, we mercilessly gave the NVA absolute and total hell in an attempt to force them out of Quang Tri Province and back to the Ho Chi Minh Trail, where we could get a better crack at them.

During the siege of Khe Sanh, “The Rockpile” had never once been overrun (in fact, it was never overrun at all during the war). Now, a little over a year after the siege, this Sunday spring afternoon was supposed to be an especially good day because it was some type of battalion holiday; the officers had all been hyping the all-day team festivities such as horseshoes, basketball, and volleyball for some time. We had some great grudge matches going between the platoons, and we could participate or watch our teams compete; read and write letters; play chess, checkers, back-alley bridge, poker, or acey-deucey. Damn, we could even wash our clothes or take a hot shower!

To top it all off, we were told we would be getting a hot meal of thick, juicy steaks and cold beer—true “pogey bait.” This meant there would be an actual day off in a war zone, with the big 175-mm guns at Camp Carroll keeping a watchful eye over the DMZ and our backs. Attitudes had definitely taken a Uturn for the good, and boy, were we ready!

Just before the revelry started, I heard my name called over the company bullhorn, which was never used very often, only for important matters like announcements of “Incoming!” I was summoned to the commanding officer’s (CO’s) bunker and urgently told to gather my tank and crew and round up another tank, which was specified, and take them both down to Route 9 toward Cam Lo. My mission was to locate an Army convoy that had been ambushed with no tank protection. Corporal Larry Basco and his two crewmen, Andy Anderson and Robert D. (Bob) Halay, bolted to their tank as ordered, but bitching all the way.

(Continued on page 22)

Subject: Bing West Meeting

During the summer of 1966, there was a Marine Recon Team wreaking havoc on a large NVA force in and around Ashau Valley. They were stalking the NVA calling in artillery form afar. After several days of this, the NVA sorta figured out what was happening and eventually our Marines were detected and a harrowing chase began. Captain Bing West, USMCR was doing his summer reserve assignment observing (damn, he does observe up close and personal) and writing about small unit tactics. He was with the Recon Team now being chased.

I am sending you a CD with his "monograph" on that and other observations and missions in which he participated, it had been published long ago, but was only available on the CD. I accidentally came across it, ordered several for my son and son-in-law.

Here is how I was involved. I am airborne, 20,000 feet with a wingman, Tom Elder, in the F8E Crusader loaded each with 2, 2,000 pound bombs. We are about to begin a TPQ run (radar controlled drop) into the DMZ area from high altitude. I get a call on "guard" (emergency channel, UHF, as you know) telling me to not drop, that there is an emergency, Marines in trouble, switch to xxx.x UHF and contact Covey airborne FAC.

I do so, immediately get Covey posit, quickly assume heading to an area (as I recall) just west and south of the big bend in Rt 9 near the karst formations. Covey tells me he has a Recon Team being hotly pursued by 2 battalions of NVA (a bunch of 'em) and the Marines are on the reverse slope of a hill with the NVA coming up the other side -- close enough to see facial features, "we don't have much time".

The conversation goes something like this:

Covey: What kind of ordinance are you carrying?

Orson: 2 aircraft, 2 - 2,000lbs. each.

Covey: Damn, not too good for close

air support, but we have no alternative, choppers can't get to Marines in time.

OS: Give me good mark and tell the Marines to get their heads down, way down.

Covey: Roger, smoke rockets on the way shortly.

By this time, I can see white top of wings of the Covey (a piper cub like aircraft) and he is at about 3,000 feet. I am approaching him from the south and once smoke hits he tells me Marines are at 6 o'clock a couple of hundred yards away. Not good! I am in the position and in a time press that my dive azimuth will be right over the top of the Marines, a short drop would be catastrophic.

I am around 15,000 feet. I tell my wingman to orbit and standby for another run if necessary. I role upside down, to better observe the smoke rocket hit, pull through into a 45 degree dive (Bing has this and my speed wrong in his write up), seeking to make damn sure I do not short drop -- to do that, I must make sure I achieve 500 kts at release altitude, have the 45 degrees, have the pipper right on the target and drop a wee bit below the prescribed drop altitude (man, it would have been great to have these computer systems of today). As I recall, release altitude was 6,000 feet, going below that with the 2,000# runs risk of frag damage.

Man, I am saying a few prayers. I pull it together as best possible, release both bombs simultaneously, pull almost 6 gs (a bit excessive, popped some rivets upon post flight inspection) and head skyward rolling up on a wing as energy takes me upward. I see the explosion aftermath, a huge cloud of dirt, dust and explosive matter. I await a report from the FAC, he says nothing (he is talking to the Recon Team on FM, as I recall, which I did not have). After incredibly long seconds, I say, "Covey, what happened?" He responds, "Wait one", my heart sinks.

Then, he comes up and says, "Direct hit, attack on Marines terminated, major damage, and the Marines said, "Don't drop any more of those bombs! We are being

pelted by huge boulders and trees".

Helos came in, picked up the now-near-deaf Marines and took them home. My flight returned to DaNang.

A couple of days later, I am sitting alert duty on the hotpad and this red-clay covered Marine captain comes into the hotpad tent. He is covered in red clay and the expression on his face reminded me of Wiley Coyote in the old Road Runner cartoons --- his eyes were a spectacle to observe.

He asked for me, then said, "I'm Bing West, and I was with that Recon Team you helped!"

The alert pad alarm goes off immediately after he said this and I had to launch on another mission supporting our Marines. Bing and I had barely spoken. I would not see him again and you know what happened to both of us after that. (Interestingly, we were both in the Reagan Administration as Asst Secretaries).

I remembered the name, Bing West, when I was in prison. Back in 2003 or so, I get a call from a former squadronmate who knew this story. He was up in NJ and had attended a wedding and met another Marine, conversation began with none other than Bing West. My squadronmate said that he flew F8s, and Bing replied, "I have an F8 story". My squadronmate got us in contact, and Bing and I had a 3 hour long lunch at Capital Grille a few weeks later. Fascinating to put the two perspectives together. Bing said the Team was inundated with boulders the size of basketballs and literally tree trunks.

Bing sends me autograph copies of each book, usually inscribed with something like, "This book would never had been written without your help! Semper Fi."

Bing and I stay in touch. He is a remarkable man, and I am honored to call him a friend.

Best and Semper Fi, CD on the way.

Orson

Heroes of the Vietnam Generation

(Continued from page 8)

history were looked down upon as shallow, materialistic, and out of touch.

Those of us who grew up, on the other side of the picket line from that era's counter-culture can't help but feel a little leery of this sudden gush of appreciation for our elders from the leading lights of the old counter-culture. Then and now, the national conversation has proceeded from the dubious assumption that those who came of age during Vietnam are a unified Generation in the same sense as their parents were, and thus are capable of being spoken for through these fickle elites.

In truth, the "Vietnam Generation" is a misnomer. Those who came of age during that war are permanently divided by different reactions to a whole range of counter-cultural agendas, and nothing divides them more deeply than the personal ramifications of the war itself. The sizable portion of the Vietnam age group who declined to support the counter-cultural agenda, and especially the men and women who opted to serve in the military during the Vietnam War, are quite different from their peers who for decades have claimed to speak for them. In fact, they are much like the World War II Generation itself. For them, Woodstock was a side show, college protester's were spoiled brats who would have benefited from having to work a few jobs in order to pay their tuition, and Vietnam represented not an intellectual exercise in draft avoidance, or protest marches but a battlefield that was just as brutal as those their fathers faced in World War II and Korea and in instances even more brutal.

Few who served during Vietnam ever complained of a Generation Gap. The men who fought World War II were their heroes and role models. They honored their father's service by emulating it, and largely agreed with their father's wisdom in attempting to stop Communism's reach in Southeast Asia.

The most accurate poll of their attitudes (Harris, 1980) showed that 91 percent were glad they'd served their country, 74 percent enjoyed their time in the service, and 89 percent agreed with the statement that "our troops were asked to fight in a war which our political leaders in Washington would not let them win." And most importantly, the castigation they received upon returning home was not from the World War II Generation, but from the very elites in their age group who supposedly spoke for them.

Nine million men served in the military during Vietnam War, three million of whom went to the Vietnam Theater. Contrary to popular mythology, two-thirds of these were volunteers, and 73 percent of those who died were volunteers. While some attention has been paid recently to the plight of our prisoners of war, most of whom were pilots; there has been little recognition of how brutal the war was for those who fought it on the ground.

