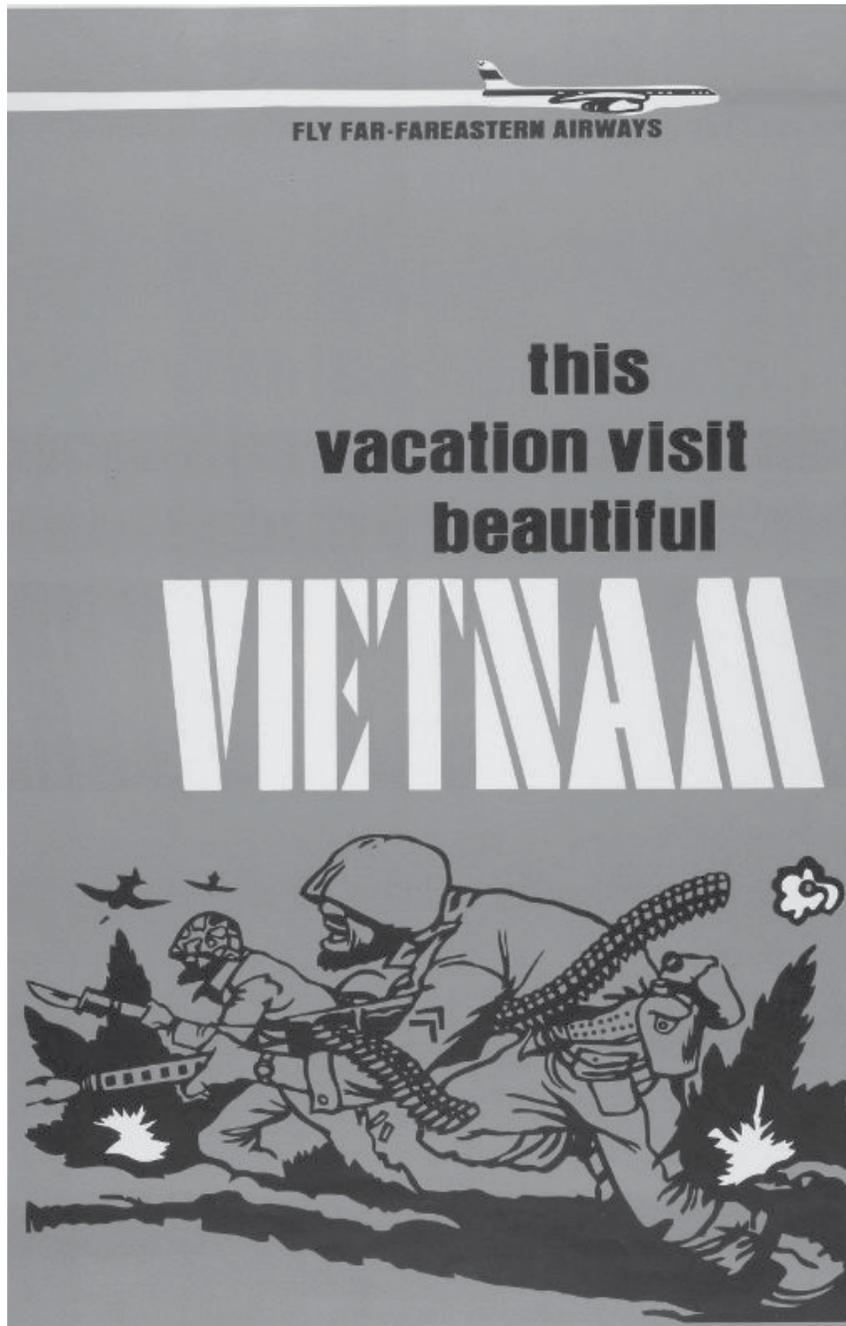




Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Featured Stories:

Ambush Valley.....	Page 9
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Calling all First Responders!!!

The last issue of our magazine was dedicated to Law Enforcement Officers, so now we would like to have a future issue dedicated to all First Responders. We are asking that any and all VTA members who served in any capacity as a firefighter, EMT and as other first responders ... either as full time or as a volunteer... to call John Wear at (Home) 719-495-5998 or Mike Giovinazzo at (Home)

845-225-7151, or his (Cell) 845-216-5498 and let's discuss your past experience to get a personal story worked out.

Vietnam combat veteran and career fireman, Mike Giovinazzo said, "This project may really work since the job is very much like combat. Just replace "gooks" with the Red Devil. The bravery and team work are the same."

SEATTLE 2019

October 31 – November 4, 2019

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

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

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

Room reservations will not be accepted by the hotel until October 2018.

Toll-Free reservations assistance: 800-222-8733. Please provide our group code ("VTA") and please let the reservation agent know what hotel you are staying. Make sure is it indicated as the "Double Tree Suites on Southcenter Parkway in Tukwila, Washington."

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

CREATE YOUR OWN LEGACY FOR TOMMOROW ...

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

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

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

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

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

Letter from the President

REMINDER: We are conducting our first ever informal mini-reunion in September at Ft. Benning in Georgia. We have over 50 members who have already let us know that they are interested in attending. Please check our final announcement on the back inside cover of this issue ... and be sure to call either John Wear or Rick Lewis to let us know that you are coming.

I was listening to a radio talk show the other day where they were discussing the process of how we humans try to get things done, and what impediments (mostly lame excuses) that keep us from accomplishing the goals. It hit home to me that often when I talk to many VTA members about them writing down and sharing their own personal stories to be published in our magazine, they seem to think that they have too many impediments getting in their way.

Things like: **"I am not a good writer."**

Response: I can tell you that if you can TALK then you can write. If you really feel that you can't write, then my suggestion is talk (dictate) to someone (like your wife or kids) and let them write it for you on the computer. It really is easy. You just have to do it.

Another is: **"I don't know what to say."**

Response: I can tell you that if you simply THINK about your time in-country, you can fairly easily organize your thoughts and then maybe if you can also contact a Marine buddy who was there with you, and if you can get your buddy's input, then maybe you'll end up with TWO stories for the magazine!

To me, one of the most invalid excuses is: **"My story is not worthy."**

Response: No matter what you think, there are nearly 500 VTA brothers who will argue with you, especially after they get to read your story. **Just do it!!!**

I keep repeating the old African proverb that really seems to ring so true: **"When an old man dies, a library burns to the ground."** The solution is for you not to take your story to the grave with you. If you do, then the legacy of the US Marine Corps Vietnam Tankers is incomplete and the world is a far poorer place than it should be



"I found out that it's not good to talk about my troubles. Eighty percent of the people who hear them don't care and the other twenty percent are glad I'm having them."

Tommy Lasorda, L A Dodgers manager



Executive Directors

John Wear, *President*

16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106
(719) 495-5998 · E-mail: johnwear2@verizon.net

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

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

Bruce Van Apeldoorn, *Treasurer*

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

Ronald C. Knight, *Secretary*

6665 Burnt Hickory Drive/Hoschton, GA 30548
(678) 828-7197 Email: rckusmcvt@aol.com

Directors

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

16331 Ashington Park Drive; Tampa, FL 33647
E-mail: mrsteele46@aol.com

Carl Fleischman

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

Fred Kellogg

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

Robert H. Vaxter

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

Pete Ritch

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

Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri

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

Greg Martin

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

James (Jim) P. Coan

15374 East Lantana Drive, JSierra Vista, AZ 85650-5401
JPhone: 520-378-9659 Email: zjimco@aol.com

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

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

Jim Raasch

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

Committees & Chairmen

SgtMajor Bill "JJ" Carroll

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

Bruce Van Apeldoorn

Audit & Finance
585-613-6564 EST

CW04 Bob Embesi

CRCS/CR Representative
406-821-3075 MS

Joe Liu

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

Ron Knight

Member Data Integrity
678-828-7197 EST

1st Sgt. Rick Lewis

VA Information
VTA History Project
858-735-1772 PST

Bob Peavey

Fallen Heroes
770-365-3711 EST

Pete Ritch

VTA History Project
850-734-0014 EST

Jim Coan

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

Greg Martin

Webmaster
National Recruiter
360-480-1206 PST
Email: usmctanker@comcast.net

Web Site: www.usmcvt.org

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

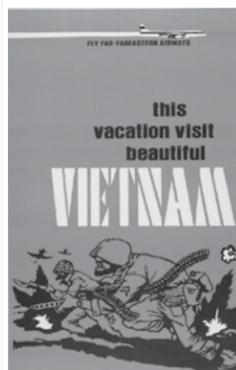
Tuyen Pham – Layout and Design

Printed in the USA

Photo from Vietnam



Dick Peksens writes: I found this photo online of one 3rd Platoon of Charlie Company (recognizable with the Maltese Cross). Not sure when it was taken or if it was previously posted in SB. I like it because it shows the vulnerable underbelly of an M48 when traversing a dike. This is usually when the NVA would take a shot with an RPG to take advantage of the minimal 2 inches of steel....



ON THE COVER: A spoof travel poster from the 1960's that might add a little levity to the situation.

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

Author's Correction

Bob Peavey writes: The last issue (April, 2018) of our magazine, I wrote an article called, "The Upside Down Tank" in which I incorrectly named and maligned the most famous tank retriever in 3rd Tanks. Anyone who served in 3rd Tanks knew of the "Magnificent Bastard" — it certainly wasn't the "Bodacious Bastard" as I wrote. I do not know what brain cell died when I wrote the story. Sorry for the gross error.

RUSSIAN ARMOR



Roger "the Loader" Caput writes: I was visiting Nellis AFB in Las Vegas in order to set up a public speaker for Memorial Day at our memorial in the town of Pahrump. It was my first visit to Nellis since 9/11. As I was searching for the exit route, any gate, I came upon an area displaying several jet aircraft. What drew my attention was the T-72 Russian-built tank in a pine tree grove. The T-72 was fully restored by the Training Facility Restoration and Maintenance Unit.

VTA History Project Works Wonders

Jim Coan writes to Pete Ritch: Yesterday, I gave a presentation to all the eighth-grade history students at my grandson's middle school, and I used the CD that was forwarded to me by the "Witness to War" rep who recorded our interviews in St. Louis. The students had just finished covering the Vietnam War in class and it really went over well to have a veteran talk about his experiences. As an aside, I got a standing ovation when the CD finishing playing. I wanted you to know that your work with the VTA History Program is paying dividends. Thanks again for making it happen.

Marines to Cops

I received my Sponson Box today and I couldn't believe the

Marine/Cop stories. You did yourself proud. What an effort you put into this project, totally amazing.

I showed my wife and son the article that you put together on me. You in so many ways spoke for me. There were things that I have never talked about with them. They were in total shock, asking questions like: "When did this or that happen?"

I am very grateful to be on the receiving end of this project. This is a keeper. I say that not for arrogance sake but for something that my kids and grandkids can read about in years to come. The Marine in us will live forever and it can be found in the details that we were part of history and that we will always be proud of our service, for better or worse.

Thanks again, great work,

S/F

Armando Moreno

John Wear's reply: You wrote your own outstanding story. The editorial staff merely "fluffed and buffed" it a little. Your message about the value of being able to have our kids and grandkids read our stories hits home. That is perhaps one of the prime reasons for the USMC VTA, the Sponson Box, and our efforts to get every single member to write their own story.

John Hunter writes: I am about half-way through the current SB. I really like the Marine to Cop stories; I think this issue is one of your best! I won't say your best, because I think you may do better in the future. How you can do that, I don't know, but keep up the great work. I also really enjoyed Bob's story about going to college and meeting a fellow Marine.

Michael Giovinazzo writes: It sure would be nice to have other First Responders who are members of the VTA to participate in writing and sharing their own stories ... but I am afraid that if they are anything like the firemen that were in my own New York City fire company, they would break out in a cold sweat if they have to write any more than their own names. We shall see it our collective effort bears fruit.

Seattle

Hal Miller writes: The story on James Haines in the last Sponson Box was great! Thank You! So far, we have at least five Ontos guys getting ready to make it to Seattle in 2019 and they are all from 3rd ATs,

Is it Vietnam or Viet Nam?

Cam Mi Pham writes: Every word in Vietnamese has one syllable. Vietnamese is a monosyllabic language. Every word has meaning. You combine different words together >>

to make new words. The term “Vietnam” is the westernized version of Việt Nam.

New in 2018: Corps will select upgraded amphibious vehicle

From the Marine Corps Times: Next summer the Marines will select a new combat Assault Amphibious Vehicle to replace the current fleet, which has been in use for more than 40 years. The new Amphibious Combat Vehicle will be a wheeled, V-shaped hull, armored personnel carrier designed to bring Marines from ship to shore and keep pace with an M1A1 Abrams tank rolling inland. The final version will be selected from prototypes by SAIC and BAE Systems. Production is expected to begin next fall.

For now, however, the Corps will continue to upgrade the existing AAV fleet while the ACVs come into the inventory. The Corps plans to purchase 204 ACV 1.1 versions and then move to acquire 490 ACV 1.2 versions after an initial production run.

The ACV must carry a crew of three along with 10 fully loaded Marine infantrymen and a remotely operated .50-caliber machine gun. It's expected to later carry a dual .50-caliber machine gun and either a 40mm or 30mm cannon. The SAIC version can carry the three-person crew and 11 infantrymen while the BAE Systems version can carry the crew plus 13 infantrymen. Marines have 964 AAVs housed in three Assault Amphibious Battalions, two active and one reserve. To continue effectiveness as the ACV enters the fleet, 361 AAVs will be upgraded starting mid-2019, Boucher said. The upgrades are aimed to extend its service life until 2035.

Parris Island, South Carolina, yesterday - Jan 3, 2018!



I understand it snowed at Parris Island today. Hell has officially frozen over

An article about cold weather training with tanks was sent out via email and retired 1st Sgt Rick Lewis commented: No thanks, I'll pass. Having landed in Korea with my tank platoon in Feb '76, we spent 30 days of which 18 were on operations. Having the tanks freeze to the ground and not being able to change out the engine oil from 50 wt. to 30 wt. made it even more fun. Our tanks were a 54-ton freezer for the crew; even with the heater going it was very, very cold. We were able to buy hay bales from a village and carry

them on the back of the tanks; then at night as we pulled into position, two crewmen would put down the hay as the tank pulled forward it keep the track from freezing to the ground at night. I'll take warm weather training any day.



Richard Peksens writes: Back in the middle 60's when I took the MC physical in Wilkes-Barre, PA, my eyesight was around 20-400 uncorrected. The requirement was to be better than 20-200 uncorrected. I was asked to read the eye chart and stated that I knew that there was a “Big E” at the top.....and I passed! Obviously, on that day, the Marine Corps was being very generous with the “requirement.” The rest is history.

USMC 'MATING SERVICE

After spotting a group of 15 Muslims setting up for an ambush, Marine Corporal Clifford Wooldridge, (now a sergeant) with guns blazing, charges across an open field and kills or wounds 8 of them. He then boldly rushes around a corner wall after hearing voices and comes face to face with 4 more Taliban Muslims within close range, and immediately guns down 3 of them.

Now with his 249 SAW machine gun empty, he jumps back behind the wall to reload, then notices the gun barrel of the 4th guy coming around the wall that he is using for cover while reloading. Wooldridge drops his empty SAW, grabs the guy's gun barrel, and proceeds to beat the Allah Akbar out of the Muslim dirt bag with his own gun, effectively killing him, and earning Corporal Wooldridge the Navy Cross, an award second only to Nations highest award, the Medal of Honor.

The United States Marine Corps is the 72 virgins mating service and will even beat you to death with your own gun to help you meet your imaginary girlfriends. And they'll gladly do it FOR FREE. It's their pleasure....really

Submitted by Bruce Van Apeldoorn

“Dunk” Remembered

On 2/14/18, seven years ago today, your friend, my friend, our friend, the legendary H. Gene Duncan, a Major of Marines left the world to go home and be with his God. He was 79 years young. For almost 8 decades Gene was a Marine icon, a fearless leader who dedicated his life to his Creator, his Nation and his Corps, unconditionally, unhesitatingly, and with an unwavering spirit of all that is good and right. His selfless role model example as a totally giving human being is what, in my opinion, God had in mind when he created all of us. Gene personified a sense of spirituality, complete integrity, never-ending courage and yes, total humility which was, is and will forever be the positive sub-

stance of his legacy. I never stop believing that sometimes in life you get a little lucky. A giant of a person crosses your path and creates a positive image of love, compassion and countless storybook achievements which cannot help but make you a better person. Gene did that for us and he did it, his way. There will be other Brother Marines, kin folk, colleagues and friends who have influenced my life. But, in truth, there has been, always, only one Gene Duncan, Major of Marines, and I for one will never stop being grateful that we shared a part of life together which will never be forgotten. God bless you, Gene, and keep you always. And thank you for being my Hero.

Affectionately, Respectfully and Semper Fidelis,
Ed Cercone—US Marine Tank Officer
“Shoot Straight—and Often” — Gene Duncan, Major USMC (Ret)

Tank Car



Bobby “Joe Chi Minh”



SOS—From Leatherneck Magazine

December 1968
Leatherneck magazine has a penchant for re-publishing an oft-repeated request, “S.O.S.” that is now reduced to “feeds-two” proportions. Up to now, I have only been able to give my wife a rather general outline of the 100-hungry-Marine job. Her arithmetic not being too good, we were faced with the prospect of inviting 98 Marines for chow every time we

tried it—or having a hellofa lot of leftovers.

For those who missed the recipe, we herewith run it again.

- One pound ground beef
- One large onion, diced
- Salt and pepper to taste
- A generous dash of Tabasco sauce
- Dash of Worcestershire sauce
- Three tablespoons of flour
- One cup of milk

Brown beef, add seasoning and onions. Cook until tender. Add flour until brown. Add milk and stir. (More milk can be added if thinner consistency desired—or substitute part water if milk gravy is too rich.) Serve on buttered toast or potato pancakes—and chow down!—Ed.

