



Sponson BOX

*Voice of the USMC Vietnam
Tankers Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Featured Stories:	Cover Story	Page 32-35
	Jimmy Dorsett	Pages 36-37
	R&R: Ripped and Relaxed	Pages 40-42

YOUR ATTENTION PLEASE:

The 2020 mini-reunion at Ft Benning has been cancelled

See details in the President's Letter

WE NEED A RECRUITER...

If you are an energetic individual who loves challenges?

IF SO THEN WE NEED YOUR PROFESSIONAL HELP!!! Has any VTA member ever had a job in recruiting? The VTA Board of Directors feels the need to find someone who knows the ins and outs of recruiting new VTA members. So far we have relied on our website and on an occasional social media contact to find and recruit our new members. We are nearly 500 members strong but we estimate that there are about 500 more USMC Vietnam tanker veterans out there that may still be alive ... and who do not know that the VTA exists. Please contact John Wear at phone: 719.495.5998 to discuss a possibility that you may be able to help.

Are you an energetic individual who loves challenges and is experienced in any kind of recruiting efforts? If so, you may be just who we need on our National Recruiter job. The main duty of a recruiter is to seek out and enlist new members. The recruiter should also be motivated and passionate about what he does. Our brotherhood has been growing steadily ... but fairly slowly over the years and we have always been in need of new members. For that, we require and seek a qualified and experienced recruiter to help us with this process. You will need to be personable, friendly and well-versed with seeking out and "selling" the brotherhood to Vietnam tankers veterans who do not know about the VTA. In return, you will receive the undying gratitude of the Board of Directors as well as the entire VTA membership ... and almost as important, the gratitude of the new recruits who will most likely thank you forever.

Job Responsibilities

1. Attend annual board meetings to learn about, plan out and discuss the organization
2. Create notices that are articulate, professional and attention-grabbing to attract qualified veterans, posting these ads on various online and offline resources.
3. Work with applicants to discuss the organization and to screen them for suitability, including reviewing their DD-214 discharge paperwork.
4. Seek out qualified veterans through networking, social media and other tactics to find new members to grow our membership roster.
5. Serve as the liaison between the VTA and the veteran community by handling phone calls, questions and other details before and after interviews and/or the applications are submitted.
6. Maintain paperwork on applicants throughout the process and set up announcements of new members for publication in the Sponson Box.

Letter from the President

FORT BENNING: Most of us who attended the 2018 VTA Mini-reunion at Ft Benning agree that one of the best things to happen to us during the get together was when we got to "meet and greet" the young USMC Tank School students. I, for one, was looking forward to doing the same this coming September. And to add to the excitement, we also timed this year's mini-reunion so that we'd be able to witness a USMC Tank School graduation.

Now for the sad reality of the situation: Based on the new Commandant "redefining" the Marine Corps, (in other words, he is shit canning tanks and arty), we decided that we needed to find out what was currently happening with and to the USMC Tank School at Ft Benning. On the last week of March we got hold of the Master Guns of the Tank School and found out that the current class that was to have graduated this past March was instructed by HQ Marine Corps for all of the students to go to their homes on leave and that they would be given new MOS schools to attend in the near future. The USMC Tank School is now closed and the staff is waiting for orders to new non-armor assignments.

We have Cancelled the 2020 Mini-reunion since there will be no USMC Tank School to visit. And by the by, the USMC VTA M-48 Tank Restoration Program will not happen since they will not require a replacement display tank at the now-closed USMC Tank School. Sadly there is no alternative 2020 mini-reunion scheduled. We will see you-all on September 15 - 20, 2021 in Providence, Rhode Island for our regular biennial reunion.

WE NEED YOUR HELP!!! Has any VTA member ever had a job in recruiting? The VTA Board of Directors wants to find someone who knows the ins and outs of recruiting new VTA members. So far we have relied on our website and on an occasional social media contact to find and recruit our new members. We are nearly 500 members strong but we estimate that there are between 400 and 500 more qualified USMC Vietnam tanker and tank battalion support veterans out there that are still alive and who do not know who we are. Please contact John Wear 719.495.5998 to discuss your offer to help.

ON THE COVER: I am very sad to have to report that the US Marine veteran that appears on the cover of this issue of the magazine standing next to Gunny Army, Bob Shofner, passed away in the middle of December 2019. The good news is that Lou Najfus was able to get Bob to write his story that we are featuring in this issue of our magazine. We truly feel that the article is a fitting memorial to Bob.

WE ARE ALL ON BORROWED TIME: Speaking of friends passing away, several years ago I had a US Marine veteran internet buddy who I met on the old Sgt Grit's Bulletin Board. His name was Bill Schwanke. Bill was an Iwo Jima Marine. After WW2, he took over his family farm in Missouri. Bill also had an Iwo Jima Marine foxhole buddy who was also a farmer that lived in Nebraska. Because both Marine veterans had very busy lives over the years, they never were able to meet up ... but they did exchange Christmas and birthday cards over the years. Finally Bill's eldest son took over the farm so Bill was able to relax a bit. One day Bill decided to get in his car and, unannounced, he drove up to Nebraska to surprise his old US Marine Iwo Jima buddy. Bill said that he drove into the driveway of his buddy's home just as his buddy's wife was coming out the door. Bill asked her about his buddy and she said, "Oh Charlie died last week." Bill's advice to me was, "Do not wait to see your old buddies. And don't hesitate to say, "I love you" to your family. And life being as it is, Bill also passed away several years later. I got notice of Bill's passing when Bill's son sent me an email thanking me profusely for being such a good friend to his dad. His son also asked me if I had heard of any of Bill's wartime stories since Bill never talked about being in the Marines with any of his family. Unfortunately like most of the VTA membership where very few members have offered to write one word of their military service to share with us; Bill went to his grave and his story will never be known.



**"To have really lived, you must have nearly died...
To those who have fought for it, freedom has a flavor the protected will never know."**

—Scrawled on a bunker at Khe Sanh, Vietnam.

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Wife: Elizabeth
Recruited by: John Wear

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ON THE COVER:
On The Cover: Gunny R Lee Ermy and Bob Shofner
- See *To The Great Tank Park in the Sky* in this issue -

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

Ev Tunget Writes

I received your letter today re: the CMC decision to eliminate all tracked vehicles from the inventory. Sort of like saying "Thanks for all you've done over the years but don't let the door hit you in the ass on the way out!"

It seems as if the "theorists" in the Marine Corps are doing all the force structure planning for future operations. They would apparently have you believe that they have inside information on just how the ChiComs and Russians plan to fight future wars and how we must tailor our response accordingly. It will be a sad day when Marines have to rely on the Army for tank support in future major land-based operations.

After I finished The Basic School in June of 1956, I reported to 1st Tank Battalion, 1st MarDiv at Camp Pendleton without any training in tanks. I was assigned to Delta Company and became the Platoon Leader of 3rd Platoon. My platoon sergeant was GySgt Bill "Robbie" Robinson. Robbie had landed at Pusan, South Korea with the 1st Marine Brigade in 1950 and later rejoined the 1st MarDiv for the landing at Inchon and the push to the Chosin Reservoir. I told Robbie that I knew nothing about tanks and that I expected him to teach me.

One of my first lessons entailed learning about the 90mm gun on our then M48A1 tanks. He emphasized that the tank was a "Mobile Gun Platform" and was best utilized that way rather than digging in for defensive purposes.

He related a story from his Pusan Perimeter days. When the Brigade landed, he said they were anxious to find out from the Army tankers just what they were facing re: The North Korean tanks. They were told that their T-34's were impossible to stop as shot rounds simply bounced off of them. Upon further questioning, Robbie said that the Army tankers were trying to engage the T-34's exceeding the maximum effective range of the 90's as they were being driven back into the Pusan Perimeter. The "invincibility" of the T-34 was soon put to rest when the Brigade tankers began engaging them properly.