Dropped onto the enemy's terrain 12,000 miles away from home, America's citizen-soldiers performed with a tenacity and quality that may never be truly understood. Those who believe the war was fought incompletely on a tactical level should consider Hanoi's recent admission that 1.4 million of its soldiers died on the battlefield, compared to 58,000 total U.S. dead.

Those who believe that it was a "dirty little war" where the bombs did all the work might contemplate that it was the most costly war the U.S. Marine Corps has ever fought-five times as many dead as World War I, three times as many dead as in Korea, and more total killed and wounded than in all of World War II.

Significantly, these sacrifices were being made at a time the United States was deeply divided over our effort in Vietnam. The Baby-Boom Generation had cracked apart along class lines as America's young men were making difficult, life-or-death choices about serving. The better academic institutions became focal points for vitriolic protest against the war, with few of their graduates going into the military. Harvard College, which had lost 691 alumni in World War II, lost a total of 12 men in Vietnam from the classes of 1962 through 1972 combined. Those classes at Princeton lost six, at MIT two. The media turned ever more hostile. And frequently the reward for a young man's having gone through the trauma of combat was to be greeted by his peers with studied indifference of outright hostility.

What is a hero? My heroes are the young men who faced the issues of war and possible death, and then weighed those concerns against obligations to their country. Citizen-soldiers who interrupted their personal and professional lives at their most formative stage, in the timeless phrase of the Confederate Memorial in Arlington National Cemetery, "not for fame of reward, not for place of for rank, but in simple obedience to duty, as they understood it." Who suffered loneliness, disease, and wounds with an often-contagious elan. And who deserve a far better place in history than that now offered them by the so-called spokesman of our so-called Greatest Generation.

Mr. Brokaw, Mr. Matthews, Mr. Bennett, Mr. Spielberg, meet my Marines. 1969 was an odd year to be in Vietnam. Second only to 1968 in terms of American casualties, it was the year made famous by Hamburger Hill, as well as the gut-wrenching Life cover story showing pictures of 242 Americans who had been killed in one average week of fighting. Back home, it was the year of Woodstock, and of numerous anti-war rallies that culminated in the Moratorium march on Washington. The My Lai massacre hit the papers and was seized upon the anti-war movement as the emblematic moment of the war. Lyndon Johnson left Washington in utter humiliation.

(Continued on page 16)

Richard Nixon entered the scene, destined for an even worse fate. In the An Hoa Basin southwest of Danang, the Fifth Marine Regiment was in its third year of continuous combat operations. Combat is an unpredictable and inexact environment, but we were well led. As a rifle platoon and company commander, I served under a succession of three regimental commanders who had cut their teeth in World War II, and four different battalion commanders, three of whom had seen combat in Korea. The company commanders were typically captains on their second combat tour in Vietnam, or young first lieutenants like myself who were given companies after many months of "bush time" as platoon commanders in the Basin's tough and unforgiving environs.

The Basin was one of the most heavily contested areas in Vietnam, its torn, cratered earth offering every sort of wartime possibility. In the mountains just to the west, not far from the Ho Chi Minh Trail, the North Vietnamese Army operated an infantry division from an area called Base Area 112. In the valleys of the Basin, main-force Viet Cong battalions whose ranks were 80 percent North Vietnamese Army regulars moved against the Americans every day. Local Viet Cong units sniped and harassed. Ridge-lines and paddy dikes were laced with sophisticated booby traps of every size, from a hand grenade to a 250-pound bomb. The villages sat in the rice paddies and tree lines like individual fortresses, crisscrossed with the trenches and spider holes, their homes sporting bunkers capable of surviving direct hits from large-caliber artillery shells. The Viet Cong infrastructure was intricate and permeating. Except for the old and the very young, villagers who did not side with the Communists had either been killed or driven out to the government controlled enclaves near Danang.

In the rifle companies, we spent the endless months patrolling ridge-lines and villages and mountains, far away from any notion of tents, barbed wire, hot food, or electricity. Luxuries were limited to what would fit inside one's pack, which after a few "humps" usually boiled down to letter-writing material, towel, soap, toothbrush, poncho liner, and a small transistor radio.

We moved through the boiling heat with 60 pounds of weapons and gear, causing a typical Marine to drop 20 percent of his body weight while in the bush. When we stopped we dug chest-deep fighting holes and slit trenches for toilets. We slept on the ground under makeshift poncho hooches, and when it rained we usually took our hooches down because wet ponchos shined under illumination flares, making great targets. Sleep itself was fitful, never more than an hour or two at a stretch for months at a time as we mixed daytime patrolling with night-time ambushes, listening posts, foxhole duty, and radio watches. Ringworm, hookworm, malaria, and dysentery were common, as was trench foot when the monsoons came. Respite was rotating back to the mud-filled regimental combat base at An Hoa

for four or five days, where rocket and mortar attacks were frequent and our troops manned defensive bunkers at night. Which makes it kind of hard to get excited about tales of Woodstock, or camping at the Vineyard during summer break.

We had been told while training that Marine officers in the rifle companies had an 85 percent probability of being killed or wounded, and the experience of "Dying Delta," as our company was known, bore that out. Of the officers in the bush when I arrived, our company commander was wounded, the weapons platoon commander wounded, the first platoon commander was killed, the second platoon commander was wounded twice, and I, commanding the third platoons fared no better. Two of my original three-squad leaders were killed, and the third shot in the stomach. My platoon sergeant was severely wounded, as was my right guide. By the time I left, my platoon I had gone through six radio operators, five of them casualties.

These figures were hardly unique; in fact, they were typical. Many other units; for instance, those who fought the hill battles around Khe Sanh, or were with the famed Walking Dead of the Ninth Marine Regiment, or were in the battle of Hue City or at Dai Do, had it far worse.

When I remember those days and the very young men who spent them with me, I am continually amazed, for these were mostly recent civilians barley out of high school, called up from the cities and the farms to do their year in hell and he return. Visions haunt me every day, not of the nightmares of war but of the steady consistency with which my Marines faced their responsibilities, and of how uncomplaining most of them were in the face of constant danger. The salty, battle-hardened 20-year-olds teaching green 19-year-olds the intricate lessons of the hostile battlefield. The unerring skill of the young squad leaders as we moved through unfamiliar villages and weed-choked trails in the black of night. The quick certainty when a fellow Marine was wounded and needed help. Their willingness to risk their lives to save other Marines in peril. To this day it stuns me that their own countrymen have so completely missed the story of their service, lost in the bitter confusion of the war itself.

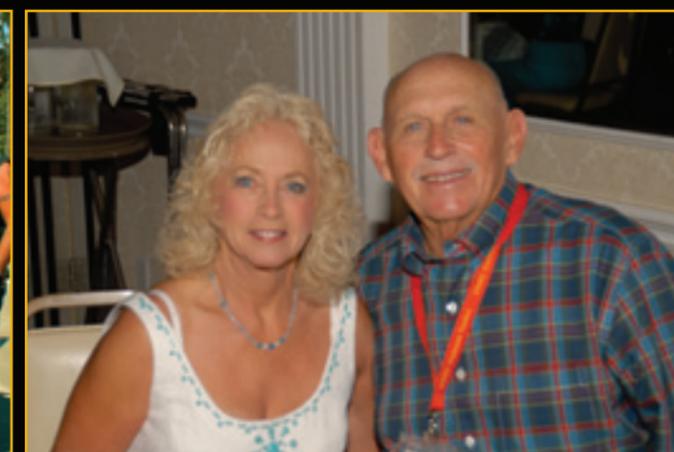
Like every military unit throughout history we had occasional laggards, cowards, and complainers. But in the aggregate, these Marines were the finest people I have ever been around. It has been my privilege to keep up with many of them over the years since we all came home. One finds in them very little bitterness about the war in which they fought. The most common regret, almost to a man, is that they were not able to do more for each other and for the people they came to help.

The Greatest Generation? Think about if they fought a unpopular war, came Home was spit on, called names,

(Continued on page 29)



Motorcycle riders: Mark Damschen (Monument, CO), John Trower (Colorado Spring, CO) and Tom Colson (Tucson, AZ)



RB English with Karen Allred



Lt.Col. Polidoro, C.O. of 4th Tank Bn, with John Wear and Doc Hackemack



Doc always with the girls



Harbor Cruise – a bit chilly!