Richard Carmer writes: Headquarters Marine Corps just revived the Official USMC General Orders and they have added one.

- The 12th General Order:
To guard my post from flank to flank
And take no shit; I have a tank

And by the way, there will be an inspection tomorrow at 0 dark thirty.

An on-line Marine grunt Vietnam vet buddy and I were discussing challenging ball players that we have known...most of whom are his family members. He sent me this one:

I coached my two sons in baseball and basketball at the YMCA in Cedar Rapids, Iowa. I probably learned more than the kids. But, one day I looked out to left field and there was “Donnie” sitting on the ground picking dandelions with his back to the game. Donnie was the worst young player that I had, but I gave him special attention. He had no dad and his mother was in terrible health, but she would struggle and end up attending most of his games. Donnie was over-weight, couldn't catch, couldn't bat, and threw like a girl. Not like girls today, either.

One day, I was giving him extra batting practice. I actually moved closer and was lobbing them in. He still couldn't hit a ball. Then I threw a bad throw and it hit Donnie in the shoulder. You would have thought that I had hit him with a .50 cal. He just collapsed in a screaming pile. Somehow, I got him to suck it up and take a few more swings, since his mother had come and had witnessed me trying to kill her son. LOL!!! Actually, she was trying to get him to man up too. Well, as life goes on, we all move on. One day, I was talking to an old neighbor and he asked me if I remembered “Donnie.” I replied, “Yes, of course, how could I forget.” Well, it turns out that Donnie was in high school then and a star baseball player.

I always tell the younger couples to try to make time to get involved with their kids. I remind them that when it is all over, they will only regret they couldn't have done more. ■



(Editor's Note: We are testing a new section with this issue of our magazine. Most of the stories come from the Vietnam Veterans Memorial archives.)

In Remembrance of My Dad

BY JENNIFER BRANCH DENARD

Jennifer Denard is the daughter of Capt. William A. Branch whose name can be found on Panel 9 West, Line 18. He died June 6, 1970.

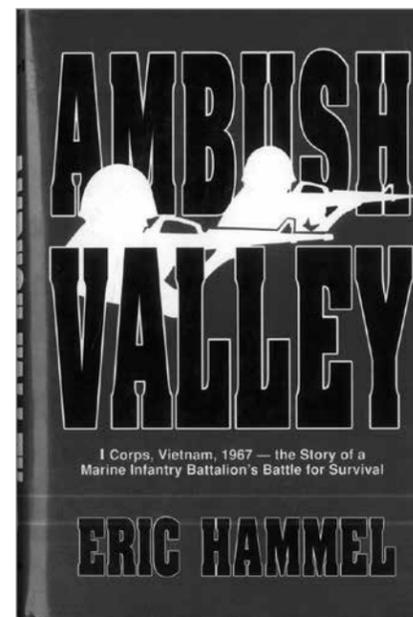
Each year, I dream of what I would buy you for Father's Day, Dad. I scour the racks for the perfect card or present and buy it in my mind. I wish we could be together today. Just once. I would sit here with you at this Wall and listen and hug and love you.

I don't remember you. I was too young when you died. But in my heart, I know you, Dad. I have read your letters and talked to your friends. I have learned more from you despite your death, than I have in a lifetime of schooling. Your lessons to me are evident. They are gifts to me, Dad, that I treasure.

Thank you for loving Mom so much – for writing to her every day from that war. Thank you for making me feel loved – for taking time to write me a letter before you died that day. Thank you for teaching me about conviction and bravery – for volunteering twice to go and fight for what is right. You were the first in your family to graduate from college. You wanted to make proud of you, Dad. You wanted the world safer. You wanted to end Communism. I am proud of you, Dad. I appreciate you. And I try hard to be like you. This is my gift to you. I love you.

Little Miss Jen.

Book Review



Ambush Valley: I CORPS, VIETNAM 1967

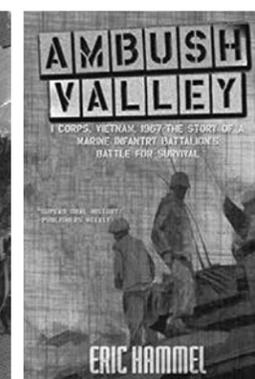
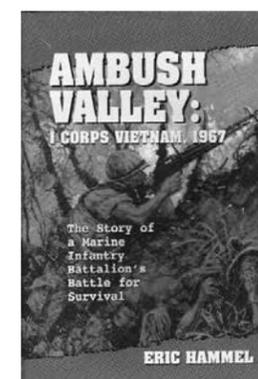
The Story of
a Marine
Infantry
Battalion's
Battle for
Survival

BY ERIC M. HAMMEL

In the summer of 1967, the Marines in I Corps, South Vietnam's northernmost military region, were doing everything they could to lighten the pressure on the besieged Con Thien Combat Base. Still fresh after months of relatively light action around Khe Sanh, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines, was sent to the Con Thien region to secure the combat base's endangered main supply route. On September 7, 1967, its first full day in the new area of operations, separate elements of the battalion were attacked by at least two reinforced battalions of North Vietnamese infantry, and both were nearly overrun in night-long battles.

On September 10, while advancing to a new sector near Con Thien, the 3d Battalion, 26th Marines that were supported by several tanks and Ontos from 3rd Tank and AT Battalions, was attacked by at least a full North Vietnamese regiment, the same NVA unit that had attacked it two days earlier. Isolated into two separate defensive perimeters, the Marines battled through the afternoon and evening against repeated assaults by waves of NVA regulars intent upon achieving a major victory. In a battle described as "Custer's Last Stand—With Air Support," the Americans prevailed by the narrowest of margins.

Another of Hammel's harrowing eyewitness accounts of a Vietnam War campaign that remains a puzzling episode in a bitterly debated conflict, Ambush Valley is an unforgettable account of bravery and survival under impossible conditions. It is told entirely in the words of the surviving Marines who faced the ordeal together—an unprecedented mosaic of action and emotion woven into an incredibly clear and vivid combat narrative by one of today's most effective military historians. Ambush Valley achieves a new standard for oral history. It is a war story not to be missed. ■



The same book with different covers

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“Seeing death as the end of life is like seeing the horizon as the end of the ocean.”

~David Searls~

Harry James Heeren



The Tank Park in the Sky welcomes another member of the 3rd Herd. We received word that Sgt Harry James Heeren, TC of F-22 Flame Tank received orders for his new assignment on January 28, 2018. Harry had fought cancer for a number of years. We had gotten in

touch with each other several years ago and it has been a real joy for the 3rd Herd to reconnect. Harry was a friend to all, a dedicated Marine and we are proud to have served with him.

Sgt Heeren was assigned to Bravo Company, 1st Tanks, serving in Vietnam during 1966 and 1967. As a Cpl, he decided to grow a mustache—and a fine one indeed! The Company Commander ruled only E-5's and above could grow mustaches. Harry shaved off half of it, as he said, 'Oh hell, he only looks at me sideways—he'll never notice.' He was right!

Will never forget the night on Hill 41, during a firefight. Several gun tanks were on the eastern side of the hill, engaged, and Heeren's flame tank was on the western side of the hill, protecting the garbage dump! No action there. Harry cranked up the volume on his record player, playing Petula Clark's 'Downtown', dancing on the turret! Gunny Garza couldn't find it in his heart to chew him out, as that was his favorite song! Semper Fi, Marine, rest in peace.

Submitted by Rod 'Lt Fuzz' Henderson

Robert V. “Just Bob” Rosencrants

Robert V. Rosencrants, was born on March 31, 1948 and stepped into eternity on February 16, 2018. Bob was passionate about God, family, friends, and country. Bob was a veteran of the United States Marine Corp, who proudly served three full tours in Vietnam. He had a communications MOS and served with several Marine Ontos platoons. He was a member of the VFW, the DAV and VVA and was retired from General Motors.

Rick Walters adds: I met Corporal Rosencrants, on a mountain top in Vietnam. He was one of the few Marines that was patient and helped “New Guys” like me. Within six months, we went to different units, his lessons were learned. I did well in leadership positions in Vietnam and in life. I called him “Rosie.” He had a tremendous history, as he was there for three tours. First in 1967, then Hue City and for almost a year, finally returned to Da Nang in 1969. For one dubious experience, a bomb landed in front of him, it destroyed his new 35 MM camera that was in his hands but he received no wounds. It was a miracle. After that he went to a deeper bunker. He also trained lieutenants and took charge in battles. We reunited by e-mail in 2000. He was working for Saturn car manufacturer at the time and had a farm in Tennessee. Again, he taught me about Elder Care for which I am still doing. He persuaded me to buy American so I bought a Dodge in Grand Rapids. Rosie and Lou had the best breakfast, with another Marine, Scott. The car still runs like new. That's Rosie.

Lawrence Thon

July 14, 1945–July 7, 2017



The below caption accompanied the above photo:

Larry and I went to USMC Officer Candidate School (OCS), then 6 months of Officer Basic School (Quantico, VA), 6 weeks of

Amphibious Track Vehicle school (Camp Pendleton, CA), flew to Viet Nam together and joined the 1st Armored Amphibian Company in Da Nang together. We shared a bunker together. As platoon commanders he went south to Hoa Anh and I went north to Cua Viet on the DMZ. When back in the states he became a series commander at Marine Corps Recruit Depot (MCRD), San Diego, CA. I thought he told me he was going to dental school. After that I lost track of him. Got some great stories from him and his experiences with the South Korean Marines when I visited with him at Hoa Anh. Sorry to hear of his loss. He will be missed.

More: I was the Navy Corpsman attached to Lt Thon's platoon of Armored Amtracs. We served at Hoi An and on Hill 52 during Operation Oklahoma Hills in April of '69. He was a good platoon leader and man. Rest easy Lieutenant Thon.

R Lee Erme

1944–2018



At age 17, R Lee Erme was given a simple choice by a judge. “Son, you can join the military or go to jail.” The teenage miscreant enlisted in the Marines, beginning a journey that would end in Hollywood. His experience as a

drill instructor led him to be cast as one of the most memorable characters in 1987's Full Metal Jacket. As Gunnery Sgt. Hartmann, Erme dominated the film's first half, berating the new arrivals at a Marines boot camp. Eyes bulging and his jaw jutting, he names one recruit “Private Snowball” and asks another rhetorically, “What is your major malfunction?” The insults were of his own invention. “It was terrifying to those actors,” Erme said. “My objective was intimidation.” He claimed that his conservative views led him to be “black balled” late in his career by liberal Hollywood. But by then, he was on shooting ranges with his friends, all of whom, he said, were “good people.” ■

An Official Letter from the Internal Revenue Service (IRS)

INTERNAL REVENUE SERVICE
P. O. BOX 2508
CINCINNATI, OH 45201

DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY

Date:

APR 27 2007

USMC VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION
C/O JOHN F WEAR II
5537 LOWER MOUNTAIN RD
NEW HOPE, PA 18938

Form 990 Required:
Yes

Dear Applicant:

We are pleased to inform you that upon review of your application for tax-exempt status we have determined that you are exempt from Federal income tax under section 501(c)(19) of the Internal Revenue Code. Because this letter could help resolve any questions regarding your exempt status, you should keep it in your permanent records.

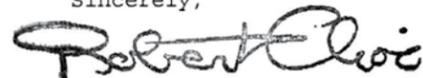
Please see enclosed Information for Organizations Exempt Under Sections Other Than 501(c)(3) for some helpful information about your responsibilities as an exempt organization.

This determination is based on your representation that at least 75 percent of your members are past or present members of the Armed Forces of the United States defined under section 501(c)(19) of the Code. It is also based on your representation that substantially all of your other members, if any, are individuals who are cadets, or are spouses, widows, or widowers of past or present members of the Armed Forces of the United States or of cadets.

Based on your representation that at least 90 percent of your members are war veterans and that you are organized and operated primarily for purposes consistent with your current status as a war veterans organization, donors can deduct contributions made to or for the use of your organization.

If, in the future, your organization does not meet this membership test or if your purposes, character, or method of operation changes, donors cannot deduct contributions to or for the use of your organization, as provided by section 170.

Sincerely,



Robert Choi
Director, Exempt Organizations
Rulings and Agreements

Enclosure: Information for Organizations Exempt Under Sections Other Than 501(c)(3)

Letter 948 (DO/CG)

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess what this prototype US Army tank is and what year it was tested?

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



Last Issue Winner

On March 26th at 5:34 PM, I got a telephone call from Hank Fuller correctly identifying the photo that was in the January 2018 issue. "That's my driver, Stan (Dave) Woodward. I was platoon leader of 2nd Platoon, Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks. My tank never hit a mine until Woodward took over the driver's position, and a few days later we hit a mine!"

And get this: Bob Peavey thought that the mystery Marine was Johnny Depp.



Ken Burns, JFK and the unopened door

PHILLIP H. MCMATH

SPECIAL TO THE DEMOCRAT-GAZETTE

As a Vietnam veteran, this writer was apprehensive about pushing the “play” button on the Ken Burns Vietnam War documentary. Would it be little more than very painful propaganda?

The button was pushed, revealing this apprehension to be only half right. The film is not propaganda. Every American should see it.

Burns does a brilliant job dramatizing the almost unfathomable complexity, fiendish dilemmas and insatiable suffering of what was certainly the greatest American catastrophe since the Civil War.

Of course, Burns can't tell us everything, and he doesn't try. The picture he presents, however sharply and excruciatingly lucid, is nevertheless in one aspect out of focus and incomplete, not by what he shows, but what he doesn't.

Burns presents so very well how five American presidents were imprisoned by Vietnam, each unable to find the key to an honorable exit. He paints an agonizingly clear vision of their Asian prison, but averts his eye from an unopened door. It is invisible in the background shadows, but if you know it's there, it exerts an uncanny peripheral power in the film's darkly negative space.

Following the French defeat of 1954, the Geneva Conference constructed certain accords that divided the country North from South, with elections planned for 1956. The North's Marxist-Leninist leader, Ho Chi Minh, expected the South to fall like rotten fruit. But it didn't and, infused with almost a million refugees from the North and sustained with American aid, president of South Vietnam Ngo Dinh Diem and his brother Ngo Dinh Nhu of the secret police were surprisingly successful in shaping their country into a viable, quasi-stable, anti-Communist state.

What the South Vietnamese people were being offered was a choice between national unity under a tyrannical, bureaucratic dictatorship or division under an authoritarian, mandarin despotism. It was not a happy choice. Increasingly apprehensive about the success of the Diem and Nhu regime, the Communists (VC/NVA) ignited a vicious guerrilla war against it. Diem and Nhu fought back, but by the summer of 1963 their government was nearing its end.

But they had one card to play, and it was in the person of Mieczyslaw Maneli, head of the Polish delegation for the Inter-

national Control Commission. The ICC, composed of three countries—India, Canada and Poland—was created to monitor the Geneva Accords.

Maneli was a Polish resistance fighter in World War II. Interned in Auschwitz in 1943, he escaped in early 1945. Post-war he taught law until assigned to the ICC.

Arriving in Saigon in early 1963, Maneli, along with his Indian counterpart Ramchundur Goburdhun, quickly established a back channel between Saigon and Hanoi.

They had help. John Kenneth Galbraith, America's ambassador to India, had laid the groundwork. In despair about Vietnam, Galbraith, with the blessings of India's prime minister Jawaharlal Nehru, formulated a peace initiative in early 1963. This called for neutralization of South Vietnam like Laos—a ceasefire and a coalition government. Galbraith later recalled that Kennedy said “to pursue the subject immediately.”

Maneli and Goburdhun picked up the Galbraith baton. Goburdhun conferred with Diem, then Maneli visited Hanoi in March. Before leaving, Maneli cabled Warsaw:

It would be desirable for the North and the guerrillas to give Diem some respite. Then, as Diem promised Goburdhun, he would get rid of the Americans by himself and would join the India line. It would be necessary to facilitate direct North-South contacts. This could take place in [New] Delhi, where the two sides have their representatives.

Since the initiative contemplated an orderly transfer of power and the Americans a face-saving exit, the response from Hanoi, as expected, was positive. But why were Diem and Nhu interested? Either they had lost faith in winning and simply wanted to survive, or they wished to gain leverage over the Americans by threatening a separate peace.

Encouraged, Maneli made numerous trips from Saigon to Hanoi after the March 1963 conference.

Following up, Galbraith met with JFK on April 1 urging his initiative, but Under Secretary of State Averell Harriman and the Joint Chiefs resisted. Nevertheless Kennedy admonished “to be prepared to seize upon any favorable moment to reduce our commitment,” even though it “might yet be some time away.”

Later Kennedy replaced ambassador Frederick Nolting, opposed to removing Diem, with Henry Cabot Lodge, a hard-liner known to favor a coup, who arrived on Aug. 22. Then, two days later, Kennedy authorized the infamous “August 24 Cable” to Lodge, demanding the removal of Nhu and threatening “the possibility that Diem himself cannot be preserved,” if he did not cooperate.

Maneli then met with Nhu publicly on Aug. 25 and clandestinely on Sept. 2. The latter, discovered by the CIA, was reported to Lodge.

Rumors flew in Saigon about a “secret deal” between Diem/Nhu and Ho Chi Minh.

Alarmed, on Sept. 13 Lodge cabled Secretary of State Dean Rusk asking “what our response should be if Nhu, in the course of a negotiation with North Vietnam, should ask the U.S. to leave South Vietnam or to make a major reduction in forces?”

On Sept. 16, Nhu met with some of his generals (ARVN) revealing the Maneli back channel, explaining that the North was interested in trade, and that Maneli was “ready to fly to Hanoi at a moment's notice.”