Thanks for all you've done to keep the tanker story alive, John. Sorry it has to end this way. I'm old enough (88) where I may not live to see the tragic end regarding decisions to reduce the Marine Corps' overall fighting capabilities. I would recommend, however, that our present-day Marine Corps strategists and force structure "theorists" drop their packs and really listen to the proud history of the Marine Corps so eloquently put forth in the three stanzas of the Marine Corps Hymn. We are and always have been the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

Semper Fidelis, my friend, and thanks again for all you've

done to showcase the stories of Marines proudly serving their country.

Ev Tunget
LtCol USMC Ret

Health Issues:

Jim Raasch writes: So, you got your tit caught in a wringer? Man, that was quite an experience. My little event is minor in comparison. My dad had a non-malignant breast tumor back in the 50's. His was service connected. He played football after V-E Day and got a very bad bruise that turned into a tumor. Hope things clear up for the Ft Benning reunion. I'm not making reservations for a couple months. Great job on the Sponson Box.

Allen Cohen writes: I had no idea that you have been dealing with health issues and was glad to hear everything is good with you. Carol and I will pray for you diligently. Thanks again for all you do for tanker vets. It really is helpful you know.

Ed Hiltz writes: A couple days went by before I started reading the Sponsor Box. I read your article about your journey with cancer and the VA. Glad to know that everything turned out well for you and wanted to personally thank you for all that you have done for the VTA. May you continue to have good health and enjoy life.

P.S. Lieutenant Morton Hurt gave me a call yesterday just to chat and reminisce about our tour he was my lieutenant at An Hoa, 4th Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Tanks. Our tank A-11.

Follow up on "Model Making Marine"

Bruce Van Apeldoorn writes: Cliff is in the process of building models of a Blade Tank and a Flame Tank for auction at the 2021 Providence Reunion. The Blade Tank will be a part of a display to include the Life Magazine iconic photo and will be a part of the Live Auction. The Flame Tank will be a part of the Silent Auction. Cliff is planning to attend the reunion as a guest of the Association. If you served on either of these type tanks in Vietnam and would like to share pictures with Cliff please call him at 585.317.2702 or email Cwileyone1946@gmail.com.

From the Widow of a Marine:

Marcia Falk, the widow of long-time VTA member Steve Falk wrote: I meant to reply to your comment about you spreading less-than-sunshine during your post-Vietnam years. I understand that comment in relation to my husband, Steve's post-Vietnam years. I've shared that Steve might have left Vietnam in February of '68 but Viet- >>

nam never left him. It was a dark shadow over our early years of marriage. I'd ask myself often, "Who is this man?" He didn't seem to be the man who wrote to me every day and filled his letters with the day's events as well as his love and longing for our relationship and upcoming marriage.

It took years to discover that PTSD was at the heart of it. What a blessing to have it come to the surface which helped Steve understand his suffering as well as our family.

I admire your vulnerability in sharing your own "dark" hours after Vietnam lacking the sunshine that, thank God, you can share today. I am happy to know you, a man with heart who is overcoming his suffering from a war so many years ago. You invest your time and energies in bringing together your many brother Marines at the Tankers' reunions. I have enjoyed these reunions with a "Few Good Men" but more so witnessing the brotherhood that exists between you.

It was a sad day as you returned to the States to be greeted with disdain by your fellow Americans. I remember you saying that you didn't want it known that you were a Marine who served in Vietnam. You should have been and should be proud of your service. It is honorable. Let's face it, your life and the lives of your brothers were on the line. We, at home, had no idea what you were experiencing.

For me, at 20 years old and in love, I awaited my "hero" to return and romanticized Steve's service. Little did I know and how naive. I now know that there is help for our veterans that is very necessary in helping to overcome PTSD and other scars of war both physical and psychological. I pray that you will continue to find peace and contentment each and every day. I applaud you for all the good you continue to do for others. That's always the best part of life. And, it can bring healing. Semper Fi.

Lawn Mower Tank



A Brand New Member

Dennis Douville writes: We formed up in Pendleton in summer of 1966. We took our tanks by LSD, I believe it

was the USS Comstock, to Vietnam. The trip took all of the month of August. We stopped in Pearl Harbor, Manila and Okinawa before landing at Da Nang. We took our whole company and all equipment from 5th Tanks.

I then left from Da Nang the following August by plane to Okinawa for a couple days then to Pendleton as I was getting out upon return. I actually flew home to CT on the 21st of August – three days past my discharge date.

I am really looking forward to meeting you and others at Providence. I am hoping to see someone I might recognize

A Note from the Past

Colonel Bruce McLaren reported for duty at "The Great Tank Park in the Sky" at least five years ago. I found an old email exchange that "Mac" and I were having where I was commenting about our inaugural video interview program that we started in 2013 at the San Antonio reunion.

Good to hear from you. I have been recovering from a 2nd stroke, I guess. I am now living w/ son Rick since my wife, Barbara passed away. I guess I am either suffering from early dementia or acute osteoporosis. I am constantly falling when trying to walk. Thank goodness the USMC taught me how to fall properly. All in all, as I approach 83 years of age, I guess I'm paring the course.

Just to remind you, I stayed in USMC for 35 happy years, mostly Far East and Med tours. Speaking Mandarin and Korean kind of predicted my assignments. Nonetheless, I enjoyed the time in the Corps. I later, after Corps retirement, taught in middle school for nearly 20 years. Tougher than the Corps! Hope you are in good health. Most pleased to hear from you!

Semper Fi!
Mac

Found on Facebook



Yakama Chief, visits his son, Cpl. Bill Yallup, who was in training at the US Army Yakima Firing Center in an M-48 tank, 1954

Correction



Lt Col. Harris Himes called on Sunday, April 5, 2020, to inform us that the above photo is not of Capt. Daniel Kent, Skipper of Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks ... but it is Harry Christiansen. As an aside, please note the bullet riddled search light cover...

Reactions to the Commandant Shit Canning Tanks

Roger Luli writes: I guess that we have joined the dinosaurs. All the more reason to write our stories.

Follow up from Dave Shollenbarger

I was reading thru the last issue of the Sponson Box and came across the story "A Vietnam Vignette – 1966." As I read it, I realized I was there that day. I had command bunker duty that day and Motor T bunker was right on the corner of Hill 34 that was directly in front of the heliport. They informed me that Ambassador Lodge was landing there so I had a front row seat for that event. I also just happened to have my camera with me and I took a couple of shots. I had a picture of the E Club they talked about. We had to build a new one after the gooks blew up the old one. So here they are attached. ■



Bruce's Facemask



Kitty Tank

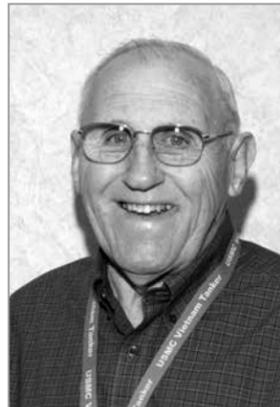


To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

"The legacy of heroes is the memory of a great name
And the inheritance of a great example."
—Benjamin Disraeli, English politician and author"

Daniel M Wokaty

May 26, 1936 ~ March 2, 2020



Richard Cecile called and reported that Dan Wokaty, 83, passed away on Monday, March 2, 2020. Daniel was born on May 26, 1936 in Waco, Texas. As a youngster, he delivered groceries to make extra money. When a tornado struck and devastated Waco in May 1953, he helped search for survivors. Later that December, with his

mother's permission, he joined the United States Marine Corps at the age of 17. He attended Boot Camp at MCRD, San Diego, earning the sharpshooter's medal while they were at the range qualifying.