MCRD Graduation



2011 San Diego Group Photo



Belmo and his son Dominick with Sparrow



We got tired of saluting that shirt!



Ginney Schlitz with Gerry Hearne



Color Guard at Farewell Dinner



Roger McVey puts another one to sleep



Bev Hoekstra & daughter Karyn Ennis during Fallen Heroes

GUESS WHO

Photo Contest



The ears are a dead giveaway!

First person to call or e-mail John Wear with the correct answer will one a "valuable" prize . . . well, maybe not so valuable. (see Board Member list on page 4 for John's addresses)

JOKE

The peace is shattered in an airplane by a five-year-old boy who picks the moment after the plane has taken off to throw a wild temper tantrum. No matter what his frustrated, embarrassed mother does to try to calm him down, the boy continues to scream furiously and kick the seats around him.

Suddenly, from the rear of the plane, a man in a Marine uniform is seen slowly walking forward up the aisle. Stopping the flustered mother

with an upraised hand, the courtly, soft-spoken Marine leans down and, motioning toward his chest, whispers something into the boy's ear.

Instantly, the boy calms down, gently takes his mother's hand, and quietly fastens his seat belt. All the other passengers burst into spontaneous applause.

As the Marine slowly makes his way back to his seat, one of the cabin attendants touches his sleeve.

"Excuse me, sir," she asks quietly, "but could I ask you what magic words you used on that little boy?"

The Marine smiles serenely and gently confides, "I showed him my pilot's wings, service stars, and battle ribbons, and explained that they entitled me to throw one passenger out the plane door on any flight I choose."*

Beyond My Horizon

(Continued from page 13)

I was quickly briefed that an Army Duster and the lead truck had been hit and rendered useless and the rest of the convoy was stalled behind them, taking heavy automatic weapons and mortar fire. I was further informed that Army tanks were on their way but still miles off in the rear so we had to get there fast to provide some immediate support and show some muscle in the meantime.

"Hell," the CO said, "it will just be a Sunday walk in the park." I tried to tell him that I was really short on my crew, but he cut me off and insisted that I get going: "Di di mau!"

I quickly threw off my Sunday-go-to-meeting blouse, put on my never-been washed, now very smelly flak jacket, and informed my grumbling buddies of the situation. We immediately (if not sooner) headed for Route 9, leaving a thunderous cloud of red dust behind us. As we barreled out of the front gate, past our defensive minefields and the triple-stranded concertina wire, I flashed back to my first tour of duty and remembered how, around fifteen months earlier, another group of tankers had rolled into a heavy ambush. We were now on our way to the exact ambush site on Route 9.

On January 24, 1968, the NVA had set up a devious and deadly ambush where the road curved sharply on Route 9 and the vehicles had to gear down and slow down to make the turn onto the access road as they returned to Camp Carroll. This sharp turn in the road was where a small Marine convoy and then a second rescue convoy, led by Captain Daniel W. Kent and his unit, had both been ambushed.

The NVA had opened up on the first convoy using recoilless rifles, pounding the convoy as it had slowed into the turn returning to camp, wrecking the vehicles. Mortar rounds, small arms, and machine-gun fire had poured in on the Marines, pinning them down. The outmanned, outgunned Marines had held their own with one quad .50-caliber and gotten out a call for help. Captain Kent had immediately mounted up and led a rescue column of tanks roaring out of the camp, with himself seated in the turret of the lead tank.

This is when the NVA had launched their second ambush of the day in the same spot, as the rescue column arrived on the scene. For this second ambush, Corporal Harry C. Christensen had been awarded a Silver Star for valiantly trying to save Captain Kent's life after the captain had been hit and fatally wounded by the recoilless rifle barrage that had opened up immediately as Kent's group with Christianson arrived on the scene. The Marines had fought back until two helicopter gunships had arrived and finally run off the ambushers. There had been eight dead and forty-four wounded Marines in that previous "walk in the park." The battle had lasted most of the day, with a couple hundred dead gooks and multiples of body drag marks.

Briskly, I cocked my tank commander's cupola at half mast; locked and loaded our .30- and .50-caliber machine

guns, our grease gun, and my personal .45; then grabbed some grenades and mumbled, "Yeah...just a walk in the park, huh?" I remembered the months at Khe Sanh during the siege when we had been forced into a defensive position and the hundred thousand rockets, artillery, and mortars they had pounded us with. We were now in an offensive position, and the boot on my foot was looking for some ass to kick. To paraphrase Captain Jim Coan in an article I'd seen in the Marine tankers quarterly newsletter "Sponson Box," "There is nothing worse than several pissed-off Marine tankers with one hundred thousand pounds of steel and explosive force looking for one thing...PAYBACK!!!"

After about twenty minutes or so on a very dusty road, the first thing we saw was a small bird-dog spotter prop plane that was dropping white-smoke "willie peters" on the ambushers' location. We went from a lackadaisical pace to an all out ricky-tic and next heard loud explosions and the familiar sounds of automatic-arms fire. We were met with a few hastily fired but errant RPGs, a couple mortars, and the faint splatters of .50-caliber gunfire on the front of our tanks, where ace driver Lance Corporal Robert (Bob) Mendez quickly buttoned up. As a tank commander, I had several drivers, but Mendez was one of the best. I looked back to see that half our tank tread was hanging off a mountain cliff, with Bob barreling forward. To this day I still get cold chills thinking about those mountain drops. Bob was an illegal seventeen-year-old, but a damn fine, Marine!

I figured the NVA had to be firing a Soviet-type DShK .51-caliber gun, because I could hear the heavy splats individually hit the bottom half of our tanks and see them hit the dirt but the splats were too slow for a .30-caliber type weapon and out of range for an AK-47 assault rifle.

We did not know our spotter's radio frequency, so we had no direct communication with him. The spotter dropped three more of the smoke grenades, which, we ascertained, were in the direction the bad guys were moving.

We did have one small problem, though: there were only two of us out of a standard crew of four. We didn't have a loader or a gunner, only the driver, Mendez, and me as the TC, so I made a command decision (ha!) to pick up Mendez into the turret by traversing it to six o'clock to the crawlspace. This must have looked pretty stupid to the aerial spotter, our other tank, and the gooks, because we approached an ambush zone with the gun turret to the rear, pointing at our backup tank.

Once I got Mendez in, I ordered both our tanks to clear out the immediate area by firing several canister rounds each on the left-hand side of the road. This made sure that there were no RPGs or sappers in close quarters and we were then free to fire our mini-dart beehive rounds that were set for a couple of hundred meters further. If necessary, we would then utilize our HEAT rounds for exact target locations.

Larry Basco's tank then moved up and pushed the convoy's damaged lead truck into a culvert on the side of the road, dumping their payload on its side. Mendez and I in our tank

pushed the Duster off to the same side. This made room on the road for the remainder of the convoy to proceed without dropping off a short but treacherous cliff on the opposite side of the road.

At that point, the spotter swooped down on the other side of a mountain razorback, where we lost sight of him. When he came up, white smoke was rising well behind him and on the other side of the razor. We took this to mean that the bad guys were still firing with the opposite mountainside crest as cover. We switched several rounds to a time-delay fuse setting and pelted the ridge with both of our tanks. After that barrage, it was obvious that the bad guys were shattered or had retreated. The spotter tipped his wings and headed south. There would be no major ambush on Route 9 this day.

In the meantime, we had heard from the CP that the Army mechanized was on the way and we were to stay put. After a short while, a General Patton-looking Army major came roaring up in a Jeep, with his steel mounted cavalry following.

He had a swagger stick, his boots were spit-shined, and he was decked out with everything but pearl-handled pistols. Looking back, I swear I think he even had an ascot, shiny buttons, and cufflinks! Mendez mumbled something hilarious over the intercom, and I lost it; I couldn't help myself, I couldn't stop laughing. Basco and his crew saw what was coming, and all pointed toward Mendez and me to face the oncoming heat from the Army major, who looked like he wanted some leatherneck revenge. I had never seen so many new-looking tanks in my life; they looked like they might have even been waxed. They shimmered like polished turtle shells coming over a sand dune from the high side of the road, avoiding the convoy.

The major climbed aboard my tank, kept calling me captain, and then announced that he was assuming command of the situation from the back of my tank and was directly prosecuting this engagement. He told me to fire a white phosphorous to where the enemy fire had last been seen and his armor would take over from there. After my tank fired a round in the proximity, I told him the shot had been low and about 100 meters to the right. He yelled back that my gunner was a lousy shot and had probably been trained at Disneyland or some such place. I responded by telling him that I did not have a gunner, was overriding the firing with my TC's joystick, and had aimed and fired by eyesight. He angrily told me to back up my Marine Corps piece of crap "right now!" and that's when I told him, "I do not have a driver, either, sir!"