Then on Sept. 18, Joseph Alsop, a hawkish American journalist visiting Saigon, published an article titled “Very Ugly Stuff” in the Washington Post disclosing the Maneli negotiations. A blaze became a firestorm.

There is a saying, “If trouble comes, use it,” and now Kennedy had plenty of trouble. His “favorable moment” had arrived and he had just been handed the key to the unopened door. The crises of 1963 and the Galbraith initiative offered both the rationale and means of exiting Vietnam. But would he use it?

Instead, JFK dithered. On Sept. 21 he sent Robert McNamara and General Maxwell Taylor to Saigon. On Oct. 2, they reported the war could be won by late 1965 with new leadership. No adviser in the field bought it, but Kennedy bought the hope of it. He bought that hope because he wanted to buy it; because he, like LBJ after him, wanted re-election in 1964, and neither wished it charged that they had lost Indo-China.

Perhaps, too, there was another reason: maybe the president remembered his letter of March 6 to Mrs. Bobbie Lou Pendergrass, whose brother, Army Specialist 5 James D. McAndrew, was killed in Vietnam in January 1963.

If Viet Nam should fall, it will indicate to the people of Southeast Asia that complete domination of their part of the world is almost inevitable. Your brother was in Viet Nam because the threat to the Viet Nameese (sic) people is, in the long run, a threat to the Free World community, and ultimately a threat to us all also. For when freedom is destroyed in one country, it is threatened throughout the world.

Did JFK believe this? If so, perhaps he felt he had no choice.



PHOTO BY AP PHOTO/NATIONAL PARK SERVICE, ABBIE ROWE VIA THE JOHN F. KENNEDY PRESIDENTIAL LIBRARY AND MUSEUM
This Oct. 2, 1963, photo shows President John F. Kennedy (right) meeting with Joint Chiefs Chairman Gen. Maxwell D. Taylor (left) and Defense Secretary of Defense Robert S. McNamara in the Oval Office of the White House.

He pocketed the Galbraith/Maneli key and authorized the coup of Nov. 1. Diem and Nhu were executed as an ARVN general pronounced them traitors for negotiating with Hanoi. However, following the fall of a despot, the first day is frequently the best.

On Nov. 22 President Kennedy was assassinated and the U.S. was set in an upward spiral of mismanaged military half measures resulting in the climacteric of April 30, 1975, when it all collapsed.

After almost 12 more years of war with 58,318 American, 250,000 ARVN, 1 million VC/NVA, and at least as many civilian deaths, we see America in the last helicopter finally passing through that exit door in abject defeat.

Ken Burns shows us that cataclysm almost too well, but riding in that chopper was the one worthy thing America would ever salvage from Vietnam, the heroism and sacrifice of those she sent.

Phillip H. McMath of Little Rock is an author and trial lawyer who served in Vietnam in 1969-70 as an officer in the U.S. Marine Corps. Reprinted with the permission of the Washington Times. ■

Looking For...

The four crewman from A Co., 3rd Tanks, who were killed on 6/26/65 when their tank sank in a river four miles west of the Tuy Loan Bridge outside Da Nang. I am looking for anyone with information of the incident,

especially any eyewitnesses. I want to honor the crew with a possible future "Fallen Heroes" presentation. The names of the crew were:

1st Lt. Robert Butz
Sgt. Arthur Eustace

Cpl. Frederick Schwanger
Cpl. George Zupancic.
An engineer was also killed while riding the tank.

PLEASE CONTACT BOB PEAVEY
770-365-3711

John Michael Hill



QUESTION: Can anyone confirm that Sgt Hill (KIA 1969) is the man standing to the right of the covered Marine? We'd love to hear any and all stories that you might have about him.

John Michael Hill

Sergeant

B CO, 1ST TANK BN, 1ST MARDIV, III MAF

United States Marine Corps

Middletown, Kentucky

October 19, 1945 to August 22, 1969

Silver Star

CITATION:



The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Sergeant John M. Hill (MCSN: 2106248), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Commander with Company B, First Tank Battalion, First Marine Division, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 22 August 1969, Sergeant Hill's unit was occupying a night defensive position on Go Noi Island in support of Company M, Third Battalion, First Marines, when the Marines came under a vicious ground attack by a North Vietnamese Army company supported by rocket-propelled grenade and mortar fire. From his vantage point in the turret of the tank, Sergeant Hill sighted the advancing enemy and commenced

delivering accurate machine gun fire against the soldiers and alerted his tank crew and the infantrymen of the impending ground assault. Having diverted the attention of the North Vietnamese Army unit by his action, he quickly became a vulnerable target for hostile fire, and a rocket-propelled grenade delivered from a near position wounded two of his crewmen who were mounting the vehicle. With complete disregard for his own safety, Sergeant Hill steadfastly remained in an exposed position and continued to fire at the enemy until another rocket propelled grenade impacted beside his tracked vehicle. Concerned for the safety of his injured men lying exposed to enemy fire on the top of the tank, he stood up and, again disregarding his own safety moved his two comrades to a position of relative safety to the rear of the tank. Upon resuming his dangerously exposed position in the turret, he was mortally wounded as he continued to deliver a heavy volume of machine gun fire at the determined North Vietnamese Army force, preventing a penetration of his sector of the defensive perimeter. His heroic and determined actions inspired all who observed him and saved the lives of two fellow Marines. By his courage, aggressive initiative and selfless devotion to duty, Sergeant Hill contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life in the service of his country. ■

A Letter Home

From Leatherneck magazine

"Splendid Job"

August 1968

I have long been an admirer of the legendary feats of the United States Marine Corps in World War II and the Korean War. I read the daily news reports concerning the actions of the Marines in Vietnam. It is not surprising to me that the Marines are doing their usual splendid job.

These men have fought hard and well, and nowhere is there better demonstrated their courage than their stand at Khe Sanh. Here, they went far and above what is even expected of a Marine. The average citizen will never know or comprehend what happened there. We will never know the feelings of those men who survived a constant barrage and an ever-threatening ground attack by a much larger force while living amid a multiplying number of rats and trash.

It is to the Marines in Vietnam, and particularly to the men at Khe Sanh, that I humbly say, "Thank you." The word "Marine" has always been said with a special kind of awe for the dedication and sacrifice of the men who have borne this title through the years. My generation just coming into maturity will not forget that awe, because in the time of the "anti-hero" and an age of "unbelief," the Marines who fought at Khe Sanh symbolize to all that there is still something in this world for which men are fighting and dying.

Bless them all.

Miss Karen Lane, Richmond, VA.

Editor's Note: Some of you may be lucky enough to have had family or friends who saved your letters that you wrote home. Please make a copy and send them in so we can all share them.

What Members Are Doing

Get Your Motor Running...



Ed Hiltz said that this was one of his bikes before he sold it.



“Uncle Ho” Peksens

Richard Peksens writes: I found this photo of myself from 1966 during my “Uncle Ho Phase”... who would have guessed that I was a potential security threat?

Vietnam Veterans Day



Guy Everest, Rick Lewis and Frank Peralta (US Navy, Vietnam) in San Diego

Vietnam Veterans Day #2

Pete Ritch writes: On April 7, 2018, in honor of Vietnam War Veterans Day, Major John Haynes, USMC Retired, was the keynote speaker at the initial commemoration of the national holiday recognizing all who served in the Vietnam War. The event was attended by over 200 Vietnam veterans and their families. Major Haynes served in the Marine Corps from 1945 to 1975 and saw combat in WW II, Korea and two tours in Vietnam. Haynes was the recipient of numerous awards and citations, including a Silver Star

Medal, Purple Heart and a Navy Commendation Medal during his two Vietnam tours. After retiring from the Marine Corps, he served as state commandant of the Maryland Marine Corps League and is currently chairman emeritus of the Florida Veterans Foundation.

His remarks were highlighted by his emphatic “Welcome Home,” which occurred many times during his speech. He stated: “There is no cause more noble than for a man or woman to give their life in defense of our country.” He asked that we never forget the over 58,000 men and women who paid the greatest price to protect our freedoms. He

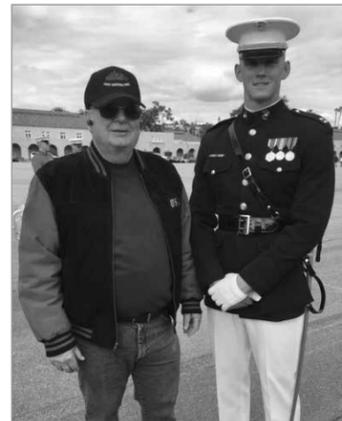


encouraged everyone to never forget those who served in Vietnam and to respect that they answered the call when their nation asked them to. In closing, he encouraged all veterans to apply for and take full advantage of the veterans’ benefits for which they are eligible. He stated that only 45% of the veterans eligible for benefits in the state of Florida have signed up for benefits.

Major Haynes received a standing ovation from the audience and stayed at the meeting hall for over an hour taking questions from veterans and their family members regarding veterans’ benefits. Major Haynes made me even prouder to be a Marine.

New Jersey Boys

Guy Everest writes: This past March, Rick Lewis, “Blues” Unland, Frank Peralta (from 4th Tanks) and I went to MCRD San Diego to watch the USMC Silent Drill Team. This is the Platoon Commander standing next to me. The young skipper is from Colonia, New Jersey, which is a town near where I grew up. ■



Short Stories

Da Nang, Vietnam (ISO) Few Marine units can boast of many men wearing more than one Purple Heart – but one battalion has a female member who’s earned a pair of awards.

Pvt. Dusty, the twice-wounded canine mascot of the 3rd Platoon, Bravo

Two “Hearts” for Dusty

Co, 3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Mar Div. was first hit when sniper fire chopped off half of her tail. She later was stuck in the leg by another sniper round.

Entered with her two Purple Heart citations in her official Marine Corps Record Book is a recommendation for

promotion to private first class. And she is one of the few Marines who doesn’t complain about C Rations.

From the Stars and Stripes Newspaper, July 1967.

A Tanker in Texas

BY RICK LEWIS

This past March when Doc Hackmack found a potential VTA member in Texas, I called him on March 19th. It certainly is a small world!!! After talking on the phone to Richard Van Zile, I found out he was one of the original Charlie Co tankers who arrived in-country via the USS Alamo in 1965. He was in 3rd Plt. And he extended his tour like a lot of us got talked into. It turns out when I was pulled out of the field in Nov 67 because I was due to go home sometime in the next 30 days and I was assigned to the dozer tank. Richard was the TC of that tank and he taught me how to use the blade. I was his driver the night we were sent down Route 4. The road was under water (flooded) and we were try-

ing to find two Marines in a radio jeep that had not made it back to their CP. We found the jeep with only the radio antennas sticking up out of the water. Unbeknownst to us the Marines had left the jeep and had humped it back to our CP but they did not let anybody know where they were. While we looked for them the road washed out from under our tank and the dozer slid off the road nose first and buried the gun tube in the mud. I just got out of the driver seat as the compartment filled with water. We sat there all night with another gun tank. The grunts took off on us about 0100 and never said a word to us. It made for a long sleepless night. We set up the 30 Cal on its tripod behind the tank and

we got down under it. We also had the good-old grease gun and our .45’s while we waited till dawn when the retriever and two other tanks showed up to pull us out. I took over the blade tank from Richard when he left for home right after that incident. It took two weeks of ball busting work to get the dozer up and running again. I had it till 24 Dec 67 which was the day that I flew home.

Richard is going over to a friend’s to use his friend’s computer to check out the VTA web site. I told him a VTA recruitment package was on the way to him. He said that he’d would like to make the next reunion. He said he will call me after he gets the recruitment package and after he checks out the web site.

The Little Things

BY TOM FENERTY

Foxtrot 2/9

Walking patrol during the hot season; you know, that time before and after the monsoon, with my rifle, gear and that ‘Prick 25’ (radio), was laboring to say the least. The sun was blistering. The heat & the humidity meant no comfort even in the shade. The only time it wasn’t hot was when it was raining. And yes, the term ‘Mud’ Marine has real meaning.

I had a green towel that my parents (bless them) sent in one of those frequent ‘Care’ packages and I almost always had it wet and around my neck. For some reason when that towel was wet....it was cool, not cold mind you, but cool. Just cool enough to help cope. It stayed wet

because I was soaked with sweat. Taking it off and just getting some air in it and putting it back on was refreshing. Sounds way too simple, but it worked. It helped.

Every once in a while the patrol would be moving down to the jungle floor and we’d find a stream. Here was a small oasis with cool running water (forget the Agent Orange, we didn’t know—Who knew?). Who wouldn’t stop and have a refreshing pause? Like I said, it was hot.

Streams can be dangerous to visit. Being caught and assaulted from above is nasty business. I remember a point squad walking up on 8 NVA having the

aforementioned refreshing pause. They too, being human enjoyed the respite. The surprise was total. A rare opportunity for payback after months of casualties. Unfortunately, we lost a man as well.

We stop, set out security, get a quick dunk, a full canteen, and in my case, soak a towel. Then, trade places with security. Heaven, simply heaven.

Many years later when meeting up with former squad members I was asked more than once, “Hey! Where’s your towel?”

Smoke ‘em if ya got ‘em.

(Continued on page 31)

V. A. News & Updates

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

Take Control of Your Claim

By James T. Marszalek

Disabled American Veterans National Service Director

The VA claims process can be frustrating for a number of reasons. Unavailable evidence, bureaucratic hurdles and incomplete paperwork can all lead to delays in the adjudication of your claim—a process many veterans feel is already long enough. However, the VA has introduced a new claims submission option that allows the department to complete a claim within 30 days of submission.

The Decision Ready Claim (DRC) initiative allows a veteran with a service connected disability to submit a disability compensation claim for increase, which is a claim requesting an increase to the current disability evaluation due to the worsening of the condition. To do so, the veteran needs to appoint an accredited representative, such as a DAV national service officer, and work together to file an Intent to File (VA Form 21-0966) to protect the effective date for a potential DRC. This allows the representative and veteran to obtain all necessary records; request medical exams; complete required VA forms; and submit a complete, formal, ready-to-rate claims package that will receive expedited consideration for adjudication.

An ideal claim for the DRC process at this stage requires very little development through the VA to prove an increase is appropriate. For instance, say a veteran has a 40 percent disability rating for service-connected prostate cancer that is in remission. If the cancer returns, the veteran can work with a service officer to request an increase accompanied by a Disability Benefits Questionnaire completed either by a VA physician or outside doctor. While the initiative currently only handles claims for increase, DAV will continue to work with the VA to expand DRCs for additional types of claims in the future.

This is where you come in, because veterans must use the DRC program for it to succeed. The VA's goal of a 30-day wait from filing to adjudication is completely reasonable, but the VA is not going to come looking for you to ask for your participation. If you're a veteran who meets the current DRC criteria, I encourage you to contact a national service officer to assist you in the process. If not, I encourage you to spread the word among your fellow veterans about this exciting new initiative.

As always, thank you for your service to this

great nation. We are forever indebted for your sacrifices, and we will continue to serve you and help you take control of your claim for the best, most timely outcome. Veterans must use the [Decision Ready Claim] program for it to succeed. ... The VA is not going to come looking for you to ask for your participation.

Come Prepared: Talk to Your VA Doc

Bring Questions, Speak Up, Be Involved

Health care appointments are usually shorter than we might like, but there are ways to make the most of every visit. You, your health care providers (the doctors, nurses, therapists, clinicians) and other members of the health care team can come away from each visit feeling more satisfied by following some simple steps. There are two basic ways to make the most of your visit.

First, come prepared. My HealtheVet makes this easier. Before your visit, check your prescription records online. Let your health care team know if there are changes to your medications or in the way that you have been taking them. You can also review notes from previous visits with your health care team and recent lab test results. These are easily found in your VA Blue Button report.

Second, at your visit, speak up and actually talk with your health care team as your partners. They are here to help you with your health and care. This means that you need to be involved in your health care and can do things to make your visits more productive. For example, much of the information needed to make a diagnosis is based on your description of symptoms, recent changes, and your health history. Be sure to share this information with your health care team during your visit. Download and print out your VA Blue Button report from My HealtheVet and take it with you to your appointment. You can use it as a reference. Make sure your information is up-to-date.

Here are some suggestions that can help:

Be sure to bring all the medications you are taking in their original labeled containers, including any over-the-counter medicines or herbal products. Be prepared to describe exactly when, how, and how often you take each of these, and any side effects that you have noticed.

Bring a written list of changes in your health. Include symptoms, any medical history or other information you think might be helpful for your health care provider to know.

Bring a written list of your questions. Common

questions include:

- What is wrong with me?
- What is the cause, or why is this happening to me?
- What treatments will help me?
- What will the treatments be like?
- What can I expect to happen to me?
- What do you recommend I do?
- Where can I get help if I need it?

Bring pen and paper so you can write down the answers to your questions.

You may want to bring a friend or family member with you to help you remember the answers to your questions or other details of the visit.

Talking with Your Health Care Provider

Speak up! Do not be afraid to ask questions of your provider or others on your health care team; they are there to help you and they appreciate you being involved in your care.

- Tell your healthcare provider right up front what you want to get done at this visit.
- Bring a written list.
- Early in your visit, describe any pain, symptoms, or side-effects you have been having.
- Talk about your concerns and worries you have about your health. Don't wait until the end of the visit to mention important concerns or symptoms.

Tell the truth, even if it is embarrassing. Your health care team needs to know the full picture.

Tell your provider even about any personal concerns like sexual problems or trouble controlling your bladder or bowels. Your health care team understands those things and is there to help.