In 1954, he was first stationed in Korea along the 38th parallel. He later served two tours in the Vietnam War from 1965 to 1966 with Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Battalion and again in 1967 to 1968 with Alpha Company 1st Tank Battalion. For his military service, he earned many medals. Among them are the Navy and Marine Corps Commendation Medal, Purple Heart Medal, Combat Action Ribbon, Korean Service Medal, Vietnam Service Medal, and Vietnam Campaign Medal.

In 1976, he married Francia P Andres in Manila, Philippines. In April 1978 after 27 years of service, Daniel retired from the military as a Master Sergeant but remained active in the USMC Vietnam Tanker Association for the rest of his life.

We also received a phone call from Francia, Dan's widow, wanting to inform us of Dan's passing. Very tearfully she told us that she was sorry that she would not be able to continue attending our reunions as she and Dan had done

for what seemed like forever. We are going to keep her on the Sponson Box mailing list as we do with all widows of members.

Federico Ernesto Rivero



Andy Traynor contacted us to say that Federico Ernesto Rivero who was born on June 3, 1942, had passed away on Monday, February 17, 2020. Federico was a resident of Peachtree Corners, Georgia. He served with B Co, 3rd Tank in 1966 and he had been a past

member of the USMC VTA.

Patrick A Rogers



Gene Whitehead called to see if he could locate his old tank commander from 1966. After seeing that Pat Rogers had let his VTA membership lapse back in 2005, we did an obituary search and found that unfortunately Pat

had passed away in May 24, 2016. This is what we found:

"Pat was a very interesting person. A long-time firearms professional and retired NYPD Detective, he didn't move in the cool-guy Hollywood circles. But life is funny sometimes. Many of the "operator types" who the "kids" worship today sought out Pat Rogers. As Pat would often say when hearing of legends moving on to the other side:" We are

diminished". There is a quite famous and true story about Pat saving the life of Louis Awerbuck's at the Gunsite Academy in the book "Death on a Sunny Afternoon".

Robert Earl Shofner

November 16, 1937 – December 16, 2019



Lou Najfus called and said that Robert E. Shofner, 82, passed away Monday, December 16, 2019. He was a retired union rep for International Harvester, a member of Harvest Baptist Church, and a proud Marine Corps veteran. Mr. Shofner was also a dedicated volunteer for the American Red Cross Disaster

Services, having helped numerous communities around the country. He also volunteered at Ft. Knox with vintage tank restoration, and he was a Kentucky Colonel.

Jimmie Ray Dorsett

October 12, 1947 ~ March 20, 2020 (age 72)



The son of a World War II veteran, Jimmie Ray Dorsett was born on October 12, 1947, in Chicago, IL, and raised for a time in Winston-Salem, NC, before coming to Roanoke, VA. At age 20, Jimmie enlisted in the Marine Corps in March 1968. After basic training, he was sent to Vietnam and assigned to the 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division posted near Dong Ha, South Vietnam. On March 24, 1969,

Jimmie was riding atop a tank retriever in support of a tank column when it struck a mine that blew off a track, disabled the retriever and deafened by the blast Jimmie was working on repairing the track when the retriever was ambushed by North Vietnamese troops. The hail of gunfire killed two of Jimmie's comrades. Unarmed, Jimmie went to the aid of a third wounded comrade and brought him to cover under the retriever. A North Vietnamese soldier charged the retriever and unloaded a clip of AK-47 rounds at Jimmie and his wounded comrade, one of the rounds passing through Jimmie's left arm rendering it useless. The Gunnery Sergeant (Harold Riensche) atop the retriever single-handedly fought off the continued attacks saving Jimmie and his comrade. Jimmie, though wounded himself, assisted his comrade to a medevac helicopter and the two were taken to a hospital. After recovering from his injuries, Jimmie returned to Vietnam to take charge of a repair shop. He received a meritorious promotion to E-4 and a Purple Heart.

After returning to the United States, Jimmie married Patsy Gail Arrington January 1, 1971, and had three children—one baby girl deceased, daughter Maria and son Nathan. He obtained his G.E.D. then graduated from Virginia Western Community College with a degree in Automotive Technology in 1972. Jimmie worked for Grumman Emergency Products welding fire trucks and retired from the U. S. Postal Service office in Roanoke. Jimmie and Patsy lived in Roanoke before building a home and settling in Hardy, VA. For seven years he bravely battled several types of leukemia from Agent Orange exposure—biphenotypic acute leukemia and CML blast crisis, acute myeloid leukemia, Philadelphia chromosome positive with a P190 mutant gene combined ALL and AML, Pht ALL and ALL, prostate cancer and failing organs longer than anyone thought possible. Please plant a tree in memory of Jimmie Ray Dorsett ■

"Welcome Home" Vietnam Marine

Now, I hear the accolades
But they flutter and fall
Like rusted leaves do
When past their prime

"Welcome home"
Thank you for your service"

A lifetime ago I yearned
For those words, but now I wonder"
Are they truly from the heart?"
Or born of some common shame

They do serve to prod and stir
Old memories that have lain deep
And hidden
Where tears once could rise
But who could understand their fall?
So, stoic I remained and still

The moment passes
And I feel myself again
Coming home, and reaching
like some dirty beggar
For the morsel you toss me now
—VTA member Greg Kelley—

Tanks & Medals of Valor

Edward J. Albright

HOME OF RECORD: Jacksonville, Florida

Silver Star

Awarded for actions during Vietnam War

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: Sergeant

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

GENERAL ORDERS: CITATION:
The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Sergeant Edward J. Albright, United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Driver with Company A Third Tank Battalion, THIRD Marine Division in, connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 29 April 1969, Company A was maneuvering in support of an Army of the Republic of Vietnam regiment's assault against a tenaciously defended hostile bunker complex northwest of Cam Lo in Quang Tri Province. As the fire fight grew in intensity the Vietnamese unit was pinned down by a merciless barrage of enemy machine gun fire, and Sergeant Albright, then a Corporal, realizing the need for decisive action, unhesitatingly directed his tank through the dense jungle foliage to a position only fifty meters from the bunkers. Deploying his vehicle into an effective fighting position, he fearlessly ignored the hostile rounds



directed at his tank as he engaged the fortified emplacements with his machine gun while his tank commander blasted the bunkers with his cannon. Resolutely maintaining his dangerously exposed position until a machine gun and three bunkers were destroyed, he then maneuvered his vehicle to the command post where he found three other tanks damaged by enemy mines. When vitally-needed ammunition was delivered to the Marines by helicopter on the following day, Sergeant Albright,

fully aware that the area was heavily mined, assisted in unloading the ordnance and was distributing supplies to his platoon when a vehicle maneuvering nearby detonated an explosive device, causing Sergeant Albright to sustain extensive wounds. By his courage, bold initiative and unwavering devotion to duty in the face of grave personal danger. Sergeant Albright inspired all who observed him and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■

Guest Opinion

A GREAT MESSAGE TO LIVE BY NEVER FORGET YOUR FRIENDS

BY NORM MCAVOY

A newlywed young man was sitting on the porch on a humid day, sipping ice tea with his father. As he talked about adult life, marriage, responsibilities, and obligations, the father thoughtfully stirred the ice cubes in his glass and cast a clear, sober look on his son. "Never forget your friends," he advised, "they will become more important as you get older. Regardless of how much you love your family and the children you happen to have, you will always need friends. Remember to go out with them occasionally (if possible), but keep in contact with them somehow."

"What strange advice!" thought the young man. "I just entered the married world, I am an adult and surely my wife and the family that we will start will be everything I need to make sense of my life." Yet, he obeyed his father; kept in touch with his friends and annually increased their number.

Over the years, he became aware that his father knew what he was talking about. Inasmuch as time and nature carry out their designs and mysteries on a person, friends are the bulwarks of our life.

After 70 years of life, here is what he, I and you will have learned:

Time passes.

Life goes on.

Children grow up.

Children cease to be children and become independent.

And to the parents, it breaks their heart but the children are separated of the parents because they begin their own families.