In all the confusion, I never did count all the tanks, which could have been anywhere from 25 to 50—what an absurd spectacle. When they all let loose their fire for effect, I thought I was back in Khe Sanh during the siege. After they had effectively eliminated all the wildlife and anything else that moved in a blinding cloud of dust, Mendez and I both shook our heads and stood with shit-eating grins on

our dirt-covered faces, and we both ducked into the turret at the same time.

Just then, the major looked at us and demanded that I stand tall on the back of my tank and give him an instant sit rep (situation report) and account for my "sorry" actions. When I climbed out of the tank commander's cupola, stood, and saluted, he could not believe what he saw—a 6'6" leatherneck wearing only shorts, boots with no laces, and a flack jacket—no socks and no shirt.

I could tell he was Irish, because on his blouse was embroidered O'Something, and I remembered that one of my drill instructors in boot camp had had that same devilish, reddish face. So I knew this guy was either Irish or a man about to have a stroke, maybe both, but I sure as hell didn't care. I, too, was sunburned red, embarrassed, and had scabs on the tops of my ears and on my nose, along with a pretty good smirk on my face. We both must have looked pretty freaking stupid. The major looked up at me and said he was going to bring me up on charges of "conduct unbecoming an officer," or some crap like that, and asked me what kind of chicken-shit outfit this was.

That was when I smiled and proudly informed him that we were the light section of Ritch's Raiders and that I was "but a corporal...sir!"

The major screamed bullshit and grabbed my "com" helmet that was then resting in a full-tilted copula hatch with the radio-connected coiled-cable inside the tank. He grabbed the helmet and just about smashed it in my face, yelling, "See this!" I looked at my beat-up old green com helmet with etched black letters— "Cp" and a worn-out "1." I suppose he must have thought I was a "Cp"—captain—rather than a proud "Cpl"—corporal!

Our mission being accomplished with both the NVA and the Army major, my team started to return to base, but the Army tanks began firing. One of them accidentally put a bead of .30 calibers across the rear of our tank. They were so close that their tracer rounds hit our "forty mike-mike" ammo boxes attached to the back of the turret, which held all our personal gear. In no time at all, the tracers ignited all our skivvies and personal effects, including the extra .45-caliber rounds we carried for our pistols. We headed into the sunset, spraying a fire extinguisher on the flames fanning behind us and with all our ammo cooking off like scorched popcorn until everything burned itself out.

When we got back to the CP we found out that the steaks we were supposed to have were actually stamped cutlets in a watery brown mucilage and the Falstaff beer was warm...as usual. And it would be decades later before I would find out that my Good Conduct Sheet stayed clean after all. ♦



VTA Academic Scholarship Awarded

The Vietnam Tankers Association has awarded its first \$1,000 academic scholarship to Brittany Kelley, age 18, daughter of VTA member Greg Kelley. She will be attending Keene State College in New Hampshire this fall, majoring in sports science and nutrition. As part of the application process, Brittany submitted the following essay:

WHY I BELIEVE WE SHOULD HONOR AMERICA'S VETERANS

BY: BRITTANY KELLEY

Throughout the world there exists conflict, violence, and war. All of these things come hand in hand, and unfortunately it seems that at times there is no stopping them. In the United States alone, many events have occurred within just the past ten years that have challenged our country.

September 11, 2001 changed the world as we knew it for good. Our nation's soldiers were sent once again into harm's way to alleviate the fear and the suffering of the American people, and to keep our enemies at bay. More lives were lost that day than anyone would have imagined, and that was something everyone wished could have been avoided.

For those lucky enough to make it out of war alive, there is not a moment that should go by where they should not feel honor for serving our country. Unfortunately, too many veterans among us go largely unnoticed. Today, there are veterans of the Second World War, the Korean War, the Vietnam War, and many other recent conflicts that have given parts of their bodies and parts of their minds in order to protect the freedoms that so many take for granted.

Our veterans have always fought to keep this nation free. Without them, we would not be able to enjoy those freedoms and rights most take for granted. I personally believe that it is extremely important to pay honor and respect to the veterans of the United States, and I am proud that I live in a town that feels as I do. I am also proud of the fact that my school system proudly flies our flag at graduation. In short, I have been raised by my parents, my church, and my school system to understand and appreciate my freedoms; freedoms our veterans have always protected.

Most of us cannot even understand the true bravery and strength it takes to put one's life on the line for the sake of others, and the sheer will power it takes for each soldier to stay strong in the face of incredible adversity. I see these traits in many people I know personally such as my cousin Michael who served in Iraq as a Marine, and my father who was a Marine in Vietnam. At the young age of 17, my dad was already training at Marine boot camp and preparing to put his life on the line in Vietnam. I can't even imagine how he must have felt at such a young age and how he could have persevered for over a year as an 18-year-old in Vietnam. This was such a huge risk and a huge journey for my dad, and for so many others.

Even though I wasn't there to see what he experienced, I know enough just from the stories he's told that paint a picture in my mind of the pain he had to go through. I know what my dad did in the Vietnam War was extremely important for the country, and also a huge risk of his life. His service to the country speaks volumes, and without him and the other soldiers who were there, who knows where the United States would be today.

Our veterans, no matter what branch of the military they served in should be honored. I believe that no medal or badge is reward enough for the price they all have paid. We as a country need to also reach out to them all and tell them how much they are appreciated and respected. ♦

Short Stories

BY JIM WEAR

Child and the WALL



My 11-year-old son, Wyatt Walker Wear, just got back from the National Rocketry Contest in Virginia; the team did well and are the "Reigning Colorado Champions".

While he was there, one of the mothers took the kids sightseeing around Washington D.C. and The Vietnam Veterans Memorial (aka The Wall) was one of the stops.

The lady who took the above photo said the other kids were standing back looking at THE WALL and talking. Wyatt walked up slowly and raised his hand, hesitated and then touched

it, staying there for a couple of minutes - giving her time to get the camera out and get the shot. I am thankful

I thought some of you would appreciate that there are still some kids who "get it".

When he got home while we were talking about The Wall, he said, "Oh Papa, all those names...." and he teared up.

We are proud of him and will treasure this photo for life.

Editor's Note: Jim Wear (Jim is the younger brother of John Wear).

What did Vietnam teach you?

(Continued from page 8)

friend killed during my tour. I believe to this day that if my tank had been accompanying his tank during that bloody operation back in May of 1968 that I could have somehow keep him from the needless death that occurred. I visit his name on The Wall (in Washington, DC) often. It's a very small consolation.

What did Vietnam teach me? I taught me that I was young, stupid and way too gullible back in the 1960's. Then in the 1970's it taught me that the American people have deeper feelings for American embassy non-combatant civilians who have been held hostage by Iranian militants than they do for the American fighting man who shed blood in Vietnam. Who got the ticker-tape parade down 5th Avenue? In the 1980's the Vietnam War's

legacy taught me that during and after the conflict we were lied to by everyone from the military leaders all the way up to the President about what we did and why we did it. Who recalls "the light at the end of the tunnel"? During the 1980's it taught me that we Vietnam Veterans could put our money where our mouths were and collected enough money (without the US Government's involvement) to build a most awesome memorial to our fallen comrades-at-arms..."The Wall." Finally in the 1990's, thank God, I located a group of USMC Vietnam tankers who after 30 years have reached out and found one another. I am now no longer afraid, ashamed or angry. I am proud of what I did in the past and proud once again of my country, the United States of America. ♦

The Last Mounted Pistol Charge of the (Steel) Horse Marines

BY JOHN "BABY HUEY" HUGHES

"Gooks in the wire!" is not the best way to be awakened in the middle of the night.

It was 0100 early in September 1968 and it was so dark that you couldn't see your hand in front of your face. My crew and the crew of the tank commanded by Cpl Mike (last name forgotten) were enjoying some slack time while hanging out at Cua Viet with the "amgrunts" from 1st Amtracs. We did not have to stand perimeter guard so we were catching up on some much deserved sack time when all of a sudden the lights came on and somebody flung open the door of our hooch with the exciting news about the enemy.