- Be clear and to the point; avoid extra chatter about things not related to your health and care that can use up the valuable time.
- Be sure to ask questions. If you have trouble understanding what members of your health care team says, ask for a simpler explanation, to speak more slowly, speak louder or softer, draw a picture, or whatever else would help you understand.
- Ask about your treatment or care plan so you understand it, know what to expect, and what the next steps are.
- Ask for written instructions and/or information if it is available.

Remember: about five days after your visit, you can logon to My HealtheVet and read your provider's visit notes using your Blue Button report. If you

have any questions or concerns, you can easily send a Secure Message to your health care team.

Being actively involved in your health care in all these ways helps you and your health care provider and team act as partners. They are all working together to improve your health and keep you healthy. Your health may be your most valuable asset, so be sure to protect it. You are worth it!

The Aid & Attendance Pension

The Aid and Attendance (A&A) Pension provides benefits for veterans and surviving spouses who require the regular attendance of another person to assist in eating, bathing, dressing and undressing or taking care of the needs of nature. It also includes individuals who are blind or a patient in a nursing home because of mental or physical incapacity. Assisted care in an assisting living facility also qualifies.

To qualify for A&A it needs to be established by your physician that you require daily assistance by others to dress, undress, bathing, cooking, eating, taking on or off of prosthetics, leave home etc. You DO NOT have to require assistance with all of these. There simply needs to be adequate medical evidence that you cannot function completely on your own.

The A&A Pension can provide up to \$1,758 per month to a veteran, \$1,130 per month to a surviving spouse, or \$2,085 per month to a couple*.

A Veteran filing with a Sick Spouse is eligible for up to \$1,380 per month*. Many families overlook the A&A Pension as it pertains to veterans who are still independent but have an ill spouse. Keep in mind that in this situation, if the spouse's medical expenses completely deplete their combined monthly income, the Veteran can file as a Veteran with a sick spouse.

Eligibility must be proven by filing the proper Veterans Application for Pension or Compensation. (Form 21-534 surviving spouse) (Form 21-526 Veteran)

This application will require a copy of DD-214 (see below for more information) or separation papers, Medical Evaluation from a physician, current medical issues, net worth limitations, and net income, along with out-of-pocket Medical Expenses.

A DD-214 is issued to military members upon separation from active service. DD-214s were issued to separated service members beginning in the 1950's. The term "DD-214" is often used generically to mean "separation papers" or "discharge papers", no matter what form number was used to document active duty military service.

If the VA has a copy of a DD-214, it is usually because the veteran attached a copy (or sometimes, the original) to his or her application for disability or education benefits. If you've lost your original DD-214 or a copy and you are receiving

(or applied for in the past) disability or education benefits from the VA, they may have a copy (or the original, if you gave it to them) on file. At the very least, if you are currently receiving benefits (or did in the past), they should be able to provide a Statement of Service, which can be used instead of a "DD-214".

Before January 1, 1950, several similar forms were used by the military services upon discharge, including the WD AGO 53, WD AGO 55, WD AGO 53-55, NAVPERS 553, NAVMC 78PD, and the NAVCG 553 as discharge papers. All of these are acceptable to the VA for making application.

To request a copy of a DD-214 visit www.vetrec.archives.gov.

VA Benefits Eligibility Update 08 • Based on Disability Rating

Take a look at the eligibility matrix below to see what benefits you are eligible for based on your disability rating:

Rating of 0%–20%

- Certification of Eligibility for home loan guaranty.
- Home loan guaranty fee exemption.
- VA Priority medical treatment card.
- Vocational Rehabilitation and Counseling under Title 38 USC Chapter 31 (must be at least 10%).
- Service Disabled Veterans Insurance (Maximum of \$10,000 coverage) must file within 2 years from the date of new service connection.
- 10-point Civil Service preference (10 points added to Civil Service test score).
- Clothing allowance for veterans who use or wear a prosthetic or orthopedic appliance (artificial limb, braces, wheelchair) or use prescribed medications for skin condition, which tend to wear, tear or soil clothing.
- Temporary total evaluation (100%) based on hospitalization for a service connected disability in excess of 21 days; or surgical treatment for a service connected disability necessitating at least 1 month of convalescence or immobilization by cast, without surgery of more major joints.

Rating of 30%

- Additional allowance for dependent (spouse, child(ren), step child(ren), helpless child(ren), full-time students between the ages of 18 and 23 and parent(s).
- Additional allowances for a spouse who is a patient in a nursing home or helpless or blind or so nearly helpless or blind as to require the regular aid and attendance of another person.

Rating of 40%

- Automobile grant and/or special adaptive equipment for an automobile provided there is

loss or permanent loss of use of one or both feet, loss or permanent loss of one or both hands or permanent impaired vision in both eyes with central visual acuity of 20/200 or less in better eye.

- Special adaptive equipment may also be applied for if there is ankylosis of one or both knees or one or both hips.

Rating of 50%

- VA Medical outpatient treatment for any condition except dental.
- Preventative health care services.

Hospital care and medical services in non-VA facilities under an authorized fee basis agreement.

Rating of 60%–80%

- Increased compensation (100%) based on Individual Unemployability (IU) (applies to veterans who are unable to obtain or maintain substantially gainful employment due to service connected disability).

Rating of 100%

- Dental treatment.
- Department of Defense Commissary privileges.
- Veteran's employment preference for spouse.
- Waiver of National Service Life Insurance premiums.
- National Service Life Insurance total disability income provisions.
- Specially adapted housing for veterans who have loss or permanent loss of use of both lower extremities or the loss of blindness in both eyes having light perception only plus loss of use of one lower extremity or the loss or permanent loss of use of one lower extremity with loss or permanent loss of use of one upper extremity or the loss or permanent loss of use of one extremity together with an organic disease which affects the functions of balance and propulsion as to preclude locomotion without the aid of braces, crutches, canes or wheelchair.
- Special home adaptation grant (for veterans who don't qualify for Specially Adapted Housing) may be applied for if the veteran is permanently and totally disabled due to blindness in both eyes with visual acuity of 5/200 or less or loss or permanent loss of use of both hands.

Rating of 100% (Permanent and Total)

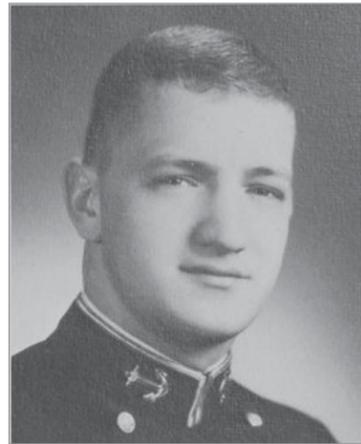
- In Addition to the Above:
- Civilian Health and Medical Program for Dependents and Survivors (CHAMPVA).
- Survivors and dependents education assistance under Title 38 USC Chapter 35.

[Source: U.S. Veteran Compensation Programs | March 2, 2018 ++] ■

The Love for a Brother

BY SUZANNE WUNSCH JOHNSON

(Editor's Note: Ms. Wunsch-Johnson is the youngest sister of Captain Michael Wunsch. Captain Wunsch, Company Commander of Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks, was the last US Marine tank officer killed in Vietnam. Ms. Wunsch, along with her husband, joined us for the VTA reunion in September 2017 in St. Louis. These are her words delivered to the VTA members during the reunion.)



A young girl had moved the kitchen chairs into the living room so she could scrub the kitchen floor. As she returns the chairs, she notices an unmarked car pull up in the front of the house. Two khaki uniformed gentlemen with shined shoes approach the house. She opens the door. There are screams. The mother falls down the last few steps from upstairs.

The gentlemen try to console her but soon return to their car and pull away. The father pulls into the driveway. The mother runs out and falls on the ground on top of the crab apples under the old tree. The father sits in the car sobbing uncontrollably. The young girl sits on the outside steps looking down the street where the car has disappeared. The pork chops burn and the pan sticks to the electric burner.

I am the young girl. I am Suzanne Wunsch Johnson. I am the younger sister of Captain Michael C. Wunsch, Co. A, 3rd Tank Battalion, Quang Tri province near Con Thien. I was sixteen. I am now sixty-four. The description above is not a Hollywood script. It was an afternoon in my life. I opened the door. I couldn't fix and reverse the unthinkable on July 28, 1969.

The loss of a brother has adverse impacts in a normal situation. When you lose a brother sitting on a tank half way around the world, your heart shatters. I made a decision to succeed with a shattered heart and make Michael proud.

Michael was my mentor. My lessons included basketball, running, sketching, and even concrete mixing. Michael was an excellent stone mason. Our house was surrounded by stone walls and porches.

Prior to Michael's entrance into the Naval Academy, he was already exhibiting military leadership skills. I was his

first platoon member in the famous "Wunsch Water Fight Events." I enlisted at the young age of eleven and was his grunt. My radio would crackle. I would gather the ammunition (balloons and buckets). Trust me, water balloons dropped from a second story window achieve maximum impact. If we felt particularly brave, we would also target mom. Mom's selection was done with care. It takes a real bravery to drench a General. Once the enemy location was identified, the battle began. Hoses were pulled.

I can only wish that water hoses were being used on July 28, 1969. I still can't fix and reverse the unthinkable. I have tried for the last forty-eight years. I love my brother Michael.

(A Second Note: It is clear that the time we spent in Vietnam not only had a lasting impact on those of us who served, but also on the ones who are closest to us. If you are, or know of someone like Suzanne who would like to set down on paper the feelings they have lived with these last 50 or so years, please send the experience to my email address: fremkiewicz@gmail.com) Thank you. "Tree."



Capt. Mike Wunsch's sister, Suzan, entertains some of the Alpha Co, 3rd Tank crewmen: Virgil Melton, Jan "Turtle" Wendling, Hank Fuller, and Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz ■



Michael C. Wunsch

HOME OF RECORD: Feasterville, Pennsylvania

Silver Star

AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING [Vietnam War](#)

Service: [Marine Corps](#)

Rank: [Captain](#)

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

CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Captain Michael C. Wunsch (MCSN: 0-92921), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as Commanding Officer of Company A, Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 27 July 1969, Captain Wunsch's unit, in conjunction with an infantry company, was participating in Operation IDAHO CANYON northwest of Cam Lo in Quang Tri Province when the Marines came under a heavy volume of mortar fire. With complete disregard for his own safety, Captain Wunsch fearlessly exposed himself to the impacting rounds as he skillfully directed the movement and fire of his tanks, causing the hostile unit to withdraw. That night, while the combined force occupied a defensive position, the Marines were subjected to a vicious

ground attack by North Vietnamese Army soldiers determined to penetrate the defensive perimeter. Boldly moving to an exposed vantage point, Captain Wunsch dauntlessly pointed out enemy targets until the assault was repelled. During the early morning hours, he detected movement forward of his position and, reacting instantly, boldly stood in the turret of his tracked vehicle to better observe the area. While thus exposed to the intense hostile fire, he was mortally wounded by the detonation of a rocket-propelled grenade which impacted on his tank. His heroic actions and determined efforts inspired all who observed him and were instrumental in the defeat of the enemy. By his courage, bold initiative and unwavering devotion to duty, Captain Wunsch contributed significantly to the accomplishment of his unit's mission and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country. ■



3rd Battalion, 26th Marines fight with the NVA 324B Division in September, 1967 during the Vietnam War

Captain Matt Caulfield's understrength company labored through the brush and scrub growth of an abandoned rice paddy toward its objective, a low ridgeline 200 to 300 meters away. Corporal Mike Norcross' squad had the point and followed an old **tank** trail across a dry watercourse and up a slope. Thick foliage 7 to 8 feet high lined both sides of the track, severely limiting observation. The trail unexpectedly opened into a clearing. As the squad started across, a burst of fire hit the second man in the column, mortally wounding him. "As the point was moving through the open area," recalled Second Lieutenant Bill Cowan, "there was a burst of AK-47 fire, followed by several more little bursts. I immediately rushed forward and saw that one of the Marines in the point squad was down."

Norcross reacted quickly and got his squad on line to push forward. Before the Marines could advance, heavy fire wounded the 1st Fire Team leader and stopped the squad in its tracks. As Caulfield evaluated the contact, he heard a Marine scream, "God, the whole mountain is coming!"

Caulfield looked up. "Two columns of the enemy — between 200 and 400 of them — started on a direct diagonal toward us," he recalled.

First Lieutenant Ron Zappardino, India Company's FAC, was behind Cowan. "The next thing I knew," Zappardino recalled, "Cowan and the three or four other India Company Marines slammed into me and I was backing down the way I had come, firing my M-16 with one hand and my .45-caliber pistol with the other. Every hand was needed, every bullet counted. We were toe-to-toe, punching it out!"

It was September, 1967. The 3rd Battalion, 26th Marines (3/26) would fight two major engagements with elements of the NVA 324B Division early that month, suffering almost 350 casualties — four out of 10 Marines killed or wounded. The actions took place just south of the Demilitarized Zone in an area that became known as the "Leatherneck Square," a quadrangle just below the Ben Hai River which marked the boundary between North and South Vietnam. The "Square," bounded in the south by Cam Lo and Dong Ha and in the north by Gio Linh and Con Thien, was one

of the most hotly contested areas in South Vietnam.

The first deadly encounter began on the afternoon of September 7, when volleys of rockets and artillery slammed into the Marine positions. Waves of NVA infantry closely followed, threatening to overrun the embattled leathernecks. Three understrength companies, India, Kilo and Mike, battled elements of the NVA 812th Regiment throughout the long night. Finally, toward morning, the fighting tapered off and the NVA withdrew to lick their wounds. The haggard Marine survivors emerged from their fighting positions to find a battlefield littered with more than 100 NVA bodies. The struggle had not been without cost; 20 Marines had been killed in action, while another 70 were wounded.



The next day, Lima Company was detached from escorting convoys and ordered to reinforce the battalion. The company moved by truck from Dong Ha to a location north of artillery position C-2 on Highway 9. The men disembarked and waited for guides to lead them into the battalion position. A short time later, a long column of infantry and **tanks** appeared out of the scrub growth. As it approached, Lima's Marines could see that the **tanks** carried a gruesome load. "A casualty on one of the **tanks** had his hand out from under the poncho, and I could see a wedding ring on it," 2nd Lt. John Prince observed. "I thought about the wailing

and gnashing of teeth. Somebody back home was going to be mourning."

Captain Tom Early, the battalion communications officer who had accompanied the column, shouted: "Spread out, spread out! The NVA are going to shell us."

Staff Sergeant Russ Armstrong heard the telltale boom-boom-boom of artillery being fired. "Oh no," he thought, "It's incoming!"

Corporal Charles R. Whitkamp was helping to unload casualties onto a truck. "The first round blew me off the top of the **tank** and I ended up under it. The incoming was heavy stuff, and lots of it."

The NVA had the road registered. They fired 35 rounds of artillery without having to adjust. Prince remembered, "Everybody was running for cover, but there was no cover because the entire area had been bladed flat and clean."

First Lieutenant Harry "Zero Fingers" Dolan said, "Rockets and artillery rounds impacting at the front of the convoy. They were just busting everything up. Some troops were hit and trucks were destroyed."

Whitkamp crawled around the back of his **tank** and froze as he noticed a nearby truck. "Between the tailgate and truck bed, there was a gushing stream of blood about 24 inches wide," he remembered. "Marines were screaming in agony."

More incoming snapped him out of it and he climbed back aboard his **tank**. "This poor corpsman had one arm blown off and he was just about ready to fall off the back," said Whitkamp, who had been trying to assist him as the **tank** sped toward help. "We got to C-2, but I'm lost as to what happened to the corpsman. I just pray that he made it."

Mercifully, the shelling stopped, allowing the casualties to be evacuated. Most were simply piled aboard any passing vehicle — anything to get them off the exposed roadway and into the artillery firebase, which had a medical bunker. Altogether, 28 Marines and corpsmen had been wounded and one Marine killed. Lance Corporal Mike Hefflin summed it up: "I was aware of the trucks running down the highway...but I didn't pay much attention. We were scared to death."

Lima Company joined the battalion without further incident and dug in on the perimeter. Zappardino recalled that while he was on a patrol, his "radiomen dug my hole 5 feet down and 3 feet in. They were scared after what had hit us. The whole perimeter was like that. Everyone who could dig dug for hours."

"It was a relatively quiet night," 1st Lt. Bob Stimson remembered. "I had finally fallen asleep...when a large-caliber round detonated right over our position. The rifleman right next to me cried out. By the time I got back to my CP position, he was dead."

Captain Andy DeBona, the Mike Company commander, sensed it was friendly fire and became "a little hostile." He threatened to do bodily harm if it wasn't stopped. "I

waited until the next bang and had battalion get hold of Camp Carroll to see if they had just fired. I was told they had, just as the next shhhhm-boom sounded. Artillery fire then was stopped."

The remainder of the night passed uneventfully. The battalion relocated to Hill 48 the next day and conducted local patrols. Most of the time was used to reorganize, resupply and integrate new replacements. India received a new captain. Matt Caulfield came in on the back of a **tank**. "It was raining," he remembered. "I was a replacement for a company commander who had been killed the night before. The **tank** lurched to a halt. I jumped off, walked over to a hole and asked, 'where's the CP?' A filthy, soaking-wet Marine continued bailing out his hole with a C-ration can and answered, 'You're in it.' I asked for the battalion commander. He answered, 'You're looking at him.'"

Another personnel change occurred on the 10th, when Major Carl Mundy replaced Captain Bill Wilprett as the operations officer. "At that particular time, India Company was on the move," Mundy remembered. "Lima Company had moved out, but on a little different course. Kilo Company was in the perimeter, around the battalion CP, and Mike Company was just in front of Hill 48."

"Our mission was to sweep a ridge 2,200 meters due north," Caulfield recalled. "I distinctly remember thinking that the avenue of approach was not the place to be if the enemy was on the objective."