Jobs / careers come and go.

Illusions, desires, attraction, sex...weakens.

People can't do what they did physically when they were young.

Parents die but you move on.

Colleagues forget the favors you did.

The race to achieve slows.

But, true friends are always there, no matter how long or how many miles away they are. A friend is never more distant than the reach of a need, intervening in your favor, waiting for you with open arms

or in some way blessing your life.

When we started this adventure called LIFE, we did not know of the incredible joys or sorrows that were ahead. We did not know how much we would need from each other.

Love your parents, take care of your children, but keep a group of good friends.

Stay in touch with them but do not impose your criteria. ■

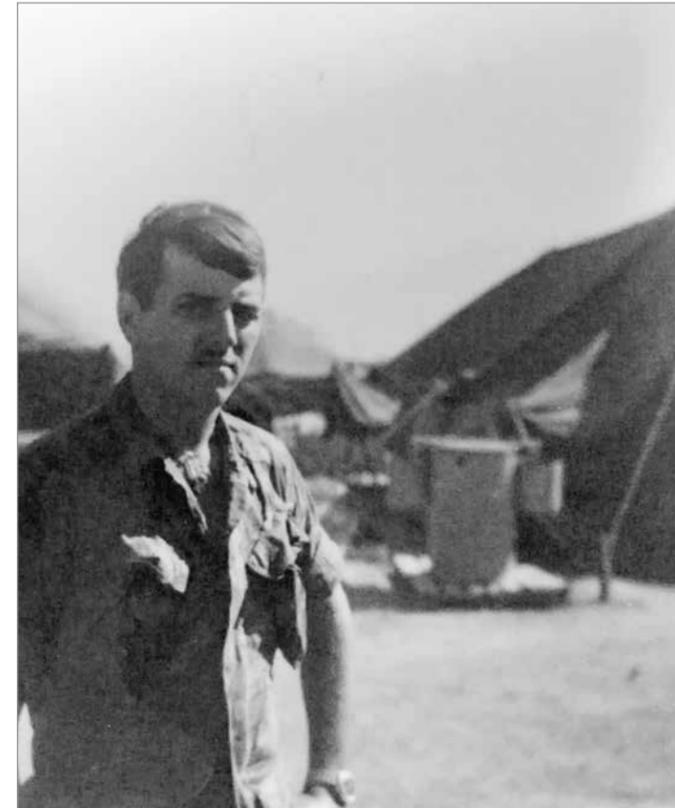
Joke

GPS: "you have arrived to your destination"
"Carl this isn't the right place"



GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who the person is in the below photo? The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 and correctly identify the person will have their name submitted to possibly win a yet unnamed mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

This may be the first time ever that NO ONE called to identify last issue's "Guess Who?" contest. The Marine TC in the photo is Garry Hall. ■



Looking For

THANK YOU!!!

My great uncle 1stLt Ronald C Kraus was the BN Adjutant for 3rd BN "3rd Tanks" when they arrived in Vietnam in July 1965. On the 9th of August the BN CP was hit with mortars and small arm fire. My uncle's tent took a direct hit. He would die on the 12th August 1965 due to his wounds he sustained. Trying to see if anyone may still be alive that was there the night of the attack and give any details they remember if possible.

Joshua Sternberg
2115 S 371st St. Federal Way WA 98003
Phone: 253.431.9353

UPDATE: Yes, I did get a few responses. I got some great insight from the gentlemen that served with my great uncle and they offered up a few nice stories. I appreciate your help. Sorry for the delayed response, I'm currently deployed overseas at the moment. Again I appreciate your help.

FEDERICO ERNESTO RIVERO

The above Marine was a Basic School classmate and a Tank School student with me. He served with B Co, 3rd Tank in 1966. This past January he went into the hospital for some surgery, but there were complications and he passed away.

His family is currently trying to pull together information about his Marine Corps history, so I thought some of our members may know something. Any help or information you can give is very much appreciated.

My contact info is:
Andy Traynor
15080 Eclipse Drive, Manassas, VA 20112
Phone: 703.919.9472 (cell)
Email: andy.pam@verizon.net

HOPEFULLY "BETTER LATE THAN NEVER"

From: Robert Von Nason [mailto:nace@sti.net]
Sent: Thursday, August 11, 2011 4:55 PM
To: johnwear2@verizon.net
Subject: TANK WAS HIT

My name is Robert Nason. I was a grunt squad leader with 1st squad, 1st platoon, Hotel Co, 2/9 at the end of May 1967. A tank that was with us was hit with a RPG and was burning. A Marine was standing in the shade close by, all of his clothes were burned and melted off his body and most of his skin was burned badly except on his face. All he had left were his boots. He was a black kid and he was in shock. It looked like he had been blown out of the top of the tank. The tankers inside were also in very bad shape. Just as I was reaching inside for a Marine, we came under

fire and my entire squad ran off chasing the NVA into the tree line. Rounds were hitting the tank around me. Anyway two of my men were shot. One lost his arm. I got the burned tanker out to the road where we ran across another tank heading to the rear loaded with wounded Marines.

I am looking for the WIA tanker. We had to leave the burning tank after telling the other tank crew about it. I don't know if the rest of the crew were dead or not due to the insane nature of the situation. We lost many good men that day. I checked the 2/9 combat history and it looks like we were on "OPERATION HICKORY" in Quang Tri Province from May 18 to the end of the month. There must be a way to find that Marine. I sure would like for him to talk to me.

AN APOLOGY

In the last issue of the magazine we featured a "Looking For" on William F Shands, Jr. The email address that we copied out of another USMC publication turned out to be bogus. Several well-intended members called to report that they knew Shands and that they had photos of him that they wanted to share ... but they were prevented from contacting the daughter. We are very sorry that this happened.



Ben Cole writes: You can put this in the Sponson Box to find out if anyone recognizes him? He was in 3rd Platoon Alpha Co Third Tanks in fall of 1967. I think this picture was taken at the Washout.

WHOSE PHOTOS ARE THESE?

Several years ago, someone sent the below three photos to John Wear. We need to ID the owner and get to the bottom of what the photos represent. We are also sorry for our confusion but please call John Wear at 719.495.5998. ■



Sparrow's Ride



Tom "Sparrow" Moad sent us these two photos with no explanation. We asked him to give us some details and this is what he wrote: This is one of the first Frankenstein bikes. It has a 96 cubic inch Shovel Head. The heads are Harley Davidson with dual spark plugs, ported and polished. Flow benched 134 cubic feet per minute. Cases are beefed STD, polished, S&S flywheels, rods, pistons and sidewinder barrels. The transmission is an all chrome Harley. The front end is a 6" over Donny Smith Girder with an 18" wheel 3.00 18 Avon tire with 14" dual disc brakes. The rear is a 16" Metzler with Performance Machine disc brakes. Running a Jockey Shift with Rocker Clutch to make it a little more exciting. The blinkers are 1937 Harley Bullets. The frame is an early Jammer that's been molded. The pipes are Pachoe Upswings with Fishtails. Ignition is single electronic single fire high voltage. The bike is registered as a 1982. The engine was called a Z beater which meant that it would beat Kawasaki Z bikes.

He added: When I got the bike the engine was blown up. The transmission has Andrew's gears. The only things Harley are the heads and the transmission case with ratchet top. Oh! And it has a 2" SU carburetor on it.

Meet The Press

Ben Cole writes: I saw this photo image on the "Meet the Press" television show this morning, (April 26, 2020). The commentator, Chuck Todd, was saying that the

number of Covid-19 virus's deaths in the US had reached the same number of Vietnam deaths ... and then this picture came on.



Terry Hunter is on the far right with RPG shrapnel in the back and his movie star face (monster)!!! Ben added that the photo was taken by internationally-famous photojournalist, Dana Stone, during Operation Buffalo in mid-1966 near Con Thien.