I don't know about anyone else but it wasn't until I was actually mounting the tank when I finally was fully awake. My boots were on and I had my pistol belt in my hand. Thankfully we slept with our trousers on. I started shouting orders to my crew when

someone waived me down to give me the word.

It seems that the gooks weren't actually in the perimeter wire but supposedly some Marines from "force recon" had spotted a large group of the enemy moving south of Cua Viet heading toward the sea. We were going to make a "mounted reconnaissance-in-force" in the middle of the night with a few amgrunts as our infantry support. I thought to myself, "This could get real bad, real fast!"

We lined up our tanks and moved out. Our order of march was two amtracs in the lead, my tank next with two more amtracs, Mike's tank, another amtrac and then a lone Ontos bringing up the rear. As there was no gate on the south side of the Cua Viet compound, we drove around the concertina wire where it ended in the waves of the South China Sea. The tanks and amtracs didn't have any problems in the water but I am sure that when they splashed into the surf

that the crew of the Ontos got their butts soaking wet.

We moved along the beach, staying in the surfline to avoid mines. We road marched about 2 kilometers to where a large tree line came almost down to the water. About 300 yards from the tree line, the young "Rommel" (Marine tank platoon leader) who was in charge of the cluster f*ck recon-in-force had us turn inland and drive parallel to the trees.

Suddenly over the radios came an order to drive hard left, advance toward the tree line at a high rate of speed and engage "the enemy" with machineguns only. The next radio call came from Mike that amounted to "What-the-hell?" I replied to him in my best John Wayne voice, "Bad guys in the bushes pilgrim. Shoot 'em. And oh by the way, don't use the 90"... or words to that effect.

All of the vehicles came hard left and as we got on line, my gunner,

Steve "Murph" Murphy, started cutting loose with the .30. I reached in my pocket for the cocking handle for my .50 (since the Rube Goldberg affair that was supposed to cock the TC's machinegun had long ago given up the ghost.) I discovered to my horror that I had left the cocking handle in my dirty trousers when I had changed them earlier that evening. I yelled over the intercom for Hicks, my loader, to find me something to cock the .50 when I realized that I had my .45 pistol on my hip. So shades of Gen George Custer's boys at Little Big Horn, I started popping caps down range. I ran through four magazines by the time we reached the tree line. We came to a halt and ceased fire. It was so quiet that besides the rumble of the tanks' engines, you could have heard a pin drop. Had we caught them sleeping? Have we slaughtered all of the gooks before they could get off a single shot at us? Sure...and Santa Clause brings cold beer and warm babes to all good little Jarheads where ever they are.

A squad of amgrunts moved into the trees and, of course, the find nothing... no one, not even a dead monkey. So is the evening entertainment over? Not by a long shot!

Our platoon leader, "Young Rommel," instead of simply turning around and having the Ontos lead us back to Cua Viet, has us all drive right and makes us drive in a big half circle and heads us back to the beach. When we get to the ocean, instead of turning left to return home, we turn right and start moving South between the tree line and the sea. Now I call it a "tree line" but it really is a dense jungle. We travel another couple of clicks before the big sand dunes appear again. We move a couple of hundred yards past the tree line and we turn inland again. Hicks has found a screw driver so I can cock the .50 and I figure that we are in for another charge...but after going another 100 yards, I see something that I cannot quite make out.

It is a large dark mass that contrasts against the white sand of the dunes. Is this the gooks that Force Recon saw earlier this evening? Now things are starting to look pretty serious...but then I note that there is no movement in the dark mass (of people)...there is no mad dash for weapons or dispersal of troops. One of the amgrunts dismounts from the lead amtrac and walks out toward the...what we can now make out as...20 to 30 people in the dunes. Someone in the group sits up and talks to our guy for a couple of minutes and then the amgrunt remounts the vehicle. The word is passed out that these are doggies from Amercal. They have the area of responsibility south of 1st Amtracs. It appears as if someone is out of bounds...and that is probably us.

No one says anything more but everyone is thinking, here's that "regiment of gooks" that Force Recon spotted moving toward the woods. Those Jarheads were obviously calling in bull dukey sitreps and catching z's on the beach! Finally there is another big half circle of vehicles moving out... again this maneuver is to allow our "Young Rommel" to lead the column back to the base at Cua Viet. The sun in coming up, maybe we can make it back for breakfast at the amtrac's mess tent.

Not so fast! This is the US Marine Corps! They teach young officers to think on their feet and to consider all of the possibilities. Our "Young Rommel" ponders the fact that maybe the dog faces are not the troops that Recon saw...maybe there is a division of NVA hiding in the little ville that is just south of Cua Viet? Maybe we should sweep that ville, just to be sure. I mean there are 10 or 11 hooches where lots of enemy soldiers could hide.

So here we go! Our "Young Rommel" stages the tanks and the Ontos on the south side of the ville to act as the blocking force while he has

the amgrunts mounted on the amtracs move to the north. The amgrunts dismount and sweep into the ville. The sun is above the horizon as we can now witness the movement in the ville. Now we witness nothing but smoke from morning cooking fires, chickens scratching in the dirt and nothing out of the ordinary. However, someone decides that snooping & pooping is not enough. The amgrunts start popping CS (tear gas) grenades. The morning breeze is from the northwest. The tankers and Ontos guys are certainly ready to "chiu hoi" since only about half of them can find their gas masks!

Finally it's time to go home. As we move out, I tell my driver, Glenn Hutchinson, to drive through the rice paddy in front of us so we can rejoin with the amtracs for our triumphant return to Cua Viet...I think that the amgrunts did find an old rusty French rifle on their sweep through the ville. As we drive through the paddy, I see an old woman looking at me from the doorway of her hooch. Boy! Oh Boy! She is looking "daggers" at me! She is pissed! I am sure that if she had an AK-47 in her hands, she'd shoot me dead. I hadn't thought about it but our tank was screwing up about 10 bushels of rice as our tracks churned up the muddy paddy. We really won the hearts and minds that morning. And I suspect that if she wasn't VA before, she certainly was one now. I also suspect that she planted 10 or 12 anti-tank mines in the tank tracks that ran through her rice paddy.

Well, we missed breakfast and spent the rest of the day cleaning weapons. My .50 only needed a wipe down. We also re-greased the suspension that we had greased the day before...hence my need for doing the laundry and my missing .50 charging handle. I'd like to say that a good time was had by all...but that was Vietnam...and you know that would be BS. ♦

THE OFFICERS CLUB IN DA NANG

Do you remember Al Pacino, in a scene from movie, "The Scent of a Woman," when he asked the New York State cop who had just pulled him over for speeding, "Have you ever been in the Officer's Club in Da Nang?"

I was in the Officers Club in Da Nang even though I was a lowly Marine Private First Class (E-2) at the time. I was stationed around the Da Nang Combat Base with B Company, 3rd Tank Battalion. I had arrived there in March of 1966, after a transfer from B Company, 1st Tank Battalion in Chu Lai. I can remember a few of the Marines that I served with in Da Nang, especially the ones that were transferred with me from Chu Lai to Da Nang. My first and only real love was for 1st Tank Battalion. They were the ones that welcomed me from Infantry Training Regiment (ITR) back in the world. They were also the ones that trained me & the Marine's that I mounted-out with from Camp Pendleton in May of 1965.

So, one day in Da Nang, while I was the driver of an M-67A3 flame-thrower tank, I was sitting on my ass, as Marine's sometimes do when we are not being watched like a hawk by the platoon sergeant or the company gunny, when a couple of officers came by and requested two of us enlisted men accompany them on a jeep ride. I guess this was official Marine Corps business but looking back, I think that all four of us were just screwing off for the day. We took an unofficial tour of Da Nang and I remember having Dog Town (Dog patch) pointed out to me. What a nice place!

I wish I could remember the names of the other three Marines who were with

me on that tour that day but I can't. I do remember that there was a captain, a lieutenant and another enlisted man. I do not remember all the places that we visited that day but we ended up at the Da Nang Officer's Club. If I remember correctly, the club was located on high ground with a screen door entrance. When we pulled



John Hunter's friend, A.O. Ballenger

up and parked, the captain invited us two enlisted men to go in with the two officers. Do you think we got some dirty looks when the other officers saw we did not have bars on our collars? If you said yes, you were correct! So our visit was very short. I can't recall if we had a cold beer or not.