Corporal Steve Greene was with the India CP group. "I clearly recall a deep feeling of apprehension as we left our night position," he said. "It was understood by everyone that after the events of 7 September, we were operating in an area that contained numerous NVA forces that were more than willing to engage large numbers of Marines. What turned out to be a mistaken hope was that we had bled them...to a point where they might not be willing to seek further combat."

As Cowan and Zappardino were punching it out with the NVA, Lima Company hurried forward to help. Prince's men were on the right flank. "As we moved off our hill into the rice paddy, we got rocketed," said Prince.

Hefflin took cover in a Vietnamese graveyard. "The first volley of rockets fell in on the 3rd Squad," he recalled. "I looked down and saw a steel sliver 10 to 12 inches long struck through my right foot."

Prince hoisted Hefflin onto his shoulders and carried him up the slope. "We made contact with India Company up there and started taking small-arms fire."

Corporal Frank Garcia, who was the last Marine up the hill, remembered: "By the time I was moving up to the company position on top of the hill, there was a line being set up. The men were spread out, dispersed over a lot of ground."

Caulfield struggled to form a defense. "I yelled to my XO to establish a perimeter with the rear platoon and extract everyone back to that position." >>

Cowan's 3rd Platoon pulled back under heavy pressure. "The move almost got out of control," Greene recalled. "Many of the men ran right through the area where the new perimeter was being formed. If Lieutenant Stimson and Captain Caulfield hadn't taken forceful action, I don't think the company could have survived subsequent attacks."

Stimson was afraid the men would pull back too far. "I started grabbing men, turning them around, facing them toward the enemy."

As Caulfield moved around the perimeter, "A round came whizzing over my head, actually creating a vacuum as it sped by," he said. "Enemy mortars began to crash around us. By this time I was screaming for air and artillery."

Zappardino got on the radio and requested air support, reporting "enemy troops in the open." His call went out to "Land Shark Bravo," call sign for the Dong Ha Direct Air Support Center (DASC), which diverted several flights of fighter-bombers. "I had air coming on station in just 90 seconds. Air in 90 seconds! I couldn't believe it!"

Caulfield was jubilant: "Air was magnificent. The ground between us and the enemy simply disintegrated again and again."

Army pilot Captain Charles Larry Deibert, radio call sign "Cat Killer-46," with his observer, Marine 1st Lt. John Haalaud, arrived on station to direct the air support. The airborne controllers braved intense ground fire to pinpoint enemy positions. One of Deibert's marking rockets hit dead on in the center of three .51-caliber positions. It disabled the guns and killed most of the crews.

"I was glad to have that AA knocked off," he remembered. "It looked as big as grapefruits sailing just off my wingtips."

As Zappardino later wrote in an award recommendation for the Army pilot: "In less than 15 minutes, [Deibert] had [the] fixed wing on target. As the fixed wing rolled in on the enemy, at least seven .51-caliber automatic weapons opened up and attempted to destroy the [Cessna] O-1C and the strike aircraft. Through this hail of enemy fire, Cat Killer-46 continued to direct strike aircraft on the target. At approximately the same time, a human wave attack took place. Cat Killer-46, in the midst of heavy fire, directed strike aircraft against several hundred NVA assaulting our position."

Greene looked out into the rice paddy. "I saw hundreds of NVA troops in the open," he recalled, "advancing in formation toward the area where the remainder of the battalion was located. I had never seen NVA troops in these numbers."

Corporal Bill Hayes saw rows and rows of NVA advancing toward him in formation. He remembered thinking, "What is this, the American Civil War?"

Caulfield was astonished: "They were in an open field headed straight for my flank. The enemy paused, then made a precise left oblique and headed toward the battalion and Mike Company."

Mundy saw them coming: "I was struck by the almost theatrical fact that coming across from the high ground to the west of us was an almost perfect formation of NVA... firing their weapons as they came."

"It was almost too good to be true," remembered Caulfield. "The enemy was offering me his flank. I had perfect fields of fire; it reminded me of bears in a shooting gallery. The only problem was that as soon as we shot one, two more seemed to take his place."

Prince took up a kneeling position with his rifle: "I saw a group of men jogging 30 yards in front of my platoon's lines. The leader moved across my front. I fired one round into his chest. Then I did the same to the second man. I fired at four men and then my M-16 jammed."



Unknown to Prince, a **tank** moved up close to him and took the NVA under fire. "I was lying on the ground and I felt an explosion. I looked up and realized that a **tank** had moved up to my left, had swung its gun right over me, and fired a round."

Lieutenant Stimson remembered seeing "two **tanks** behind me, to my right rear, moving toward me, the flame **tank** in the lead. The **tank** commander, in the turret, was firing his .50-caliber machine gun out at the NVA in the paddy."

Caulfield watched it fire. "The **tank** got off a burst of .50-caliber fire, and 20 to 40 enemy soldiers were knocked into the air."

Just then, an NVA assault squad came out of the scrub growth, right in front of Stimson, who later recalled "a man with an RPG on his shoulder and, behind him, his ammunition humper. As I was reaching for my pistol, he let go. The RPG went flying over me and hit the **tank**."

Zappardino was looking at the first **tank** when it was hit. "As soon as the **tank** turned down the hill — boom, boom — it was history," he said. "One guy jumped out of the turret on fire and started rolling around on the ground. Meantime, everything around me stopped as it dawned on us — this was for real; we were in real trouble."

First Lieutenant Paul Drnec, the **tank** platoon com-

mander, reported: "B-25 [a gun **tank**] and F-23 [the flame **tank**] took RPG penetrations which started fires in both vehicles. B-25's fires were the result of ammunition in the ready rack exploding, which killed the loader and seriously wounded the gunner and the **tank** commander. F-23 was abandoned when the fire spread to the main napalm **tank** which contained 450 [Ed. correction: 360] gallons of gasoline and napalm mix. In half a minute it erupted in a 25-meter-high mushroom cloud."

Zappardino summed up the loss of the armor: "That heavy steel weapon had represented the heart and strength of the organization to me, and it had just disappeared. The loss of that **tank** was demoralizing to whoever saw it."

The battalion was being assailed on all sides and was in danger of being overrun. The NVA had succeeded in splitting it into two separate perimeters which could not provide mutual support. Major Mundy summarized the precarious situation: "What we had at that time was what I would characterize as a pretty good, well-planned, and pretty well-coordinated attack by the NVA engaging all of our elements, which were strung out. They were keeping India and Lima companies engaged over on the high ground to our southwest and keeping Mike Company pinned down between the battalion and an attempt to move onto that ground behind Lima Company."

NVA reinforcements swarmed toward the battlefield. Captain Deibert recalled that "thousands of North Vietnamese were headed for the fight." Rocket, artillery, and mortar fire pounded the two perimeters. Marine casualties were mounting and ammunition was running short. Survival was at stake.

Zappardino described the situation in more pithy language: "They were coming right at us. They had us by the short hairs!"

Rifleman Dean Cosby lay on his side firing his M-16. In between shots, he scraped desperately at the ground with his entrenching tool "trying to get some kind of cover," as he later recalled. Bushes and shrubs around him disappeared under a hail of enemy bullets. The roar of gunfire was deafening. Suddenly, a line of NVA soldiers emerged from a tree line, firing their AK-47s as they advanced across the rice paddy. He watched in astonishment as hundreds more poured into the open field, until rows of NVA stretched from one side of the field to the other.

Lance Corporal Chuck Bennett could not believe it. There were hundreds and hundreds of NVA coming toward him. "They were kind of jogging, firing from the hip, and yelling, all at the same time," he remembered. "Some hit the deck and fired from the prone position, while others kept coming at us."

Stimson observed "a hell of a lot of North Vietnamese in the open rice paddy to our immediate north. I could see them all over," he said, "in front of us and off our right front. We were being engaged by this huge force."

India Company's 60mm mortars and machine guns opened up on the enemy soldiers, killing and wounding scores of NVA. Cosby exclaimed, "We wore them out!"

Bennett was spraying them with his M-16. "The NVA were attacking right at us in human waves. There were too many to aim at. There was just one big target out there."

Lima Company's Corporal Garcia recalled seeing "the NVA — just a lot of green uniforms — charging right at me." Then, said Garcia, "My rifle jammed."

He was not the only one whose weapon malfunctioned. Lance Corporal Anthony Zawicki, one of 2nd Lt. Prince's squad leaders, was down on one knee trying to clear a jam with his cleaning rod. Prince yelled over to him. "As I was speaking to Zawicki, he got shot in the forehead," remembered Prince. "He fell down on his back and just lay there."

Zawicki's buddy Garcia covered the wound with a bandage but really didn't know what to do. Zawicki was beyond help. Zappardino described "firing my M-16 with my right hand at the same time I was scraping a fighting hole with my left." He was also on the radio calling in air support: "The first flights were F-4s with 250-pound bombs. As the first F-4 pulled out, he drew fire from NVA .51-caliber anti-aircraft machine guns. His wingman started his run when the world opened up on him. I never saw a pilot pull back on the stick so hard. He must have popped every rivet in the aircraft."

Zappardino worked the planes closer and closer to the perimeter. Cosby remembered, "The FAC brought the air in so close I could feel the heat of the napalm."

One aircraft was not so lucky. "Two Marine F-4s worked over the opposite ridgeline," recalled 2nd Lt. Chan Crangle. "The second pilot flew into a solid curtain of .51-caliber. At least three positions poured green tracers into the aircraft. The plane seemed to stop in midair, with pieces flying off in all directions. Smoke and flame immediately erupted, and he began to lose altitude."

Cosby thought he could hear the rounds hit the aircraft. Crangle watched as the plane cleared the area. Someone shouted, "He's out," as the pilot hit the silk.

Bennett suddenly heard someone on the radio yelling to tell the pilots they were dropping short.

One of the planes lined up the wrong target. Cowan's platoon was right in the "V" ring. "I looked up and saw an F-4 going through a little cloud, coming right at us. It dropped four 500-pound bombs right smack on top of our hill."

Cosby heard someone yell, "Get down, get down!" Then there was a deafening explosion.

Zappardino screamed at the pilot, "You dropped those bombs on Marines!"

Cowan didn't blame the flier. "It was an honest error, and by some miracle, no one was hurt," he said, "and, more important, the airstrike stopped the NVA who were after us."

Prince said, "I saw a group of men jogging or double-timing probably about 30 yards in front of my platoon's >>

line. They were dressed in green uniforms, so I thought they were Marines." I wondered, "What in the hell are Marines doing out there? Then I noticed that they had clean clothes on, so I figured they couldn't be Marines."

Cowan thought "they looked exactly like Marines, except they were short and taking choppy steps...they were in fact NVA wearing our helmets and flak jackets."

Prince called up an M-60 machine gun team. "As soon as the gunners got up there, a hand grenade hit them." He moved forward to see what happened, when "something hit the ground about 10 feet from me and exploded. My mind was going a million miles an hour. I could see the piece of shrapnel heading directly toward my right eye." Prince hit the deck and saw "blood streaming down the barrel of [my] rifle, boiling away as it hit the hot metal." The side of his head was numb. He turned to a Marine and worriedly asked, "Do I still have an ear?"

The bemused man answered, "Yes, Lieutenant," staring at Prince's nicely pierced ear lobe.

Cosby traded grenades with several NVA. Many of their Chi Com missiles were duds; his were not, to the enemy's everlasting regret. As the duel continued, a badly-wounded Marine crawled up to his position. The lower half of his jaw had been shot away. He mumbled piteously, "I need help."

Cosby did what he could and started back to the fight. The man took him by the arm and said, "If we get overrun, don't leave me behind—shoot me."

Bill Hayes found a Marine lying in the open. "I didn't see any physical injuries but he couldn't talk or move. I think he had a broken neck. I felt so helpless and told him I'd get help." Hayes found a corpsman amid a mass of dead and wounded. "I'll never forget the look he gave me as he struggled to cope with the severely injured Marines."

A badly wounded Lance Cpl. Hefflin lay in a bomb crater with several other wounded. "I was completely naked except for my pistol belt, but I still had my .45. When I saw all those NVA, I thought aw shit, what am I going to do with only a .45?"

A wounded buddy stood over him with a rifle. "I'll take care of you, Hef," he said resolutely.

A badly burned **tanker** staggered up to Prince. "His entire back was blistered—one huge blister," Prince recalled. "He knelt down on the ground beside me and sat down on his heels. He couldn't touch anything. I told him to stick with me...I protected him."

The two **tanks** that accompanied Lima Company were knocked out within minutes. Both took multiple RPG hits, which set them afire. One rolled down the slope. Corporal Norcross and one of his men went out with an M-72 light antitank weapon to make sure the NVA couldn't use it against them. Norcross warned his men "to make sure he came back through the perimeter at the same place." Instead, he came in one foxhole down and walked unan-

nounced into one of Lima's positions. A Marine shot him with a .45. The big slug hit him in the upper part of the flak jacket, knocked him to the ground and broke his collarbone. It didn't penetrate the vest but it did leave a heck of a big bruise."

A heavy volley of rockets slammed into Hill 48. Major Mundy said, "I ran to the edge of the brush that surrounded the battalion CP and looked out. It looked somewhat like what Andrew Jackson might have encountered in New Orleans. Here was an almost perfectly aligned NVA battalion moving across the low ground toward us."

Lance Corporal Ron Burke's squad was moving toward the paddies. "I saw what looked to me like hundreds of NVA coming at us in waves," he said. "One wave would fall down and another wave would move in front of it. That's when I began thinking we were doing something stupid!"

Captain DeBona's Mike Company was outside the perimeter when it started taking fire. "After hitting India and Lima head-on, the bad guys made a left-oblique turn so they were pointed straight down the rice paddy at Hill 48. They were headed right for us...India and Lima had clear fields of fire into the right flank...and we [Mike Company] were shooting into their front."

DeBona was ordered back to the perimeter. Lieutenant Dolan's 3rd Platoon covered the company's withdrawal. "My radio operator and I began moving in a low squat along each side of the **tank** trail. We expected the NVA to jump out of the underbrush at any moment. Suddenly, I heard someone call my name, and when I looked behind me, Andy DeBona was calmly strolling down the trail, saying, "Come on Zero Fingers, we don't have all day."

Corporal Whitkamp's **tank** threw a tread and was immobilized. "As I was examining the track, we got shelled," he said. "The first rounds hit right on us. The concussion knocked me flat." He picked himself up and scrambled back into the **tank**. "From the driver's compartment, I watched the entire battle as it unfolded, totally helpless to do anything. The gunner was shooting into the hordes of NVA. I'd never seen so many in my life."



Two lightly-armored M-50 **Ontos** antitank vehicles took the enemy under fire. Staff Sergeant Charles Owens was 30 yards away. "The sergeant in the **Ontos** started firing his .50-cal (Ed. correction: .30-cal) at them," he recalled, "mowing those rows of NVA down like they were corn . . . like he was chopping corn."

The **Ontos** took a hit and the sergeant was killed. The driver continued to fire, although painfully wounded.

DeBona made it back to the perimeter. "Nearby was the shell of an **Ontos**. It looked like it had been RPGed. The battalion CP itself was a shambles, except for Master Gunnery Sgt. McHugh and Captain Tom Early. They were on the radios. I saw Major Carl Mundy walking very calmly and nonchalantly around the area."

Early remembered: "A wounded PFC who was shooting NVA point-blank with his M-60 only 5 meters in front of the battalion CP suddenly crawled back to us and asked, 'Where is Master Gunnery Sgt. McHugh?' McHugh replied 'Here,' and the Marine said, 'Thanks. I just never saw one.' Then he crawled back to his M-60. Some Marines were actually shaking hands to say farewell."

Mundy heard the NVA in the brush around the battalion CP. "At one quiet point," he said, "when I heard a crashing in the thicket, I drew my .45 and pulled the slide back to chamber a round. As the crashing got closer, I got ready to repel boarders. A very beleaguered-looking young Marine suddenly emerged [and said], 'We're out of .45 ammo; can we get a resupply?' I had three magazines — 21 rounds. I pulled out two and handed them to him. He thanked me and walked back down the hill. Here was kid who had been down there fighting all afternoon. There was no question whatsoever in his mind about going back down there, even though he only had 14 rounds."

One squad of Crangle's platoon tangled with 10 NVA in a hand-to-hand brawl. "The platoon had been on a knife kick," he recalled. "The evenings were full of the sounds of sharpening and bragging about using them in hand-to-hand. My first squad leader had an especially deadly looking Kris, wavy blade and all. He and his crew waded in. I saw him bash one NVA with his M-16, which promptly broke in two. I found him later swearing a blue streak. He was absolutely fit to be tied because, in his one chance to use the Kris, he had completely forgotten about it!"

Whitkamp's **tank** ran out of ammunition and they decided to abandon it. "The grunts pulled out, and it was time to bail out," he said. "We disabled the guns and ran for the perimeter shouting, 'Marines, don't shoot!' I was bare from the waist up, no helmet, and carrying a big bad .45 with two extra magazines. Artil-

lery, mortars and small arms pouring all around—how we got back into the line is a miracle."

Whitkamp pitched in to help with the wounded. "One poor guy I helped move back to the LZ was so blown apart I thought the only thing keeping him together was the poncho we were carrying him in." Whitkamp equipped himself with a weapon and gear from the wounded and took his place on the line.

By late afternoon, the two perimeters had stabilized. India and Lima companies had consolidated on the high ground southwest of the battalion perimeter. Mike Company had completed its withdrawal and was tying in with Kilo. Staff Sergeant Owens noted: "The NVA were still mingled with us but the fight had tapered off. They were still pushing, trying to get through. They still had a lot of people out there."