Santa Maria community honors fallen service men and women on Memorial Day

BY PATRICIA MARTELOTTI-MAY 25, 2020

SANTA MARIA, Calif.—Armando Moreno, a veteran who serviced in the United States Marine Corps, (Edit: ...and who is a longtime member of the USMC VTA) came to honor our fallen heroes. "Along with that I'm also mindful of those families of those fallen. In Vietnam we lost 58,000 men and women and I know that the families continue to suffer and always well."

Moreno, who serviced during the Vietnam War, shares why this ceremony hits close to home. "Armando Moreno I've got a lot of friends who are buried here and I think of them a lot."

Veteran Nathaniel Taylor of the United States Marine Corps shared the importance of never forgetting the sacrifices our fallen hero's made. "Veteran Memorial Day means to me to give thanks for those who have gone before us air today and my hope is that those were here today really gave thanks to those who made it possible for us to have events like this." Some veterans say due to the pandemic they're not seeing as many people at the ceremony but they're humbled by the community's continued support

"Normally it's elbow room it would just be elbow room because there's so many people but we normally get plenty of support every year," said Taylor. Despite the smaller crowd, Moreno is grateful to those who came.

"It's great that they have supported the military and our fallen," said Moreno. The ceremony included a prayer, presentation of wreaths, and several guest speakers. ■

V. A. News & Updates

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

VA Urgent Care –Top 10 Frequently Asked Questions

Have a sore throat, earache, or strained muscle? Then consider contacting your VA facility or using the community urgent care benefit available to eligible Veterans under the MISSION Act. VA facilities across the country offer same-day primary care and mental health services, and many offer additional services as well. With the new community urgent care benefit, eligible Veterans can also visit a local walk-in retail health clinic or urgent care center that is part of VA's contracted network. Urgent care providers treat non-emergent symptoms or conditions such as ear infections, minor burns, and mild skin infections. If you believe your life or health is in danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away!

To be eligible for the urgent care benefit, you must be enrolled in the VA health care system and have received care from VA (either in a VA facility or a community provider) within the past 24 months. To check eligibility, contact your local VA medical facility or call 1-833-4VETNOW (1-833.483.8669). Eligible Veterans can receive urgent care from an urgent care provider in VA's contracted network without prior authorization from VA. Following are the top 10 Frequently Asked Questions by vets regarding this program:

1. How do I find the nearest in-network community urgent care provider?
Use VA's Facility Locator at <https://www.va.gov/find-locations/> and click on the VA-approved urgent care locations and pharmacies near you. There are currently two types of urgent care network locations: walk-in retail health clinics and urgent care centers. Seek care at a retail location for an uncomplicated illness such as a sore throat. Visit an urgent location for more pressing illnesses or injuries requiring services such as splinting, casting, or wound treatment.
2. What do I do when I arrive at an urgent care location? What type of identification will I be asked to show?
There is no identification card needed for VA's urgent care benefit. When you arrive, verify they are part of VA's contracted network, complete the intake form, and tell the provider you would like to use your VA urgent care benefit. The provider will check your eligibility. Both Veterans and providers can call 1-833-4VETNOW (1-833.483.8669) to confirm eligibility. Veterans can call 1-866.620.2071 for other issues related to the urgent care benefit.
3. Does urgent care cost anything?
No, you do not have to pay anything at the time of the visit. If you owe a copayment, VA will send you a bill. Copayments are \$30, but your liability will depend on your assigned priority group and the number of times you have used your urgent care benefit in a calendar year. Learn more about urgent care copayments.
4. How does prescription medication work for urgent care?
VA will pay for or fill prescriptions for urgent care. For routine

prescription medication longer than a 14-day supply, the prescription must be submitted to VA to be filled. Before filling the prescription, VA will verify the urgent care visit. If there are issues with filling your prescription, call 1-866.620.2071.

5. There are no urgent care clinics in my area. What do I do?
Contact your local VA medical facility to discuss options. Same-day primary and mental health services are available at all VA medical centers. In addition, VA continues to expand its contracted network of urgent care providers so that most Veterans are within a 30-minute drive time from their home to a network urgent care/retail location.

6. If there are no in-network urgent care facilities nearby, can I visit an Emergency Department (ED) instead?

If you are having difficulties receiving urgent care services, contact your local VA medical facility. Same-day primary and mental health services are available at all VA medical centers. If you believe your life or health is in danger, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department immediately. Please note that VA can only pay for a Veteran's emergency care under certain conditions.

7. Can I use the in-network urgent care provider at my local pharmacy as my primary care provider (PCP)?

No. Urgent care is not a replacement for services your PCP offers. Use urgent care for treating minor, non-emergent illnesses and injuries. The urgent care benefit does not cover preventive health care offered by your primary care physician. Always consider talking with or seeing your PCP if you are concerned that the urgent care provider will not understand the complexities of your medical history or medications.

8. How do I know if I need urgent care or emergency care?

Urgent care is for non-life-threatening illnesses or injuries such as strep throat, pink eye, or a strained muscle. Emergency care is for an injury, illness, or symptom so severe that a prudent layperson reasonably believes that delay in seeking immediate medical attention would be hazardous to life or health. Such life-threatening major illnesses or injuries could include severe chest pain, seizures, loss of awareness, heavy uncontrollable breathing, or severe burns. For emergency care, call 911 or go to the nearest emergency department right away. Please note that VA can only pay for a Veteran's emergency care under certain conditions.

9. What if I arrive at an in-network urgent care location and have difficulty receiving care?

Call 866.620.2071 or your local VA medical facility.

10. How do I get a free flu shot?

Veterans can receive a flu shot at their local VA medical facility or from

any Walgreens location, paid for by VA. Veterans can also receive a flu shot, paid for by VA, at an in-network urgent care location, but it must be administered in conjunction with a condition requiring urgent care. [Source: Vantage Point | December 1, 2019 ++]

VA Urgent Care—Update 02: Region 1 Community Care Network Provider Change

The U. S. Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) is transitioning its urgent care network manager, effective 18 MAR, from TriWest Healthcare Alliance to Optum Public Sector Solutions, Inc. (Optum), which is part of UnitedHealth Group, Inc., in Community Care Network Region 1. The change will result in new urgent care providers being added to VA's contracted network, while others will be removed. These changes in Veterans' urgent care are part of the VA Maintaining Internal Systems and Strengthening Outside Networks Act of 2018 or MISSION Act. Veterans have the option for urgent care treatment of minor injuries and illnesses such as colds, sore throats and minor skin infections at in-network non-VA urgent care providers. Additionally, Veterans can receive same-day urgent care treatment at VA medical centers.

"VA is working to ensure Veterans in Region 1 understand how this change will affect them," said VA Secretary Robert L. Wilkie. "The goal is to provide Veterans a seamless transition when seeking urgent care in their communities." Not all urgent care providers currently in the Region 1 network will be authorized to provide care after March 18. Conversely, new providers who are not currently authorized through the TriWest network will be available through Optum's network beginning March 18. VA can only pay for urgent care if the provider is part of VA's contracted network. If Veterans go to an out-of-network urgent care provider, they will be required to pay the full cost of care.

The change in network management will also affect pharmacies. Veterans who require urgent care prescriptions of 14 days or less can find an authorized in-network provider (<https://www.va.gov/find-locations>) or contact their local VA medical facility to identify a VA network pharmacy to avoid paying out-of-pocket costs. Community providers within Region 1 who want to provide urgent care services to Veterans after 18 MAR must establish a contract with Optum.