Later on, maybe two weeks later I remember going on a big sweep outside of Da Nang...which is an operation that does not appear on my Service Record Book, so I think that you should only believe about half of what you read here. I remember driving the tank through a farmer's fence

that day, seeing a hapless Marine grunt walking in front of our tank and stepping on a land mine. He was wounded but thankfully not killed.

I do remember a few of the people I met in Da Nang: my tank commander Sgt. Gladney, who was a 6 foot 4 inch black guy that had the misfortune of shooting down a friendly aircraft in the Dominican Republic with his tank's .50 caliber machinegun. I also recall "Frenchie" Laverne who used to say that he was from "Bugs Scuffle," GA, and I also remember fondly, my friend A.O. Ballenger from Louisville KY.

Another incident that I remember from my time in Da Nang was one evening when two tanks were going to cross the Da Nang River and the ferry boat broke down. We were forced to stay the night on the river bank. It was not all bad because there was a South Vietnamese bar next to us that had cold beer and some nice looking girls. There was also a Vietnamese band playing in the bar and they sang American songs. We

had quite an entertaining night of it. Another fond memory of Da Nang was the view of Marble Mountain and the French Fort down the road from us.

I wish I could remember more...but what the hell? It has been 45 years since I left Viet Nam. After requesting to be stationed on the West Coast, just like our beloved Marine Corps, I was sent to Camp LeJeune...where life was easy!

Semper Fi
John M. Hunter

Vice President Stepping Down

I am resigning the position of Vice President effective with this issue. This has been a hard decision for me because I realize that I am putting a burden upon my fellow Board members. I have enjoyed seeing the organization grow and become more professional-like over the last 5 years. I am most proud of the way the Sponson Box has evolved into a true magazine instead of the simple newsletter it once was. The positive feedback from scores of people has been very rewarding. I am also proud of the website I designed, albeit its lagging maintenance while we tried to find a webmaster. I am certain Greg Martin will get it up to snuff fairly quickly now that we have someone dedicated to maintain it.

Fallen Heroes has been very rewarding to me. It is an honor working with the grief stricken families that have been all but forgotten. All the families tell me after the show that they feel that they now feel they can let go a little, that the sorrow has lifted a little. I will continue with the program provided you, the members, can put me in touch with the families of our fallen brothers. I would hate to break the string of 5 reunions that Fallen Heroes has run; we have inducted 11 Heroes as this point.

Many of you are aware that I produced the Sponson Box. This issue will be my last issue. However, John Wear has agreed to pick it up and continue in the same manor; I am certain he will do a fine job. I will be helping him make the transition with the next issue. I will remain a member and I will do any graphic work required by the organization. I apologize to the rest of the Board of Directors for adding to your workloads. I hope that someone will step up and help out.

Lastly, I implore the membership to get involved in any way that you can with our organization, no matter how small. Anything you can take on relieves some of the burden that others are carrying. The workload needs to be shared among more than just 4 people. I know John would appreciate any help he can get at the next reunion. We need two more Rick Lewis's who did a terrific job as the Recon guy and Forward Air Controller for San Diego. Please volunteer and help out... it doesn't mean you have to run for office, but we would highly encourage that as well.

Sincerely,
Bob Peavey

Heroes of the Vietnam Generation

(Continued from page 16)

their Fathers Generation had nothing to do with them and yet though it all these so called no good cry babies who could not win a war (Thanks to their Fathers and Mothers Generation) fought the biggest war of their life and is still fighting it today. Fighting for their rights for benefits due to them and guess who you see standing in line for their benefits is the same Generation who turned their backs on these so called hippie, sex driven baby killers. Ironic when you think about it but most everything all Veterans get as far as medical benefits, compensation for a disability and other Federal mandates all is because some little snooty 17 yrs old went to fight for his Country because his Father told him it was his Patriotic Duty as an American.

It would be redundant to say that I would trust my life

to these men. Because I already have, in more ways than I can ever recount. I am alive today because of their quiet, unaffected heroism. Such valor epitomizes the conduct of Americans at war from the first days of our existence. That the boomer elites can canonize this sort of conduct in our fathers' Generation while ignoring it in our own is more than simple oversight. It is a conscious, continuing travesty.

Next time you want to bash a Vietnam Veteran read your history books and maybe then you will see what great warriors these young men were. ♦

V. A. News & Updates

Go to our website for more health related info.
www.USMCVTA.org

VA Rural Access Update 09: Nearly 40 percent of enrolled Veterans live in rural areas of our country. This includes men and women Veterans of all ages, races and ethnic groups. Like other individuals living in rural areas, Veterans have difficulty in obtaining access to quality health care. The reasons for this are multiple and varied, but mainly stem from the need to travel long distances to health care facilities, lack of health insurance, and lack of specialty care providers working in rural areas. As a result, rural populations tend to be in poorer health; in fact, a study by the Office of Health and Human Services estimates that half of the adults living in rural areas suffer from a chronic health condition. With regard to rural Veterans, there are the unique health complications associated with combat exposure such as PTSD, depression, and traumatic brain injury. Over the past decades, VA has transformed itself from an in-patient tertiary care system to an outpatient health care system with an emphasis on prevention and patient-centered care using the electronic health record and patient aligned care teams. The Office of Rural Health (ORH) was created in MAR 07 to bring this model of care to Veterans in rural and highly rural areas. It's a model that can provide not only the specialty care that can meet the unique health needs of Veterans, but one that can also provide care to meet the needs associated with chronic illness and aging.

ORH has established six strategic goals and

associated initiatives to accomplish their mission of increasing access to quality health care for Veterans living in rural areas. They include improved communications and outreach to rural areas, building and staffing community based outpatient clinics and outreach clinics, enhancing tele-health capabilities such home-based tele-health and tele-mental health in rural areas, funding transportation systems to VA facilities from rural areas, and collaborating with non-VA clinicians to provide health care for women Veterans. ORH is making great strides on all of our strategic goals. Using VA data sources, ORH can report the following progress:

- From FY08 to FY10, over 217,000 Veterans from rural areas were enrolled through ORH outreach and communication efforts
- Fifty-one VA community-based outpatient clinics were opened in rural areas
- Thirty-seven VA Outreach clinics have been opened in rural areas
- Within a new telehealth-based program that focuses on obesity, the number of services provided to rural Veterans rose 60% in the past year to 13,035.
- The number of rural Veterans receiving mammograms, by both VA and non VA providers, increased 17% (20,447 in FY10)
- The number of rural veteran outpatient primary care visits increased 18% to 5.5 million in FY10
- From FY09 to FY10, the number of rural Veteran telemental health encounters increased 23%

Although of their progress there is still much to be done to provide rural Veterans with the care they deserve. ORH is committed to fulfilling our mission and will report back here on our progress as well as the impacts our programs and initiatives have made to improve the health and well-being of rural Veterans. [Source: Vantage Point Director of the Office of Rural Health for DVA Mary Beth Skupien article 5 Apr 2011 ++]

Colon Cancer Update 01: The American Cancer Society (ACS) lists colon cancer as the third-most-common cancer in American men and women. What can you do to prevent colon cancer? Following are the top five foods that can help prevent this disease:

Dairy products (such as yogurt or milk): According to the ACS, several studies have shown that foods high in calcium may help reduce the risk of colon cancer. Dairy products are some of the best sources of calcium.

Broccoli and cauliflower: These veggies belong to a food group called cruciferous vegetables, which are part of the cabbage family. The ACS says these foods contain certain compounds that may reduce the risk of colon cancer. 10

Spinach and asparagus: The American Dietetic Association (ADA) says that spinach and asparagus contain high amounts of folate. Too little folate, according to the ACS, may increase the risk of colon cancer.

Whole-grain breads and pasta: Whole-grain

foods are high in fiber, which helps food move faster through the digestive track, according to the ADA. High-fiber foods are also high in antioxidants, which help protect against several cancers, including colon cancer.

Strawberries: Strawberries are packed with fiber, vitamin C and folate—all nutrients that both the ADA and ACS say help reduce the risk of colon cancer. They make a great addition to your breakfast or a snack.