The beleaguered Marines poured a torrent of small-arms fire into the enemy ranks. Thousands of rounds of artillery and flight after flight of fighter-bombers boxed the two perimeters with a veritable wall of steel. The enemy attack slackened. Suddenly, a roar filled the night sky and a solid red stream lit the darkness. "Puff the Magic Dragon" was on station.

The AC-47 gunship pounded the NVA unmercifully. Lance Corporal Bennett thought it was awesome. "Puff firing his mini-gun at night was a hell of a sight. It looked like a straight, solid orange line from the sky to the ground. It was hard to believe there were four to five rounds between each tracer round. Puff had to be the baddest thing over there."

Zappardino loved it. "There is nothing like Puff," he said, "nothing in the world—not artillery, not fast movers, nothing!"

"By about 0300, all was quiet," Mundy noted. "The NVA had disengaged. The troops at the front reported hearing the sound of what they described as bodies being dragged back."

DeBona inspected a bomb crater. "I found three lines of enemy dead; each line was formed of bodies stitched together by a meat hook."

Hefflin survived to see the sun come up. "The hill was a horror scene," he said. "We could see all the guys laying around dead."

Prince picked up a Marine helmet. "There were bullet holes in it. I started retching."

Caulfield stared at a row of dead. "Nothing is as final as a Marine's boots sticking out of a poncho."

As the battalion got the word that it would be relieved, Tom Early heard an enemy voice over the battalion radio: "Goodbye, 3/26!"

This article was written by Colonel Dick Camp (Ret.) and originally published in the August 2006 issue of Vietnam Magazine. ■

Marine Corps Gave Vet Sense of Purpose After War

BY ABBY HAMBLIN
OCT 4, 2015



Vietnam veteran Armando Moreno enlisted with the Marine Corps, a decision he was proud to make.

Armando Moreno was attending Hancock College in 1966 when he felt the draft for Vietnam looming and decided it was time to enlist in the Marine Corps. It was a decision he was proud to make, coming from a Marine Corps family, and one that gave him a sense of purpose and continues to guide his life almost 50 years later. And it all started on the USS General LeRoy Eltinge, a transport ship he jokingly describes as falling very short of Princess Cruise standards.

“Those memories of those first five days on that ship ... it’s something that’s a part of you, it will always be there,” Moreno said. “That smell, how bad the food was and the fact that we were all crammed into small spaces and wondering, ‘What the heck did we get into?’”

Moreno worked on armored tracked vehicles that provided cover fire as they rolled into combat areas, particularly via beach landings.

“My first taste of combat was getting on a landing craft with our tracked vehicles and heading toward the beach just like my predecessors in World War II and Korea,” Moreno said. “At the time, I could see the jets

hitting their targets; I saw the grunts going in from helicopters and we went in from the ocean, and then when we got to the beach, the ramp goes down and out you went.”

Despite some harrowing experiences, Moreno is more likely to talk about his appreciation for the grunts or talk about how the Marine Corps has changed his life than talk about any of the hard times. He credits the Marine Corps with giving him the preparation to have a prosperous life after the war.

“Slowly but surely I stayed with it,” he said about the journey that led him to 30 years of service to the Santa Barbara County Sheriff’s Department. “I think that was the thing. I wanted to improve my life. I had a sense of pride.”

Now at age 68, Moreno holds a leadership position in Marine Corps League 1340, and it was the USS General LeRoy Eltinge that really brought it all full circle for him just a few years ago. He met a man named

John Contos, now a close friend of his, who had been on the exact same ship at the exact same time, though they never met at the time.

“I wouldn’t trade my experience for anything in the world, especially as I get older,” Moreno said. “Those experiences and those memories are probably more dear to me now than ever before.”

He treasures the Marine Corps League and said it has been therapeutic for him. The group celebrates and preserves Marine Corps traditions and history and provides assistance to veterans and members of their community through projects like “Toys for Tots.”

“You feel that connection,” Moreno said. “We don’t sit around and talk about the old stories. We’re just comfortable with each other. Every once in a while, a conversation or situation will come up which serves as a reminder and we’ll look at each other and kind of laugh about it and that’s that connection that we have.” ■

Mike Maldonado and me (I am on the top right) outside of Phu Bai, Gia Le, 1967.



Short Stories
(Continued from page 19)

At Miramar This Morning

THE PATRIOT GUARD RIDERS

At 0800, the PGR assembled at Miramar National Cemetery to render honors to “Veterans Without Family.” This morning we were joined by three veterans to render honors along with the PGR. Just before ceremony for Veterans Without Family, each of the three veterans stepped forward to recite his military career.

Navy Sonar man, Gulf of Tonkin.

Air Force Flight Engineer, Korea and Vietnam.

Then, a fellow who appeared all of 63 years of age stepped forward and with a loud resonant voice, full of timbre,

began to speak. He said he was lucky to be alive three times. He is 93 years of age. As a Navy Seabee, he was in the second wave to hit the beach at Iwo Jima. The enemy allowed the first wave to land literally unscathed. The landing craft next to his took a direct hit just as the ramp was lowered and half the men lost their lives in a flash. Then, he and the second wave made its way inland, a few yards from the beach. Near sunset, he

and two others were tasked with evacuating the wounded. Upon return to their company area, all were gone and they dug in for the night. They heard explosives down the beach for most of the night. The following morning, they discovered their unit had moved 500 yards down the beach and were ones who were literally pounded all night by cannon and mortar fire. He and his two buddies were unscathed.

They rejoined their unit and he was directed to hike up the hill to the tell the colonel and the major why they were not with the unit through the night. They

accepted his explanation and he turned and headed down the hill. Within ten seconds a mortar hit the hilltop killing the two officers and blowing him 75 feet down the hill.

He saw the original raising of the flag over Iwo Jima. He said it was a small flag, so a large flag was obtained from a ship and the iconic flag raising was recreated with the much larger flag for the photographer present.

Within eight days they had an airstrip built and immediately B-29’s returning from bombing raids over Japan that could not reach Guam or their original base would land on the strip. One B-29 landed with but one live engine.

We saluted all three and after the honor ceremony for the Veterans Without Family the three joined us for breakfast. A couple if our PGR members picked up the checks for our hero’s.

I’ve said before & I’ll say again the Patriot Guard Riders are an incredible group of people. What a great honor it is to belong to such a group.



Why Swearing is F**king Good for You

BY KEN CHAMBERLAIN-MARINE CORPS TIMES

Humans aren’t the only primates who can curse, but we’re really good at it, as anyone in the military might know. And, it turns out, it’s good for us. Cursing can promote teamwork and trust, and even make us more tolerant to pain, according Emma Byrne, author of the new book “Swearing is Good for You.” An interview with Byrne is available on the National Geographic website.

How can cursing can build teamwork and increase pain tolerance? “Using swear words appropriate for that person shows how well you know them; and how well you understand their mental model,” Byrne told National Geographic. She also notes that at research shows that people who are swearing can withstand much more pain than people who are otherwise quiet. More important, other primates can curse?

Yep, chimpanzees taught sign language develop signed swear words that they use not only in their daily lives, but they also teach the signed words to younger chimps. So, swearing not only builds teamwork and tolerance for pain, it’s arguably in our f**king nature.

(Continued on page 45)

GOOKS IN THE WIRE

BY RIC LANGLEY

An hour on the road and 1st Plt. arrived at Dong Ha after a petal to the metal trip east-bound down Highway 9 from the Rock Pile. It is summer 1966 in Vietnam and hotter than hell. I was sweaty and dirty but happy as hell; I always enjoyed our trips down the highway. We would run the tanks flat out and if someone got in the way well to bad. The locals had pretty much learned, after a few crashes between tanks, buses, cars and three wheeled scooters, to move off the road when confronted by a column of tanks.



I believe by this time Operation Hastings was over and we had moved on to a new operation, probably Prairie. These operations would start and end and we didn't know the difference. One day was remarkably like another to us. Dong Ha had changed quite a bit from the last time we were there. Alpha company had moved in and established their new company headquarters. We could not believe it; they had tents for every platoon, a mess hall, hot showers, a large maintenance facility and even a small club. Had we died and gone to heaven?

We had roared up in a cloud of dust, and before we could even dismount our iron beasts there was some guy standing in front of our tank all red faced and yelling and screaming something about the speed limit and the dust and the company commander along with a bunch of other crap. He was wearing bright green utilities and actually had on black boots. Next to us in our faded, torn, and seldom washed utilities and mud covered worn out boots, this guy looked like a recruiting poster. We climbed down with the guy still about to blow a gasket and everybody gathered around just to watch in case he did explode. He finally calmed down enough to point out a tent that was to be our new home whenever we were ordered or allowed, however you want to put it, to return to Dong Ha, which did not look like it was

going to be all that often. We were already off on the wrong foot. The gentleman also pointed out the company office and suggested that whoever was in charge of this mess that we called a tank platoon, get their butt in there and report to the company XO. I could tell this guy was not going to be our new best friend.

The tent we had been assigned was just a tent with enough cots for the whole platoon but it had a roof and electric lights, which went out early in the evening when they shut down the generator. A roof and electricity, two things we had not seen in quite a while. After my short time in Nam, it wasn't hard to impress me. In the middle of the floor there was a pile of sea bags and other gear. These bags belong to 1st Plt. personnel who had come up from Phu Bai. They contained all the personal gear we didn't want to drag out in the field with us. "C" Co. had sent them up north when Alpha Company had set up shop. This must be a clue that we would never see Phu Bai again. Everybody that had them found their bags, staked out a cot and started to unpack. The whole group was loose and relaxed. It felt good not to have to be listening for mortars or worrying about snipers.



The chow hall didn't open until 4:30 pm and the club even later at 6:00 pm, so we took turns heading for the shower. On the way down, the first group was told that they didn't light the water heaters until about 5:00 pm so the water would be cold. We didn't care. A shower was a shower and it had been a while for all of us. The groups of guys would troop into the showers, clothes and all. This way we killed two birds with one stone, showering and washing clothes all at one time. This sure beat waiting for a rain storm to get a shower. Within a couple of hours, everybody was showered and had their laundry hanging on a line just outside the back flap of our tent.

Siva stuck his head into the tent and told us we would not be standing any perimeter watch or bunker duty that night, so have some fun. He also said that we needed to check in the back of the jeep parked by the back door. As my cot was at the rear of the tent, I flipped the rear flap up and saw the jeep parked in the tank park directly behind our tent. From where I was I could make out something under a tarp in the back of the jeep, so I went to investigate. Under the tarp I discovered four of the best looking cases of Black Label Beer I had seen in many a day; and, to my surprise, there was also two blocks of very cold, hard to come by ice under that tarp. Seems those weapons we had latched on to up at the Rock Pile had paid off. We hustled the beer and ice into the tent and the party began. Siva always looked out for his Marines.

Three beers and a couple of letters written and it was time for chow. Everybody was really looking forward to a hot meal. That dirty, dusty, drab green mess tent looked like a five star restaurant to the members of 1st platoon. On the menu they had hamburger patties, instant mashed potatoes, runny dark gravy, something green that was impersonating a vegetable, and all the cold grape Kool-Aid we could drink, such a gourmet delight. We all ate until no one could take another bite for fear of barfing.

Back at the tent everyone grabbed another beer and dug into the pile of mail that had been delivered while we were at chow. Our mail had been sporadic over the last month or so and getting mail was one of the bright spots in our lives. There were some packages which, if they contained anything edible, were as always passed around to everyone. With luck, one of the packages was full of chocolate chip cookies, so we had a great dessert to go with our fabulous dining experience.

With the mail read and more beers downed, the club was the next order of business. This club consisted of a tent with a long table set up at one end where you were allowed your two beers and two cokes per day ration. Guys who didn't drink beer would trade you for your cokes so you could end up with four beers. If the club was busy, as it was this evening, it might even be possible to fool the bartender into giving you another beer and coke ration and then the trading would begin again. Who knows how much beer you might walk out of the club with on any given night? With the beer we were able to obtain at the club and the four cases Siva had given us we were set for the next couple of days. The tent rocked with the sound of the popular music of the day played on Armed Forces Radio. The beer flowed, the cards shuffled and a good time was being had by all. With the sun down, the electric lights had come on, all two 100 watt bulbs, and the tent was aglow with good times.

Things became subdued as guys would disappear and later return only to lie on their cots. I didn't pay much attention until all a sudden nature was calling and I had to head for the out house and I mean right now. It could have been that the mess facility just was not as clean as it should have

been, but we think that we just were not used to regular food. Having eaten only C-Rats and nothing but C-Rats for so long, our bodies were not accustomed to real food. There is another lesson learned the hard way. From then on we ate very little at the mess tent and had no further problems. All through the night guys were up and off to the out house.

I think I finally went to sleep about 3:00am and slept until we got a rude awaking at 5:45am. The same guy who had so graciously greeted us the day before was standing just inside the front flap of our tent again yelling and screaming. What is it with this guy; we had fifteen minutes to fall out for morning formation. Formation, what the hell is that! Half asleep and most of us half dressed, we stumbled out on to what they called a company street and tried to resemble some kind of formation. Some of us had utility jackets with the sleeves cut out, some had pants with holes or rips, some had covers (hats), some didn't. Everyone's clothes, although being washed the day before in the shower, still looked stained, faded and dirty. Our boots were still worn, muddy and in some cases falling apart. You could tell from the start that the XO and the first sergeant were not happy with this new platoon they had been forced to adopt.

The normal morning formation information, including the perimeter and bunker guard schedule, was passed along. Bend over 1st Plt. here it comes again! Tanks from 1st Plt. that were operational would be placed somewhere on the Dong Ha perimeter for night guard. Those that were non-operational, their crews would have bunker guard around the Alpha Company compound. We would of course be replacing personnel from Alpha Company. They needed a break from the stresses of guard duty. The formation was dismissed and immediately the first sergeant was on our platoon sergeant. Officers rarely attended these formations, so the first sergeant's wrath fell solely on our platoon sergeant. At this time, I do not remember who the platoon sergeant was but I do remember he was really going to catch hell.

After being dismissed, all the members of the platoon gathered around as the first sergeant started to chew ass. The first sergeant growled at us that we were dismissed, for us to move out and get to work. 1st platoon stayed put. If he was going to chew on our sergeant he would have to chew on all of us.

First, he wanted to know why we thought it was appropriate to fall out dressed like we were. Our sergeant explained that what we were wearing was the best clothing we had. After a while in the field things get worn out. He went on to add that each platoon member had at the most three sets of utilities and one pair of boots. We had put in for replacement boots and clothing on several occasions with no results. The first sergeant actually apologized and pointed to the supply tent and told us to go turn in all our old clothing and they would issue us new utilities, boots, socks, >>

covers and anything else we needed. We did notice that all of Alpha Company people had all new gear. This would continue to be a problem the whole time I was in Vietnam. Rear area personnel would always have first pick of any supplies that were meant for the troops in the field. From then on, any time we were in Dong Ha, we would make the supply tent one of our first stops.

With that problem solved the first sergeant brought up the behavior of the platoon the night before. It seems we had been entirely too loud and most of us way too drunk. He understood that we had been in the field for quite some time, but this kind of behavior would not, in any way, be tolerated. Our platoon sergeant apologized and said it would not happen again. The Alpha Company first sergeant wasn't a bad guy, he just did not want things to get out of hand. We all understood, so from then on we cooled it in the company area.



Perimeter position at Dong Ha

The rest of the day was spent working on the small maintenance problems we had with the tank. Some of the tanks had major things to take care of, so we were lucky. To be in our perimeter guard spot by 6:00 pm, we left the company compound around 5:45 pm for the short trip. I don't know how Siva accomplished it, but our spot happened to be right across the road from the Navy CB's club. As soon as we parked and checked in with Alpha communication headquarters, Siva was headed across the road for the club. I thought, well that's the last time we will see him until the club closes. Wrong again. After about twenty minutes he was back with two fifths of rum. Those CB guys love to get their hands on a good .45 cal. pistol or an M14 rifle. On one side of us on the perimeter we had a grunt bunker, and on the other was an Army quad 50. These things have four .50 cal. machine guns mounted on a rolling chassis and are intended to be used as anti-aircraft guns. A conversation began between us and the crew of the Quad 50 about our tank and their guns and ends in an invitation for them to join us for a cocktail. The three Army guys climb up on the tank and we all gather on the the rear deck with the commander of the Quad 50 sitting at the very end. The bottle is passed

around several times as we talk and tell the Army guys a bunch of our sea stories. It seems they spent all their time in Dong Ha with nothing to do but perimeter guard. They were greatly impressed with all of our travels and stories of defeating the dreaded enemy.

One bottle of rum is consumed in short order but the other is tucked away inside the turret for safe keeping as this party turns into BYOB. Searching their pockets, the Army guys come up with enough money for one more bottle of rum. Siva and the Army sergeant take off for the club, returning a short time later with the necessary ingredients to keep the party rolling. By the time this last bottle is almost empty, we are all feeling no pain, especially the Army sergeant.

Sitting there on the back deck of the tank, he is laughing and having a great time when all of a sudden he reared back and flips right off the back of the tank, falling about five feet to the ground. We all scramble to the back to see if he was OK. There he is, propped up on his butt gasping for breath. He had rolled off the tank landing in a sitting position. The fall had knocked the wind out of him, but other than that he was fine. Once we knew he was all right, there was a good laugh had by all. With that incident and the fact that it was getting late we decided that it was time to call it a night.

I was not scheduled for watch until 4:00 am, so I took my usual place on the left front fender. It was another warm summer night, I tucked my poncho liner under my head and dozed off. I stood my watch without incident and woke everyone else at about 6:15 am, thus making sure not to leave our spot on the perimeter until after morning formation. This would save us that headache. This was our routine for the rest of the time we would be in Dong Ha. On one of these nights on the perimeter, Siva and Sellers had gone to the club to do some trading for snake bite medications, as we knew we would be leaving Dong Ha in the near future. Rodriguez and I were left to hold down the fort.