The change will impact Veterans in the following locations: Connecticut, Delaware, Maine, Maryland, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, New Jersey, New York, North Carolina, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island, Vermont, Virginia, Washington, D.C. and West Virginia. Veterans in these states who need urgent care should use VA's facility locator or contact their local VA medical facility for help identifying in-network urgent care providers. [Source: VA News Release | March 11, 2020 ++]

Diabetes—Concerns over VA's Keto Diet Treatment

Diabetes is one of the largest, most expensive problems facing America's veterans, and the US government is staking its hopes for a solution on an unconventional treatment: the popular keto diet. The Department of Veterans' Affairs (VA) has launched a partnership with a digital therapeutics startup Virta Health to treat diabetic veterans using the low-carb, high-fat keto diet, at no cost to the vets or the VA. The partnership, first announced in May 2019, has enrolled 400 veterans into Virta's program, which includes personalized nutrition plans and online access to health coaches and physicians.

So far, the results have been promising, according to the company's data. A pilot program with the VA found that half of the participating

veterans achieved blood sugar levels below the threshold for diabetes after three months on Virta's program. And the treatment successfully reduced medications, including insulin, by 53% across the entire group. But some experts have raised concerns that there may be unforeseen health consequences following this kind of treatment, and that the VA's buy-in will lend legitimacy to what is still an experimental treatment. Keto could reduce symptoms of diabetes by managing blood glucose, but it isn't a cure prior to working with the VA, Virta had been studying keto as a treatment for diabetes for over two years.

Diabetes is an inability to balance blood sugar. Reducing carbs manages the problem at the source by preventing blood sugar from rising in the first place, according to Dr. Mark Cucuzzella, a professor at West Virginia University School of Medicine, a US Air Force Reservist, and a marathon runner who has published several studies on keto and diabetes. "The most impactful thing on your blood glucose is the amount of carbs in your diet. The low-carb diet is effective because it lowers the insulin load," Cucuzzella, who is not affiliated with Virta, told Insider in an interview. "Insulin is the master switch." Medications like insulin can mitigate diabetes symptoms by managing blood sugar levels. But keto can help patients reduce medications, said Dr. Sarah Hallberg, medical director for Virta.

Eating carbohydrates causes blood sugar to rise, but eating fats does not. It means diabetic patients can get their daily calories without needing to use insulin to balance out spiking blood sugar levels. "Standard treatment puts people on a one-way street of progression for diabetes, with temporary pharmaceutical treatment that will have to be added on to," Hallberg told Insider. "We're able to give people another lane going the other way by bringing blood sugar into non-diabetic range while reducing and eliminating medication." That doesn't mean keto can cure diabetes. Virta refers to its treatment as a "reversal" of diabetes. In layman's terms, this means the disease is in remission. The treatment only works as long as the low-carb diet is maintained. As soon as carbs are re-introduced, the same problems with blood sugar and insulin emerge.

A keto diet is any eating plan that pushes the body into a state of ketosis when it begins producing substances called ketones, explained Dr. Ethan Weiss, a cardiologist and founder of a ketone-detecting device. (Weiss previously served as a medical advisor for Virta.) "Keto" typically refers to eating plans in which a majority of daily calories come from fat, along with some protein and minimal carbs. People with diabetes could cut their carb intake to as low as 30 grams a day and still be healthy. But the key to medical keto is going beyond counting macronutrients. Instead, it's important to focus on whole-food sources of fats, cutting carbs without completely eliminating nutrient-rich foods like veggies.

It's not clear what long-term health effects the keto diet might have. The Physicians Committee for Responsible Medicine, a group of medical experts who advocate a plant-based diet, sent a letter to VA officials asking them to reconsider the partnership, and keto treatment, based on evidence that a high-fat, low-carb diet could potentially increase risks of diabetes, particularly diets high in saturated fat. Skeptics have also noted that most of the data showing keto can treat diabetes is based on studies led and funded by Virta itself. There is barely any hard data on keto's health effects beyond two years on the diet.

Hallberg acknowledged the lack of long-term evidence, but said the same problem has plagued nearly every other type of therapeutic diet (with the exception of the Mediterranean diet). "There's needs to be a hard outcome,

(Continued on page 45)

Special Announcements

Marines to Shut Down All Tank Units, Cut Infantry Battalions in Major Overhaul

23 Mar 2020

Military.com | By Gina Harkins

In the next decade, the Marine Corps will no longer operate tanks or have law enforcement battalions. It will also have three fewer infantry units and will shed about 7% of its overall force as the service prepares for a potential face-off with China.

The Marine Corps is cutting all military occupational specialties associated with tank battalions, law enforcement units and bridging companies, the service announced Monday. It's also reducing its number of infantry battalions from 24 to 21 and cutting tiltrotor, attack and heavy-lift aviation squadrons.

The changes are the result of a sweeping months-long review and war-gaming experiments that laid out the force the service will need by 2030. Commandant Gen. David Berger directed the review, which he has called his No. 1 priority as the service's top general.

"Developing a force that incorporates emerging technologies and a significant change to force structure within our current resource constraints will require the Marine Corps to become smaller and remove legacy capabilities," a news release announcing the changes states.

By 2030, the Marine Corps will drop down to an end strength of 170,000 personnel. That's about 16,000 fewer leathernecks than it has today.

Cost savings associated with trimming the ranks will pay for a 300% increase in rocket artillery capabilities, anti-ship missiles, unmanned systems and other high-tech equipment leaders say Marines will need to take on threats such as China or Russia.

"The Marine Corps is redesigning the 2030 force for naval expeditionary warfare in actively contested spaces," the announcement states.

Units and squadrons that will be deactivated under plan include:

- 3rd Battalion, 8th Marines
- Marine Medium Tiltrotor Squadron 264
- Marine Heavy Helicopter Squadron 462
- Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 469



- Marine Wing Support Groups 27 and 37
- 8th Marine Regiment Headquarters Company.

The 8th Marine Regiment's other units — 1/8 and 2/8 — will be absorbed by other commands. Second Marines will take on 1/8, and 2/8 will go to the 6th Marine Regiment.

Artillery cannon batteries will fall from 21 today to five. Amphibious vehicle companies will drop from six to four.

The Hawaii-based Marine Light Attack Helicopter Squadron 367, which flies AH-1Z and UH-1Y aircraft, will also be deactivated and relocated to Camp Pendleton, California, the release states.

And plans to reactivate 5th Battalion, 10th Marines, as a precision rocket artillery system unit are also being scrapped. That unit's assigned batteries will instead realign under 10th Marines, according to the release.

"The future Fleet Marine Force requires a transformation from a legacy force to a modernized force with new organic capabilities," it adds. "The FMF in 2030 will allow the Navy and Marine Corps to restore the strategic initiative and to define the future of maritime conflict by capitalizing on new capabilities to deter conflict and dominate inside the enemy's weapon engagement zone."

Existing infantry units are going to get smaller and lighter, according to the plan, "to support naval expeditionary warfare, and built to facilitate distributed and Expeditionary Advanced Base Operations."

The Marine Corps will also create three littoral regiments that are organized, trained and equipped to handle sea denial and control missions. The news release describes the new units as a "Pacific posture." Marine expeditionary units, which deploy on Navy ships, will augment those new regiments, the release adds.

In addition to more unmanned systems and long-range fire capabilities, the Marine Corps also wants a new light amphibious warship and will invest in signature management, electronic warfare and other systems that will allow Marines to operate from "minimally developed locations." >>

Berger has called China's buildup in the South China Sea and Asia-Pacific region a game changer for the Navy and Marine Corps. He has pushed for closer integration between the sea services, as the fight shifts away from insurgent groups in the Middle East and to new threats at sea.

Marine officials say they will continue evaluating and war-gaming the service's force design.

"Our force design initiatives are designed to create and maintain a competitive edge against tireless and continuously changing peer adversaries," the release states.

Editor's Note: I am of a mind that the civilian bean counters at the Pentagon think that the USMC should be America's

"9-1-1" task force to conduct large scale but tightly-controlled "surgical strikes" similar to what the Rangers, the Green Berries and Delta Force are supposed to do ... only on a far larger scale ... while the US Army would be a massive "land army" that would totally crush the enemy with its sheer size.