Experts agree that one of the best ways to survive colon cancer is to find it early—through screening. The Centers for Disease Control and Prevention recommend a screening test called a colonoscopy only once every 10 years beginning at age 50. Based on this recommendation, TRICARE covers one colonoscopy every 10 years for beneficiaries age 50 and older who are at average risk of colon cancer. Individuals at increased or higher risk for colon cancer may be covered for more frequent colon cancer screenings. For more information, refer to <http://www.triwest.com/colon>. [Source: Tricare Health Matters Issue 3 : 2011 ++]

Colon Cancer Update 02: For many older patients, screening for colorectal cancer is performed too often or is more likely to harm than help, researchers said. According to a study published online in Archives of Internal Medicine, nearly half of Medicare patients with negative findings on a colonoscopy underwent repeat exams much sooner than the guideline-recommended interval of 10 years. And another study appearing online in the same journal found that only relatively healthy older patients are likely to see a net benefit from fecal occult blood testing (FOBT). Those in poor health with positive FOBT results were much more likely to die from causes other than colorectal cancer, and many suffered from complications associated with follow-up testing and treatment. Both studies highlighted the downsides of aggressively screening patients for colorectal cancer when risks associated with the disease are either minimal or overshadowed by other, unrelated problems. "Given the increasing public interest and ownership of cancer screening, public information campaigns that emphasize both the necessity for colorectal cancer screening as well as the dangers of overuse may prove beneficial in reducing overuse," wrote James S. Goodwin, MD, of the University

of Texas Medical Branch in Galveston, and colleagues, authors of the Medicare study of repeat colonoscopies.

Their analysis examined outcomes of 24,071 Medicare enrollees who had negative colonoscopy findings from 2001 through 2003, derived from a random 5% sample of national records. According to "all relevant authorities," Goodwin and colleagues noted, repeat exams need not be performed for 10 years in such patients. But the Medicare data showed that 46.2% had repeat exams in less than seven years. In just under half of these patients, the records contained "no clear indication for the early repeated examination," Goodwin and colleagues indicated. Even among patients 80 and older -- who, given a negative colonoscopy, would be far more likely to die of something other than colorectal cancer in the near future -- repeat exams within seven years were performed in 32.9%. Goodwin and colleagues found the results especially surprising because, they wrote, "Medicare regulations preclude reimbursement for screening colonoscopy within 10 years of a negative examination result." Even so, their data indicated that only 2% of claims for the repeat exams were denied. But clinicians who perform such early repeat exams should beware, the researchers warned. "Our analyses, when applied to 100% Medicare data (in contrast to the 5% sample used), should be able to identify individual endoscopists with patterns of potential overuse ... Such findings could then trigger audits involving medical chart reviews."

The study of FOBT took a different approach. Christine Kistler, MD, of the University of North Carolina in Chapel Hill, and colleagues, examined outcomes in a cohort of 212 patients at least 70 years old who received a positive FOBT result in VA medical centers in 2001. These patients were followed for seven years. Kistler and 11 colleagues found that barely half (56%) received follow-up colonoscopies as recommended. Of these 118 patients, 34 had "significant" adenomas and six had bowel cancers. Ten experienced complications from the colonoscopies or subsequent treatment. None died of colorectal cancer, but 20 died of other causes within five years. Yet among the 94 patients who didn't have follow-up colonoscopies, three died of colorectal cancer, whereas 43 died of other causes and 48 survived at least five years. Kistler and

colleagues found that the FOBT screening was least likely to benefit those in the poorest health to start with. They defined a benefit of screening, in those with positive results, as a confirmed finding of adenoma or cancer followed by at least five years of survival, which could include complications or additional exams.

All other outcomes -- negative results from follow-up colonoscopies, death from causes other than colorectal cancer, or survival without having obtained a follow-up colonoscopy -- were classed as a net burden on patients.

Using those definitions, Kistler and colleagues determined that, among the 30 patients in the whole cohort with the worst life expectancy based on age and comorbidities, 87% experienced a net burden. The researchers acknowledged that the burden in many of these cases was small or even negligible, but they argued that performing FOBT can be uncomfortable and embarrassing and a positive result can cause anxiety. Patients with better life expectancy had lower burden rates: 65% of those with the best survival chances and 70% of those with average life expectancy experienced a net burden from the positive FOBT finding (P=0.048 for trend). Kistler and colleagues suggested that FOBT screening and follow-up be targeted to relatively healthy older adults. They noted that their study had several limitations: it involved a relatively small number of patients in the VA system, and relied on medical chart reviews for outcomes beyond the first year of follow-up. They also acknowledged that their use of five-year survival as the cutoff for benefit versus burden was arbitrary. Likewise, Goodwin and colleagues indicated that their study was limited by lack of information on the quality of the initial negative colonoscopy and the restriction to patients with fee-for-service Medicare coverage. [Source: MedPage Today John Gever article 9 May 2011 ++]

Kidney Disease Update 03: More than 20 million adults have chronic kidney disease and an estimated 16.3 million have heart disease. Over 7.1 million have both. The National Institute of Diabetes and Digestive and Kidney Diseases asks people to consider the link and what they can do to protect their kidney health. Diabetes and high blood pressure can damage the kidneys and lead to kidney disease. Kidney disease is often a chronic disease that typically gets worse over time. It can lead to kidney failure, at

which point dialysis or a kidney transplant may be needed. Diabetes and high blood pressure are not the only risk factors for kidney disease. TRICARE beneficiaries should check with their doctor about getting tested for kidney disease if they have cardiovascular (heart) disease or if a mother, father, sister or brother has had kidney failure. In most cases, early kidney disease has no symptoms, said U.S. Public Health Service Cmdr. Aileen Buckler, TRICARE population health physician. Right up to the point of kidney failure, many people may feel just fine. The earlier kidney disease is found, the sooner you can start medical treatment and take other steps that can keep your kidneys healthier longer. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) suggests at least 10 things people can do to be kind to their kidneys. Topping the list is getting tested for kidney disease if they have diabetes, high blood pressure or a family history of kidney failure.

Pathology and laboratory services are covered under TRICARE. Coverage and out-of-pocket costs are dependent on the beneficiary's eligibility and may vary according to the program option he or she is enrolled in. A beneficiary should contact his or her regional contractor or TRICARE Area Office for more information. Two tests are used to check for kidney disease. A blood test checks glomerular filtration rate (GFR), which tells how well kidneys are filtering the patient's blood. A urine test checks for albumin in the urine. Albumin is a protein that can pass into the urine when the kidneys are damaged. Other than testing, the NIH also suggests people learn how to keep their kidneys healthy. Some things included on the NIH website that can be done include:

- Keeping blood pressure below 130/80 mmHg
- Maintaining ideal weight
- Being physically active
- Limiting alcohol, caffeine and daily sodium intake
- Keeping blood cholesterol levels in the target range
- Eating healthy – choosing fruits, vegetables, grains and low-fat dairy foods
- Taking all medicines as prescribed

To review the entire list of things you can do to protect your Kidney Health, go to <http://www.nkdep.nih.gov/KidneyMonth>. Source: TMA Sharon Foster article 8 Apr 2011 ++]

Vet Toxic Exposure ~ LeJeune Update 19:

A congressional Democrat has again introduced legislation to help Marine veterans and family members affected by historic water contamination at Camp LeJeune, N.C. This time, though, Rep. Brad Miller (D-NC) is working to bring more Republicans on board and broaden the base of support to get the bill through a skeptical, budget-conscious, GOP-controlled House of Representatives. "If members of Congress know there are people in their district who were exposed to water and have health issues because of it or are concerned they have health issues because of it, then I think it does make a difference," said Miller, who introduced the bill this week with Rep. John Dingell, a Michigan Democrat. The legislation, the Janey Ensminger Act, would establish a presumptive link between the poisonous water at LeJeune and a variety of cancers and other illnesses thought to be connected to the contamination. The bill would require the Department of Veterans Affairs to pay for the health care not only of veterans but of family members as well. An estimated 1 million people are thought to have been exposed to contaminated water at Camp LeJeune until the mid-1980s, including the spouses and children of Marines who lived on the base.