The Quad 50 was nowhere around that night, so the partying had not been all that hard, we had both just had a couple of drinks. Rodriguez had been acting strangely the last few days. He seemed really worried about going back out in the field. He was in the middle of his six-month extension, so he had been there about fourteen or fifteen months.

We were sitting on the back deck talking when he became very agitated and kept checking the area in front of the tank saying that he thought he heard something. I had heard nothing and kept reassuring him that there was nothing out there. About half an hour passed and he became more and more nervous, pacing around the tank and talking crazy. I tried to get him to sit down and relax but he was having no part of it. He was sure that Charlie was in the wire and they were going to capture us and take us away.

Before I could react, Rodriguez grabs the M14 rifle that was lying on top of the turret next to the loader's hatch. He cranks off about ten rounds into the wire to the front of the

tank at the same time yelling something about not taking him alive. As quickly as I can, I wrestled the rifle from his hands and threw it over the side of the tank. We are now on top of the turret rolling around with me trying to get him to calm down. He just keeps fighting and trying to get into the turret, saying that we need to fire some canister rounds to drive off the enemy. With a few good slaps and one good solid punch to the face he starts to become a little more subdued.

Siva and Sellers, having heard the rifle shots, had double timed it back to our position to find me straddling Rodriguez and him crying like a baby. I explained the situation and Siva immediately called headquarters to report the problem.

Within a few minutes, a jeep rolls up with two corpsmen from the Dong Ha medical facility. They investigate and decide that Rodriguez should go with them. By this time,

Rodriguez is starting to fight again and yelling "gooks in the wire!" One of the corpsmen goes back to the jeep and returns with a straight jacket and a syringe, saying that they have had a few of these incidents in the past so they always come prepared. The corpsmen administered the shot and decided that there was no need for the straight jacket. They wrestled Rodriguez, still fighting and crying, into the jeep and down the road they went. We would never see him again.

Arriving back in the company area the next morning, we were short a crewman, so Herb Whittington, I think he came from Alpha Co., would replace Rodriguez as loader. With that problem solved, we were told to pack our gear, as we would be moving to Cam Lo to be set up and used as artillery. Another new role. More new questions to answer, more new problems to solve and undoubtedly more new lessons to learn. ■

Photo from Vietnam



From Richard Peksens: Charlie Company at LZ Baldy in 1969 during the rainy season

90mm GUN TANK M-48A3 PATTON

M48A3: General			
Date of first acceptance	February 1963	Total acceptances	1019 converted from M48A1
Manufacturers	Anniston Army Depot Red River Army Depot	Crew	4 men: Commander in turret right rear Gunner in turret right front Loader in turret left rear Driver in hull center front

M48A3: Dimensions			
Combat weight	107,000lbs / 48,500kg	Height over cupola periscope	129.3" / 328.4cm
Length without gun	270.5" / 687.1cm	Gun overhang forward	71.3" / 181cm
Width over tracks	143.0" / 363.2cm	Tread	115.0" / 292.1cm
Ground clearance	16.5" / 41.9cm	Fire height	~79" / ~200cm
Turret ring diameter	85.0" / 216cm	Ground pressure, zero penetration	12.1psi / .849kg/cm ²

M48A3: Armament						
Type	Mount	Ammunition	Traverse	Max traverse rate	Elevation	Max elevation rate
90mm Gun M41	M87A1 in turret	62 rounds	360° (manual and hydraulic)	24°/sec	+19° to -9° (manual and hydraulic)	4°/sec
.50cal M2HB MG	Cupola M1 on turret	600 rounds	360° (manual and hydraulic)	—	Manual and hydraulic	—
.30cal M73 MG	Coaxial to 90mm gun	5900 rounds	360° (manual and hydraulic)	24°/sec	+19° to -9° (manual and hydraulic)	4°/sec
Rangefinder						
Coincidence M17A1						
Night vision						
Infrared periscope M24 for driver						

M48A3: Armor		
Assembly		
Welding		
Hull		
Cast homogeneous steel		
Location	Thickness	Angle from vertical
Upper front	4.33" / 11.0cm	60°
Lower front	4.0" to 2.4" / 10cm to 6.1cm	53°
Front sides	3.0" equivalent / 7.6cm equivalent	0°
Rear sides	2.0" equivalent / 5.1cm equivalent	0°
Exhaust grille	1.0" equivalent 2.5cm equivalent	0°
Lower rear	1.6" to 1.2" / 4.1cm to 3.0cm	30° to 60°
Top	2.25" / 5.72cm	90°
Front floor	1.5" / 3.8cm	90°

M48A3: Armor		
Rear floor	1.0" / 2.5cm	90°
Turret		
Cast homogeneous steel		
Location	Thickness	Angle from vertical
Gun shield	4.5" / 11cm	30°
Front	7.0" equivalent / 18cm equivalent	0°
Sides	3.0" equivalent / 7.6cm equivalent	0°
Rear	2.0" equivalent / 5.1cm equivalent	0°
Top	1.0" / t2.5cm	90°

Engine	Continental AVDS-1790-2A; 12 cylinder, 4 cycle, 90° vee, supercharged diesel				
Horsepower	Net: 643@2400rpm Gross: 750@2400rpm	Torque	Net: 1575 ft-lb@1750rpm Gross: 1710@1800rpm	Fuel capacity	385gal / 1460L
Transmission	General Motors CD-850-6A, 2 ranges forward, 1 reverse				
Steering	Mechanical, steering wheel				
Brakes	Multiple disc				

M48A3: Suspension		
Type	Road wheels	Track return rollers
Torsion bar	6 independently sprung dual/track	5 dual/track
Drive sprockets	Idlers	Shock absorbers
11-tooth rear drive	Dual compensating at front of track	On first 2 and last road wheels/track

M48A3: Track T97E2							
Center guide, double pin, rubber chevron							
Width	28" / 71cm	Pitch	6.94" / 17.6cm	Shoes/track	79	Ground contact length	157.5" / 400.1cm

M48A3: Performance			
Max level road speed	30mph sustained / 48kph sustained	Max trench	102" / 259cm
Max sideslope	40%	Max grade	60%
Max vertical obstacle	36" / 91cm	Min turning diameter	Pivot
Max fording depth	48" / 120cm	Cruising range	~300mi / ~480km

The M48A3 modification fitted M48A1s with a diesel engine for greater fuel economy and reduced danger from fuel explosions. The rear deck was reworked to incorporate M60 grilles and exhaust louvres, and rear fender-mounted dry air cleaners were used instead of the oil bath models of the earlier gasoline engines. The auxiliary generator and engine were deleted, since the tank's diesel engine was more efficient than even the smaller auxiliary generator engine. The tank received the suspension upgrades of the M48A2. The personnel heater was changed again, to the type used in the M60, with its characteristic exhaust routed to the right (instead of left) side of the tank. The M48A3's fire extinguisher was improved as well. M48A3 was able to mount a xenon white light or infrared searchlight on the gun shield above the 90mm gun. The gun shield cover was waterproofed, and the crew was provided with a spall liner inside the tank. The fire control system of the M48A3 was also upgraded. The ammunition box for the .50 cal. MG was reduced from 100 to 50 rounds due to lack of space in the commander's cupola, but

conditions were still cramped for the commander.

Bowen-McLaughlin-York, Inc., converted 578 tanks to M48A3 (Mod B) standard starting in 1967. The Mod B tanks differed from the earlier M48A3s by having armor framing running along the tops of the engine exhaust louvres, armor boxes surrounding the taillights, and an adapter ring incorporating vision blocks which raised the commander's cupola by about 5" (13cm). This, combined with a redesign of the cupola door, provided more room for the tank commander. M48A3 (Mod B) tanks also received driver's controls and gauges from the M60A1 tank, the fuel lines were relocated, and the suspension was modified by the addition of knock-out holes for the torsion bars and the redesign of the track return roller mud shields. Detachable headlights were mounted, and the fender telephone intercom was mounted in a higher position. Infrared fire control equipment was installed in the upgraded tanks as well. The upgrades that BMY installed were eventually retrofitted to all M48A3s, and the Mod B designation was subsequently deleted. ■

Editor's Note: The following story is a perfect example of why we all should write down and share our personal experiences of the Vietnam War. We should not keep them bottled up and inadvertently end up with them buried with us when we check into the Guard Shack in Heaven.

Leatherneck Magazine Letter of the Month

December 2017

A few months ago I arrived at work early and noticed the message light blinking on my desk phone, so I entered the password and listened. I never could have guessed the journey that would ensue, as the content of the message froze me to my chair. "Hi, my name is Mike Maddox. I'm a former Marine and live in West Virginia. I'm calling to see if this is the Jeff Pinkham related to Lieutenant Sherman Pinkham who served in the 4th Marine Division on Iwo Jima. If so, please give me a call because my neighbor was in your dad's company and remembers him well."

My emotions were a swirling gust of wind. Dad rarely talked about his time on Iwo, at least not until the last years of his life. As we sat in our cabin in Northern Minnesota sharing some good bourbon, stories started to trickle out—it was like listening to something that happened to a person I didn't know. Landing in the first wave on Blue Beach, the nightmarishly slow going under heavy fire through volcanic sand that was sharp as razor blades and as firm as quicksand, taking cover behind a dead Marine whose body protected him as bullets ripped into the sand, and taking an enemy life close enough he remembered the mole on the cheek. Dad was shot on day 4 after the invasion when he and one of his men were ahead of the front line to direct fire. He was shot through his chest and remembered looking over, not seeing his arm, and thought it had been blown off. In reality, it was under his back but there was no feeling in it. The sergeant that was there threw him over his shoulder, carried him to the beach through heavy fire, and had to

flag down the hospital ship shuttle to return and pick Dad up.

I called Mike back and struggled to find the right words. Mike's neighbor was Hobie Wright, who all these years thought Dad had been killed on the island, and he had stories about him he would like to tell me. I made plans to drive to Alpine Lake, W.Va., and my brother, Andrew, decided to fly from California to Columbus to join me. I packed a few things that I thought Hobie would find interesting: A book entitled, "Iwo Jima, Legacy of Valor," with notes in the margins written by Dad describing what was happening to him at that time; comments on people he knew mentioned in the book; his .45-caliber sidearm and box of cartridges from the campaign; a Marine Corps shot glass filled with sand from the Iwo Jima beach and sealed with a Marine Challenge Coin; a newspaper article announcing Dad's wounding; and his dog tag. Hobie was a wonderful, crusty, 94-year-old Marine who served us bottles of wine as we listened and learned more about our father's unit, what the landing was like, and some personal things about Dad. Seems there were several battle-hardened men in the company who looked at Dad as yet another greenhorn college boy who was made an officer despite having no war experience.

Hobie said Dad did what he was supposed to do, which was move ahead of the front line to be able to direct fire then lead them forward. It was quite a day, but another surprise waited. I had always wanted to know the identity of the mystery man who saved Dad's life. It turned out Mike had done some

research and surprised us with documents that had the answer. Sergeant Charlie "Giff" Giffin was the man and was awarded the Silver Star for his actions. I looked at his picture for a very long time and wondered if he had any family still alive. Now it was my turn to do some research. After several false starts and dead ends, I sent a Facebook message to a Bob Giffin who lived in the area where Giff was buried and asked if he was related. Seeing his affirmative response, we set up a call that would be one of the most emotional conversations I've ever had.

I provided some background to Bob as to how the call came about, but the heart, soul and core was this: "Had your Dad not carried mine to the beach, I would not be talking to you today. I want you to know how grateful I am for your father's amazing act. I, my brothers and sisters, our children, our children's children, and family yet to come have lived or are alive because of Sgt Giffin's heroism. I want you to know about all the wonderful things, the deep love, and the contributions that Dad's offspring have done. The cascading impact of Charlie's act has changed things in a wonderful way since that day in 1945, and for generations to come. I know the two of them are smiling together even as I say this." I was crying. There was silence on the other end, then the sound of soft sobs. I asked for the email addresses of any family member who might want to hear the story and followed up with 11 relatives. And so, after 72 years there was closure. I saw the ghosts of the battlefield turn, walk toward the horizon and slowly fade, but their story was now firmly cemented and as complete as it can be for my family, Hobie, Mike, and the Giffin family. We are in a sense now members of the same family, all started long ago by a band of brothers on a far away, bloody island that now sleeps peacefully in the Pacific.

Dr. Jeff Pinkham
Dublin, Ohio

COPS and MARINES

Editor's note: The last issue of the Sponson Box was filled with stories from our Marine brothers who became officers of the law. Here are a few follow up stories:



Armando Moreno writes: (L to R) John O'Connell, retired LAPD Captain and Sgt. Michael Sheridan, retired San Luis Obispo Sheriff's Dept.

Mike Sheridan replies: I spoke with Armando with regard to me writing an article for your magazine, so here we go:

I enlisted in the United States Marine Corps May 3, 1965, after graduation from high school. I went to MCRD San Diego and then to Advanced Infantry Training Regiment, Camp Pendleton. Then after my 30-day boot leave, I was flown to Okinawa and Nov. 5, 1965 I volunteered for Reconnaissance at Camp Swab. Following my Recon training, I was assigned to 2nd Platoon, Delta Company, 1st Recon BN. We arrived in Vietnam in March 1966 and were headquartered at Chu Lai. By the end of my tour I had participated in 10 major operations and 53 combat patrols. When I left V.N., I was a platoon sergeant.

On June 16, 1966, we were attacked by part of a North Vietnamese regiment. It began around 2000, when the NVA began blowing bugles, whistles and yelling that we were going to die that night. There were just eight of us on the patrol. The lieutenant gave the order that no one was to fire their rifles, as it would give away our position and the enemy could then tell the small number of people we

had in our group. I had the M-79 and was told to fire rounds in the direction of the voices and gun fire from the NVA. The NVA never made a full-on attack, as they did not know our strength or exact location.

As a side note, Jimmy Howard's recon unit was attacked the same night, probably by the same NVA unit, on Hill 488.

(Editor's note: The book Hill 488 was reviewed in a previous issue of the Sponson Box. It could possibly be one of the most harrowing books about close-in combat of the Vietnam War).

The development of self-control and maintaining a cool train of thought during the many patrols that I participated in followed me into my career in law enforcement. I began that career in December 1969 and, thirty-two years later, I retired on July 7, 2001. During my time as a law enforcement officer, I worked as a detective, deputy coroner, station commander, and was in charge of the internal affairs unit. Having been a staff sergeant in the Marine Corps, I had to deal with many different personalities. This was also true in law enforcement. I had to deal with 28 different personalities and I had to keep each of them happy. It was the training and experience that I acquired and developed in combat that allowed me to run a successful patrol station. I had the highest number of personnel advance to higher positions than the other two police sub stations combined. I was taught in the Marine Corps to train your subordinates to do your job and that philosophy followed me into my law enforcement career.

Another US Army SNAFU

BY: GUY EVEREST

Good afternoon, John. This morning I was having breakfast with "Blues" Unland, First Sergeant Rick Lewis and

Frank Peralta. As usual, we started swapping some old war stories. And, of course, Blues talked about the brig (LOL!). And then I remembered the story from my days as a police officer in New Jersey. So I thought I'd send it to you.

It was the early to mid-70s. I had arrested a gentleman on a warrant. As I recall, it was either a misdemeanor or traffic warrant. I took him in to the processing room at the police station. While there, I told him we would probably let him post bail right here rather than put him in a city lockup. Back then, the bail was not all that much and most arrestees could afford posting it.

After he and I talked a little bit, he says, "Officer, can I tell you something?"

I have to admit that when anyone asks me something like that, as a law enforcement officer, I can almost bet it's not going to be good news. So, I told him, "Go ahead tell me whatever you want."

At this point he told me he was a deserter from the Army and that he was a wanted fugitive. I had already checked NCIC and found nothing on him. So, I informed him of his non-deserter status.

Then he said, "Well let me tell you the whole story. I deserted about five years ago. During that time, I was picked up and taken to Fort Dix, New Jersey, by a couple of Army MPs. They brought me to the Provost Marshall's office where they put me in a holding room. There happened to be a window in the room, so I was able open it and escape. So, now I would just like to get this behind me since I know someday that it will catch up with me at an inopportune time. Besides, every time I see a police car behind me or I hear a noise in the hallway of my apartment building, I have to wonder if it's the Law coming for >>

me. So please contact the Army and let me get this taken care of.”

I called down to Fort Dix and spoke to a soldier in the military police who was manning their desk. I was advised that he would check and asked if I could just hold on. After I gave him the go ahead and after a short wait, the MP came back on the phone and said, “We have no record of that individual. No record of him being a deserter or of being incarcerated here.”

I thanked the MP, hung up the phone and spoke to the subject again. I told him what the MP had said. He responded that they were mistaken and asked me to please call again. It is not often that you find someone that wants to go to jail. He kept telling me that he just wanted to get this behind him.

I called back to Ft. Dix and advised them what the suspect was saying, that he was wanted and was confessing to escaping. The MP on the line turned me over to a staff NCO. I advised him that the subject was confessing to being a deserter and escaping from custody. I was told by the staff NCO to just let him go as they don't have anything on him.

I thanked him and immediately called over to the Port Authority Bus Terminal in New York City. At the time, if anyone remembers, the airports, train station and bus stations had what they called “Special Armed Forces Police.” They were from all different branches working together.

When I got the office for the SAFFP, I advised the person on the phone who I was and asked if there were there any Marines on duty and, if so, could speak to them.

He said there was one Marine there but that he was busy at the present time. I asked the man on the line if he would have the Marine call me ASAP.