I am also of a mind that those same inexperienced and highly ignorant DoD "pencil pushers" are going to say "What have we done?" When young Marines on hostile shores are dying in droves without any of the combat support that we have had for (what?) 200+ years.

Simply Forget Us



Ben Cole writes: This picture is of Bravo Company, 2nd Tanks from a Mediterranean Cruise in the early part of 1966.

1. It has pictures of at least four tankers that would soon be going to Vietnam: Gary Young (KIA), Clyde Hoch, Ben Cole plus, Kirby and Alexander.

2. It also has a number of tankers that were part the first landing at Da Nang in March 1965.

3. AND front and center was our platoon Gunny, SSgt (at the time) John Downey who drove the FIRST Marine tank in Vietnam ashore at Da Nang!

QUESTION: Are there any other VTA members that might help identify some of them?

Wally Young writes: This is me (on the right) on my first full day in Vietnam. It was a Friday, 13 Oct 1967. After arriving by commercial airlines, the night before & spending the night in the Da Nang Transit Area w/ incoming rockets

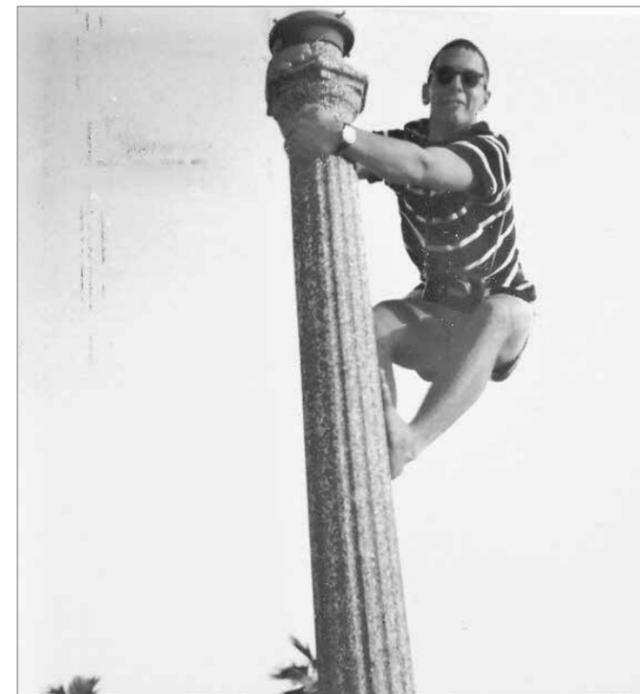


during the night. The next morning, I was ordered to catch a ride on this convoy, up to Phu Bai. That's me, a 19-year-old Marine (FNG) headed out on a long ride and not knowing anyone or what was going on. Scared? Yes! I was issued an M-14 w/ no ammo but I got some & was ready for action

I recently made contact with Karen Lynn, whose father, a Marine with 1/3 Marines, took this picture. He passed away in '09 from complications with lung cancer & Agent Orange. I don't think that I actually knew him but from this photo, we did cross paths.



Dick Peksens writes: Does anyone recognize any of the brand new soon-to-be hard charging platoon leaders? I am on far left in first row... some of these officers went to 3rd tanks.



I climbed a pole in Oceanside and my fellow Tank School officers threw me up a beer. The shore patrol stopped during this escapade and requested that I cease and desist...I am guessing that this sophomoric behavior would not be tolerated today! >>

Editor's Note: It would truly be outstanding if our membership felt compelled to write their own opinion of what they learned from their experience while serving in the United States Marine Corps in Vietnam instead of us having to use a "commercial" opinion.

"So ... What Was Vietnam REALLY like?"

VIETNAM AND THE AMERICAN FIGHTING MAN

BY MIKE RICK, JUNE 1967

Viet Nam, to the American fighting man here, half a world from home, the name means many things—almost none of them good. It means the farthest place from those he loves. It means the CLOSEST place to death. It may mean a rice paddy where he lost his best friend. It does mean a war in which he most surely and quickly lost the last remnants of his own boyhood. It would be cruel enough without war.

For Viet Nam is stagnant rice paddies, red clay gumbo, prehensile jungle vines, bamboo thickets and 12 foot elephant grass. It is weeks of 120 degree heat and 95% humidity, or drought and monsoon and flood. It is a country of two seasons, hot and dry, and hot and wet. Or mixed, for as one GI complained, "This is the only place in the world where you can be shoulder deep in mud and have dust blowing in your face at the same time".

It is the residence of the inch long red ant, the Malaria mosquito, the bamboo flea and the bamboo viper, the Russell viper, pit viper, cobra, banded krait, four inch long cockroach and a couple of snakes that perform under the aliases of Mr. Two Foot and One Step Charlie. Needless to say, ALL poisonous. Spiders, lizards, flies, rats, bats, leeches and a million other insects—no two alike, thrive here. So does Malaria, Jungle Rot, Typhus, Fungus, Immersion Foot, Dysentery, Pneumonia, Sunburn, Head Prostration, Tuberculosis, Leprosy and a couple of Asiatic ailments we haven't quite put a handle on yet. They thrive, all of them. But, miraculously, so does the spirit of that amazing being, the American Fighting Man. Every day he meets the challenges of the cruel and agonizing war. He survives. He even triumphs. And what he has to go through, few civilians know. And NO ONE knows who has not been to Viet Nam. General Eisenhower, in another war, once exploded to a war correspondent, "I get so eternally tired of the lack of understanding of what the infantry soldier endures....I get so fighting mad because of the general lack of appreciation of real Heroism which is the uncomplaining acceptance of unendurable conditions...."

The uncomplaining acceptance of unendurable

conditions.....the statement could have waited for a more appropriate war. This one. The numerous muddy front lines in Viet Nam may complain, but it is the healthy, time-honored fashion of the GI gripe. And the GI here DOES accept the unendurable. He accepts 18 hour workdays with no women, booze or overtime pay. And he accepts the million other little bitterness's of Viet Nam.....the Halozone tablet in a canteen of rice paddy water, the bites and stings of insects, the grime, the dirt, the dust, the mud, the kind of sweat you bleed. He accepts the facts of rotting wrist-watch bands, a "Dear John" letter, reconstituted milk, canned meat, three salt tablets a day, last choice at the C-rations, and when he can even find it, WARM beer.

He hears Hanoi Hannah reading our casualty reports each night over Radio Hanoi. Sees his friends fall in battle, and he endures. And he endures the sight of a mortally wounded child, the cries of pain and "MEDIC" and "CORPSMAN", the smell of DEATH and the taste of FEAR, the prospect of the next patrol, the RAWEST emotions of the battle, and his own dreams. For Viet Nam is these. And it is mumbled prayers under the sounds of incoming artillery, and learning to laugh at things that aren't really funny. It is the fears and doubts about yourself in battle, because you know if you stop to think about them during battle it could get you killed. It is wanting a WAR STORY without having to live it, and then living it and not wanting it. It is the PHONY war story every man despises and the war story too TRUE to ever be told. It is the fear of cowardice and fear of courage.

The American Fighting Man endures all of these, and performs everything his country asks of him. For the task, he fuels himself on Courage and Selflessness and Dedication and a Camaraderie that no one who shares will EVER really find anywhere else again, and he gets along on the most simple and pathetic, most God-awful seemingly unimportant pleasures. The sweat wrinkled photograph of a loved one, the sight of a Saffron yellow mail bag and a letter from home—or mail addressed simply to "A fighting

man in Viet Nam", a clear stream with no leeches, or a night's sleep in a real bed. He cherishes hot chow, cold beer or a cool breeze. Or the reminders of home, a USO show, a circled date on a Short-timer's calendar, a favorite tune over Armed Forces Radio, or a week old copy of Stars and Stripes reassuring him that America still exists. His satisfactions are a burst of insect repellent on a leech's back or a dry cigarette.