Advocates for the veterans have been encouraging supporters to write and call their members of Congress to get support across the country. The House bill is named after a girl who died of leukemia in 1985 at age 9. Her father, former Marine drill instructor Jerry Ensminger has been a driving force behind getting congressional attention on the contamination and its impacts. Ensminger also is the subject of a new documentary, "Semper Fi," that traces his advocacy on the issue. He said the bill might have a better chance in this Congress as the issue drew more attention and high-profile sponsors such as Rep. Bob Filner of California, the top Democrat on the House Veterans' Affairs Committee. "In combination with their support, the fact that this is a veterans issue, that this did happen, that this was a case of negligence by the leadership of our military, which is very, very well spelled out, and in combination with the film, I think that will push it over the edge," Ensminger said. In the last Congress, the bill had nearly 40 co-sponsors but it died in the Veterans' Affairs Committee. This year, there are 15 co-sponsors, but Miller is working on adding more names. He thinks it will get support even though the bill

would increase costs significantly for Veterans' Affairs at a time when the GOP-led House is trying to cut the budget. "We are running up against that some, but there is a strong sense that justice requires we do right by these families," Miller said. [Source: McClatchy Newspapers Barbara Barrett article 6 May 2011 ++]

Agent Orange Linked to Kidney Cancer: Study

SATURDAY, May 14 (HealthDay News) -- There appears to be a link between Agent Orange and kidney cancer in U.S. veterans exposed to the herbicide in Vietnam, a new study suggests.

Researchers at the Veterans Affairs Medical Center in Shreveport, La. examined the records of 297 patients diagnosed with kidney cancer between 1987 and 2009. Thirteen of the patients, aged 39 to 63 when they were diagnosed, said they had been exposed to Agent Orange.

Documented exposure to the herbicide and pathology reports were available for 10 of the patients. The researchers reviewed these patients' age at diagnosis, tumor size, side of lesion, pathology and survival.

Nine of the 10 patients had clear-cell cancers, which typically have worse outcomes than papillary tumors, which appeared in one patient. One patient had both clear-cell and papillary cancers.

During the average follow-up of 54 months, four patients developed metastatic cancer and one patient died from his cancer.

The findings were presented Saturday during a special news conference at the American Urological Association (AUA) annual meeting in Washington, D.C. Research presented at meetings should be viewed as preliminary because it has not been subjected to the peer review that typically accompanies publication in a medical journal.

"We know that the chemicals in Agent Orange were extremely toxic, and are known to cause cancer," press conference moderator Dr. Anthony Y. Smith said in an AUA news release. "These data indicate that we may need to better determine whether exposure to these chemicals should be considered a risk factor for kidney cancer."

More information

The U.S. Department of Veterans Affairs has more about Agent Orange. ♦

What Members are Doing



The Wendling's, Marines All.

This was taken in 1976 and is our "Police Family" picture. Front row: John, a sniper with 2/7 (66-67); 2nd row at top left: Jim, a FO with B 1/7(68-69), Joe, a machine gunner for L 3/5 (66-67) and a Bronze Star recipient. Last is me, a TC with A Co 3RD Tanks (69).
Jan "Turtle" Wendling



Brothers John and Joe getting ready for their shift (1969).

Current status: John is a Lt. in charge of the Major Crimes Unit of the City of Mansfield. Joe and I retired after 40 and 38 years service two years ago. Jim was shot in the line of duty during a Burglary. He killed the guy that shot him but he had to take a full disability. He now owns his own engineering company in Raleigh N.C..

Joe Tyson joined 65,000 other attendees at the Andrews Air Force Base Air Show in Washington, DE, last weekend.

Even though the Air Force's "Thunderbirds" and the Army's "Golden Knights" parachute team were there... Joe Tyson's highlight of the show was finding the head on a C-5A!!!



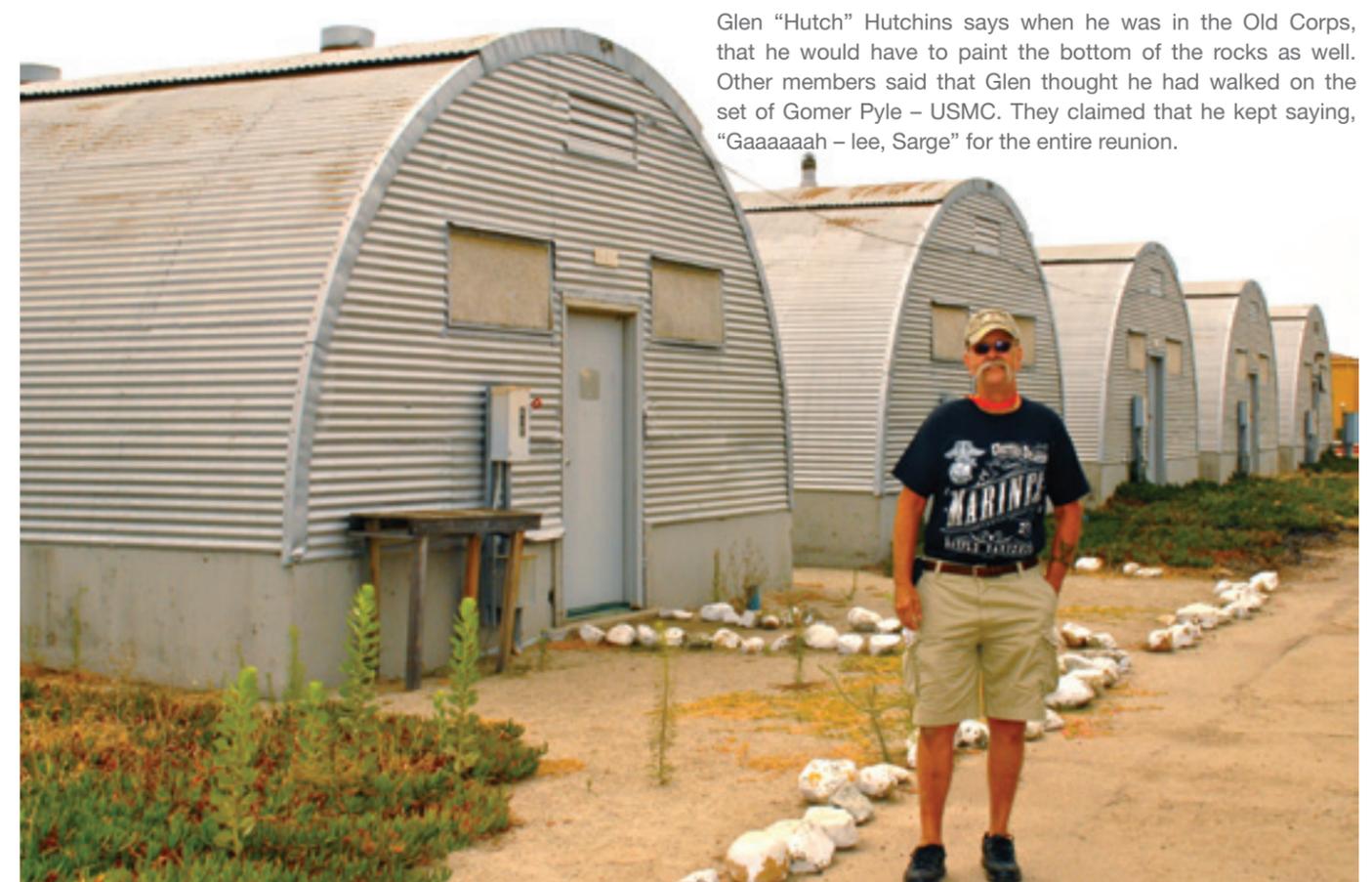
Robert F. Skeel

Yeah, that's me in the boat....nobody believes it because I've never caught that many fish - they think I bought them at a local store and just attached them to a stringer. This is a beautiful remote Adirondack pond near the St.Regis canoe carry area (Lake Clear, NY)





1st Lt. Robert Skeels takes a picture of his Tank Commanders of the 1st Platoon, B Co., 3rd Tanks near Cam Lo/ Vin Dai
From the left: Gilbert Ramirez(?), Andy Anderson, Wayne Smull, Dale Reichert, Dale Sandifer



Glen "Hutch" Hutchins says when he was in the Old Corps, that he would have to paint the bottom of the rocks as well. Other members said that Glen thought he had walked on the set of Gomer Pyle – USMC. They claimed that he kept saying, "Gaaaaaaah – lee, Sarge" for the entire reunion.



Top: L/R: Rich Huff; Dan McQueary; Andy Seneal; Ed Sipel; Bill Raines; D J Clark
Dave Doyle; J B Thompson; Ken Zebal; Milo Plank; Pat Boromeo; Ken Zitz

Front Row: L/R: Sam Kaleleiki; Louis Borriello; Dave Erikson; Rob Lockett;
Ivan Williams; Rich Shaver; Charlie Denton; Tony Pinnett; Steve Nicholson

"A" Co. 3rd. Plt. 3rd. Tks. VIET-NAM '68
CHU LAI, '68
Picture by: Chris Vrakolas

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.45 ACP
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