A short time later the Marine called me from the unit. I advised him of all the above and my dealings with the Army at Ft. Dix. After I gave them the information on the suspect, he told me he'd call me back shortly. And, a short time later, he called me back and said that the gentleman was in fact a deserter and there was a warrant on him out of Washington, DC. He added that he would come over and pick him up. The one condition that he asked of me was if I would make sure I hold the suspect until the Marine could get to my station. He also added that, if I had an extra police unit patch, to give it to him.

I told him that both would be no problem, that they'd both be waiting for him at the front desk.

I then called the MP SNCO at Fort Dix. I advised him that I had called over to the Special Armed Forces Police at the NYC Port Authority Bus Terminal and they did find a warrant on the suspect. At which time the Army NCO appeared to get a little upset.

I hung up and a few minutes later he

called me back. He said, “Well I think we will come over and get the soldier.”

I advised him that would not be happening since he's being held for the SAFFP unit. Of course, he did not seem to be too happy. After I hung up, he called back again. He asked if there's any way that my suspect could be turned over to his MPs.

I told him, “That's not going to happen. I gave you guys three chances to pick this guy up. Now I had promised to turn him over to the Marine who is on his way to the station to pick him up.”

The Dix SNCO did not sound too happy, and then he hung up.

A short time later, I got a call from my colonel who advised me that the Army MP from Ft. Dix would be showing up to pick up my suspect. He added that I was to release the soldier to him.

At this point I asked the colonel if the MPs had already left Ft. Dix. To which he said, “Yes.”

I told him, “Well then, you had better dispatch more MPs.”

His reply was. “Why would I need to do that?”

I replied, “Because if the MPs from Ft. Dix show up here to try to take the suspect from our City lock up, they'll be under arrest and find themselves in City lock up.”

I expected him to blow a gasket, so before it happened I told him, “I can figure out what really happened at Ft. Dix. Somebody picked up this suspect but, after he escaped, what they did was to cover up the whole thing like it never happened and they just buried the paperwork.”

The colonel said, “I have to agree with you on that. You can believe me that heads at Ft. Dix will roll over this. I will personally take care of it.”

The Marine from the AFSP unit showed up and got his patch along with his prisoner. He told me, “This was a good day to get out of New York City. I got to drive around for a while.”

That's the story as I remember it.

Guy Everest sent this photo... He is #4 from the left. ■



The Marine Corps is the Legacy of Gladiators

BY FRANK “TREE” REMKIEWICZ

“There is no greater victory than to fall from this world a free man.” Spartacus

In recent years, I have struggled to define exactly what is the United States Marine Corps. Our values of duty, honor, commitment did not just spring out of thin air. Rather, those concepts have been around since the world first started spinning with two people on it. So, I did a little research to try to find these concepts. We are definitely not the Army and we are not, strictly speaking, citizen-soldiers. Yet, while we consider ourselves very special, we are not SEALs or the Green Berets; we are not the Delta Force nor are we that Air Force special services unit. Though these groups protect their brothers, run toward fire, have generally superior training, enjoy the same or similar values, and never leave a brother on the battlefield – alive or dead. The Marine Corps is a very large organization compared to these groups and still maintains and promotes and demonstrates the very same ethos.

So, where did the Corps come from? What are its roots? How do we do what we do, very often against superior troop strength and superior fire power? I have at least one possible explanation but we need to go back in history to the Roman Empire, starting around 135 BCE.

Clearly, Rome conquered most of the known world at that time. When a country was conquered, many of the inhabitants became slaves. These slaves worked in the homes, fields, and mines of Rome. As we can imagine, the Romans were not very kind to the slaves. The sense that those conquered were not people was centered in the Conquest by Roman troops. Treatment was harsh, and torture, punishment, rape, and death were very real to those enslaved.

From 135 BCE thru 71 BCE there were three slave rebellions. The first two were short, nasty, and brutish, as the Romans would have it. However, the Third Servile War (as these were known) was named by the Romans as the “Gladiators War.” Gladiators were trained in special Roman Villas for the amusement of the Romans in arenas, the most noted was the Colosseum in Rome. These gladiators were also slaves but of a special quality that the Romans found in men (and women) that had been captured through the rather normal process of Roman conquest. Gladiators ate together, slept together, trained together and fought one another in the arenas, usually until one or both were dead.

They fought against each other and in small groups, one group against another. Sometimes, a few of the gladiators even successfully won their freedom.

In 73 BCE, a few of these gladiators had had enough of their Roman masters and began a war led by a gladiator by the name name of Spartacus (a Thracian soldier that had been captured and placed in a gladiator school run by a Roman named Batiatus. Spartacus longed for freedom in a very special way, recognizing that there was but one way to accomplish that—go to war against Rome. Spartacus escaped the Batiatus house and took with him the all the gladiators including Crixus, Agron, and Gannicus.

Word soon spread and this group gathered many more slaves, lots of gladiators and their numbers swelled to over 70,000 including regular camp followers, but all had the undying need to be free.

The gladiators taught the non-gladiators how to >>



fight, including the concepts of duty, unwavering commitment to freedom, honor in all things including battle, reliance on each other in and out of battle, and often called each other by a rather unique term, brother. This group used deception, mis-direction, improvisation, and surprise to defeat superior numbers in ill-trained Roman Legions. Rome very quickly became concerned and shortly began sending better trained and equipped Legions, yet they were still defeated. Then came Crassus, Cesar, and Pompey with the very best Rome could muster in Legions numbers which far outweighed the gladiators. In 71 BCE, Spartacus, his group now numbering less than 50,000, for some unknown reason split his troops up and were eventually overwhelmed by the Roman Legions. In a punctuation mark to end any further thought of rebellion, crucified thousands of these warriors along the Appian Way, a main road leading into Rome.

Now, back to the United States Marine Corps. As our Corps history is reviewed and the battles won and lost, the traditional qualities of the gladiators stands out.

Most Marines come from homes and neighborhoods and schools and classes not unlike the gladiators, though none of us were actually, formally, slaves. But we all come from the same commitment to our constitutional democratic republic and desire for all peoples to not suffer under tyranny. We reserve and preserve our freedom. We are melded into a fighting force in boot camp like no other in the world. We have a need to protect each other in peace or war and a strong sense of brotherhood that lasts a lifetime. The Ma-

rine Corps has Butler, Puller, Basilone, Glenn, and many more just as the gladiators had Crisis, Gannicus, Onemaeus, and Spartacus. If ever any of us, or one of us, is in real trouble, all we need to do is call out to another brother and, in a flash, they are there to help, no matter what. We reunite from time to time to relive old battles, not to just “feel good” but rather to reignite our core values, re-energize, and go back out into the world with renewed commitment to work in our own communities and to spread our time honored and battle tested values.

Honor, courage, commitment are not just words thrown out to impress someone. These are at our core. Do we always agree on things? Heavens, no. We are as individually complex and concerned on many, many important issues. We came from all walks of life and we returned to our new walks of life. You will find us in places where justice has gone awry, in places where tyranny has overtaken freedom, where those who are weak or timid need someone to fight for them and for their just cause, where there are bullies to be tamed, and to protect those who cannot protect themselves. But you also find us where the wounded need to be helped, those who pray need a safe place, and those who mourn have the time to grieve. We are United States Marines. We are the modern-day gladiators, and when you mess with one of us, you mess with all of us.

“One day Rome shall fade and crumble. But you shall always be remembered In the hearts that yearn for freedom.”—Agron—gladiator. ■

Photo from Vietnam



Homeowners' Association Is Very Upset About Man's WWII Tank.

But They're Welcome To Try And Tow It

BY JASON TORCHINSKY

Filed to: HOA



Germany 1945

Thanks to its starring role in World War II, the M4 Sherman tank is one of America's most iconic and battle-tested machines. This particular example landed at Normandy just after D-Day, helped liberate Paris, and took the fight to the Nazis in Berlin. 70 years later, it finds itself facing a much different—though arguably no less vicious—kind of enemy: the homeowner's association that runs the ritzy neighborhood where its owner resides.

I know not everyone agrees with this, but as far as I can tell, life can be interesting, and the purpose of a Homeowners' Association is to prevent any evidence of that fact from being demonstrated. At least that's what I'm taking away from the situation with Tony Buzbee, his authentic WWII Sherman tank, and the HOA in his Houston, Texas neighborhood.

Neighborhood residents seem to get a kick out of the tank, as KHOU has footage of kids clambering all over it while drivers and pedestrians pause to admire the out-of-place piece of American history. Unfortunately, the homeowner's association doesn't agree: The group sent Buzbee a sternly-worded letter raising traffic concerns, calling it a “safety” issue, and vaguely alluding to the “serious concerns” of anonymous neighbors.

Buzbee is a well-to-do attorney with the sort of knocking-around money that allows him to spend \$600,000 on one of the

American tanks that landed at Normandy, and went on to liberate Paris and then roll in into Berlin to help end the European part of WWII. The tank is a significant piece of history and appears to have been restored to a very high standard.

That tank that once helped to free Paris is now street-parked in front of his house on River Oaks Blvd. The neighborhood is very wealthy, and it's not really that surprising that the HOA has a problem with a tank being parked on the street. Though there's no specific ordinance against the tank—which, to be fair, is fairly compact as far as tanks go and not a bad choice for a general-use city tank—the HOA is not having it and sent a stern letter to Buzbee to remove it.

The letter from the River Oaks Property Owners' group calls the tank a “safety issue,” and suggests it “impedes traffic” and causes “serious concerns for neighbors.”

“Let's just think about these concerns really quickly here. As far as the tank being a ‘safety issue,’ I guess that's possible

in the sense that any obstacle near a road, like a tree or a parked car or a hydrant can be a ‘safety issue.’ But it's not roaming the streets firing its main gun or anything like that.”

“As far as impeding traffic, it's not really physically any different than a parked car on the road, which seems to be allowed, and the >>



Houston Today

road has four lanes, with the different directions divided by a large median area, so at worst it's bringing two lanes of same-direction traffic to one, for a bit, like any parked car."

"Because it's a tank, there may be some extra traffic from people coming to look at it, too. But it's not causing a road-block or anything like that. And, as far as the 'serious concerns for neighbors,' I'd just like to know what those are. Are they afraid this will open a floodgate and every neighbor will start to park WWII battle vehicles in front of their homes?"

"Are they concerned some local Nazis may be offended? Or that the Fourth Reich Lunar Base will spot the tank through their telescopes and decide that the River Oaks area is now a primary target for the particle beam they've been developing for all these decades?"

"Really, the problem is it's a novel thing, and HOAs hate novelty. Neighborhood kids seem to like playing on it, and local news reports have found mostly positive responses to the tank from neighbors. Eventually, the tank will end up at Buzbee's ranch, so it's not even permanent."

Local TV station KHOU talked to Buzbee, who is re-

maining defiant, saying, "The problem is there is no action they can take. They can ticket it or they can try to tow it, but the truth is, unless I decide to move it, it's not going anywhere."

"I know all the usual arguments about property value and, as a homeowner, I understand them in theory, but come on. This is a fascinating thing to have in a neighborhood, and as far as property value losses, I'm crying my eyes out for these poor million-and-billionaires just scraping by in that filthy Royal Oaks wealth-hole. I hope somehow they can make it through this national nightmare of having a well-maintained historical artifact nearby! Hey, some neighbor has a white tank, too!"

"If only people would quit being distracted by whatever's happening in Puerto Rico and somehow think about these poor bastards who occasionally have to see a perfectly-restored tank, we'd be much better off."

"Look, fuck the HOA. If there's anything less sympathetic than a regular HOA, it's a very wealthy HOA, and that tank isn't hurting anyone. Let the man have his tank for a while. You'll get through this, HOA. Dipshits." ■

Photo from Vietnam



1967 working with 1/9 along the DMZ

Short Stories

(Continued from page 31)

Ted Williams and John Glenn

TED WILLIAMS WAS JOHN GLENN'S WINGMAN FLYING F-9FS IN KOREA.

When asked to name the greatest team he was ever on, Ted Williams said: "The US Marines." The Boston Red Sox slugger who wore No. 9 as a major leaguer, was assigned to an F-9 Panther jet as a pilot. Ted flew a total of 39 combat missions in Korea. He was selected by his commander John Glenn (later the astronaut, senator, and 'septuagenonaut') to fly as Glenn's wingman.

While flying an air strike on a troop encampment near Kyomipo, Williams' F-9 was hit by hostile ground fire. Ted commented later: "The funny thing was I didn't feel anything. I knew I was hit when the stick started shaking like mad in my hands. Then everything went out, my radio, my landing gear, everything. The red warning lights went on all over the plane." The F-9 Panther had a centrifugal flow engine and normally caught fire when hit. The tail would literally blow off most stricken aircraft. The standard orders were to eject from any Panther with a fire in the rear of the plane. Ted's aircraft was indeed on fire, and was trailing smoke and flames. Glenn and the other pilots on the mission were yelling over their radios for Williams to get out.

However, with his radio out, Williams could not hear their warnings and he could not see the condition of the rear of his aircraft. Glenn and another Panther flown by Larry Hawkins came up alongside Williams and lead him to the nearest friendly airfield. Fighting to

hold the plane together, Ted brought his Panther in at more than 200-MPH for a crash landing on the Marsden-matted strip. With no landing gear, dive brakes, or functioning flaps, the flaming Panther jet skidded down the runway for more than 3000 feet. Williams got out of the aircraft only moments before it was totally engulfed in flames. Ted Williams survived his tour of duty in Korea and returned to major league baseball.

Ted missed out flying combat missions during WWII, because his flying and gunnery skills were so good that he was kept as an instructor for much of the War. During advanced training at Pensacola, Florida Ted would accurately shoot the sleeve targets to shreds while shooting out of wing-overs, zooms, and barrel rolls. He broke the all-time record for 'hits' at the school.

Following Pensacola, Ted was sent to Jacksonville for advanced gunnery training. This is the payoff test for potential combat pilots. Ted set all the records for reflexes, coordination, and visual reaction time. As a result of his stunning success he was made

an instructor at Bronson field to put Marine aviation cadets through their final paces.

By 1945 Ted got his wish and was finally transferred to a combat wing, but weeks later the War was over. He was discharged from the military in December of 1945. Seven years later, in December of 1952, Ted was recalled to active duty as a Marine



(L to R) Ted Williams and John Glenn

Corps fighter pilot.

Additional amazing stats: Ted Williams averaged 42 home runs in his career. His military service in two wars cost him eight years his major league years' prime. That 42 home run average in 8 years totals 336 homers. His career home run totals were 521. Add that to his career homers & it is easily argued that he could have had more homers ... many more homers than Barry Bonds' 762.

Tales from Across the Pond: A Tale of Two Lizards

BY JR DONAT - 69TH ARMOR ASSN.

Back in 1968, I'm not exactly sure what month it was, but we were in the Central Highlands. I walked to the loaders side of the back deck to "bleed my lizard" ... (for the uninitiated, relieve myself). Suddenly I heard some movement on the ground near the wood line. I looked down and saw a

lizard about five to six feet long, moving slowly near the tank track. I put the task at hand on hold as I took my .45 caliber and pointed it at the (other) lizard. After I took my shot, the lizard went into a death roll into the woods. Unfortunately when I took that shot, I hadn't locked my wrist and the re-

coil from the .45 came up and caught me in the bottom lip. The only time I hadn't locked my wrist and it came back to bite me. Guess I was so excited about killing that lizard that I was too relaxed when I took the shot. Finally I got to "bleed" my lizard.

Attention ONTOS crewmen,

I have great news. John Wear wants to produce a special ONTOS edition in the Vietnam Tankers Association (VTA) Sponson Box publication.

I have spoken to most, if not all of you, on an individual bases. During those one on one conversations, you have shared some incredible stories: some heroic, some funny, some inspiring, and all were noteworthy. Don't take these stories to your grave. This is an opportunity to build on the Ontos legacy and add to the Ontos stories John Wear already has in his possession. We share a special, but small window in the history of the USMC and our MOS 0353 and the term ONTOS will fade with time. Capturing your stories with other Ontos crewmen stories would be fantastic ... all in one publication.

As you are aware, I support the VTA and their activities. However, you do not have to be a member of the VTA to share your experience(s) with John Wear (Phone: 719-495-5998) and his team and GET IT INCLUDED IN THIS UPCOMING PUBLICATION!! Although, you will need to become a member to get your own copy of this special edition. They are assembling those stories right now. So call ASAP! And add to OUR legacy.

Semper Fi,

Lou Najfus

Phone: 678-546-1444

REMINDER: VTA Mini-Reunion Ft Benning, Georgia Sept 5 – 8, 2018

You can check the VTA website for particulars...

COMMENT: We really need a head count. If you are remotely interested in attending this event then please call or email:

John Wear at 719-495-5998 or email Johnwear2@verizon.net

Or Rick Lewis at 858-735-1772 or email RICKLENT@aol.com and let us know your plans. Please call today!!!



PLEASE TAKE NOTICE!!!

FOR WHATEVER REASON THERE HAS BEEN A MARKED DECREASE IN VTA MEMBERS SUBMITTING PERSONAL STORIES FOR PUBLICATION IN OUR MAGAZINE.

If this trend continues we may soon be forced to decrease the frequency of publication from four magazines per year back to three or even worse ... to only two per year.

This is not a threat. It is a promise.

If you have already written a personal story but for whatever reason you have failed to submit it, now it the time.

If you have never written any story, please get off your butt and write one.

There are all sorts of ways that we can offer support in helping you write it. You just have to ask.

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

Please note: If the last two digits after "EXPIRE" on your address label is "17" then your 2018 membership dues are now payable.

**Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30* and mail to:
USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611**

Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.