And there IS humor, even here, not side-splitting humor, but humor that fights the grimness and makes it bearable.

"Didja' hear? A couple of mosquitoes landed over at Da Nang Air Base the other day and Ground Support pumped 50 gallons of AVGAS into them before they realized they weren't F-4's", or "Hot Damn! Only 300 days and a wake-up, I'M SHORT". "It must be Sunday, they're feedin' us Malaria pills again". And humor sprouts in the signs which GI's brand their whereabouts, "No one would DARE mortar this place and end all the confusion". On a roadside, "Drive carefully, the life you save may be your replacement". On the fuselage of an ancient C-47 transport, "Trans Paddy Airways", or outside a Marine's tent in Chu-Lai, "Chu-Lai Hilton, VACANCY", or on the side of a C-123 used to spray defoliant, "Remember, only you can prevent forests", and a much in evidence bumper sticker, "Support your Fighting Men in Viet Nam".

There is a slang in his speech. Lots, every other word sometimes. His dangerous, merciless adversary, the Viet Cong (VC or Victor Charlie in military phonetics) becomes simply CHARLIE or OLD CHARLIE. And every little Vietnamese street urchin becomes CHARLIE-SAN though they usually rate the affectionate GI pat on the head with the term, unless one has just run by and stolen your wrist-watch. Then, you grab them by the neck. Even though billets, hooches and tents are papered with Playboy foldouts, the memory of American womanhood is distant in his mind. To be referred to as Round Eye, Smooth Legged Woman who exists in the Land of the Big PX is about all that is spoken. Air mattresses become rubber ladies, Piasters become "P'Z", Military Payment Certificates become Funny Money, Replacements become Turtles (because they take FOREVER to get here), and an enemy infested jungle becomes "VC National Forest".

Fighting Men are, Jet Jockeys, Ground pounders, Grunts, Snuffies, River Rats, Stump Jumpers, Straight legs, and Saigon Warriors depending on their unit, rating and/or assignment. Vietnamese become Slopes, Gooks, Dinks and other assorted epithets. Montagnard Tribesmen become Yards, and the enemy becomes (besides Charlie), Cong's, Gooney's, Ho's Boys or simply "The Bad Guys", and Charlie gets either Greased, Zapped, Zonked, Massaged or simply Blown-away.

Jets are referred to as Birds, Prop airplanes as Spades, Scooters or Tinker Toys. Snakes are Mr. No Shoulders. And there is the Thousand Yard Stare in a Ten Foot Room

and the Million Dollar Wound (just serious enough to earn a ride stateside).

There is, too, a less imaginative Alphabet Soup of letter abbreviations that lubricates the Language and Paperwork. Samples: WIA (Wounded In Action), DMZ (De-Militarized Zone), LZ (Landing Zone), FAC (Forward Air Controller), and so on....through VC, K'S, PAVN'S, ARVN, MACV, TAOR, MPC 'S, and a thousand OTHER combinations and alphabetum.

The war has a favorite phrase, in Vietnamese "Xin Loi", which means "Sorry 'bout that". It is employed for every stumble, oversight, injustice, burp, blister or disaster. "Xin Loi", may be the LAST words Charlie ever hears. And finally, everything succumbs to a GI rating system of Number ONE (Satisfactory), and Number TEN (UN-Satisfactory). There are no numbers in between. No GI wants any. In a GRAY, confusing WAR—a Number TEN War – It's nice to deal in BLACKS and WHITES again. So, WHO is this remarkable American our country has sent to Viet Nam? Who IS this guy we pay the lavish sum of \$65.00 extra a month and even forgive the trouble of filling out Income Tax forms, for what can only be the most underpaid work in the world? He is, of course, many men, many types, he is the Cool, Mature, Professional Officer and he is the BATTLEWISE Non-Com on his second tour of his third WAR. But MOSTLY, he's a YOUNG American (some COMBAT UNITS average 18 ½ years of age), who would prefer to be back home doing other things, but who by chance of history is here. He VOLUNTEERED or by lack of a deferment was DRAFTED, but he is here because he LOVES his Country. By all accounts and opinions, he is the SMARTEST, STRONGEST, BEST TRAINED, MOST SPIRITED and COMPETENT Fighting Man our Country has ever sent to war ANYWHERE. He is YOUNG but he is OLD beyond his years because this war is a CRAM COURSE in Maturity and Survival.

Experts marvel at him. "In 60 years of Soldiering and watching Soldiers", writes Military Affairs specialist S.L.A. Marshall, "I have never seen higher morale than that of the U.S. men in Viet Nam...The American fighter here can outwit, out-move and out-game anyone thus far thrown against him. Their main gripe is that the enemy is loath to come out of hiding. Their aggressiveness arises from pride in unit. The bond with their buddies. A wish to get the job over...and an unflinching belief in the rightness of their task".

General William C. WESTMORELAND, Commander of American Forces in Viet Nam, calls him flatly, "The finest fighting man our country has ever produced". There is a Sacred Brotherhood among Combat Vets. There does not have to be speaking or organized gatherings, there is merely that look, when eyes meet, and you just KNOW. Understand and LOVE you Viet Nam Vet...after what he has been through, he needs that above all else. ■

Recruiting for the US Marine Corps

BY EV TUNGENT

Been a while since I talked to you. I received your email re: "The Corps is finding new Marines despite recruiting challenges" and it stirred a few long ago memories.

As a captain, I served a recruiting duty tour in the Recruiting Station (RS) Cleveland, Ohio from 1962 until 1965 as the Assistant Officer in Charge. We covered Northern Ohio from north of Columbus, except for Toledo which fell under RS Detroit's jurisdiction, and extended east to Erie, PA. As I recall, we had 8 Recruiting Sub Stations (RSS's) throughout our area with a GySgt in charge of each with 1 or more other NCO's working for him.

All of our applicants had to be brought to the main station for the subsequent Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) and physical evaluation at the Armed Forces Examination Station (AFES) in Cleveland. It was only after successfully passing through AFES that I became involved with our applicants. Some applicants were brought in as direct enlistments and some as 6-month delay enlistments in the Marine Corps Reserve pending completion of high school graduation, as a stringent qualification at that time, or for other reasons precluding immediate direct enlistment. When successful applicants returned from AFES to the Main Station, our Admin Section prepared their enlistment documents and they were then assembled outside my office awaiting an individual interview. This was not only "a moment of truth" for them but also for their recruiter.

When I reported to RS Cleveland, my Officer in Charge emphasized to me that the performance of the RS (meaning his fitness reports and mine by association) were going to be judged by our Marine Corps Reserve and Recruitment District Headquarters in

Philadelphia, PA based primarily on our rejection rate from recruit training at MCRD, Parris Island. We were given some degree of "forgiveness" for a recruit who "washed out", but not a lot!

Therefore, it became incumbent upon me to detect any warning signs as I interviewed each applicant which would indicate he or she wasn't ready for the Marine Corps just yet, or sometimes never would be. I developed a line of questioning which gave me a reasonable idea of their motivation and mental make up to complete boot camp, first and foremost. Early on I would ask them why they wanted to become a Marine and did they have any idea of what they were getting themselves into with recruit training.

I do recall the old recruiting poster which said, "We don't promise you a rose garden." I came across a cartoon picture years ago with a fierce looking bulldog dressed as a Marine drill instructor and had the following caption, "We don't promise you a rose garden, but we can promise you sleep deprivation and muscles so sore you'll puke." That pretty much summed up my initial approach to see if I could determine the true nature of their commitment.

The RS was given a quota each month from District which was in turn passed to the RSS's proportionately. It was a matter of pride, and performance evaluation also, for an NCOIC of an RSS to meet his quota for the month. Some of them had a "stash" of applicants which they would sometimes be asked to give up over their own monthly quota to help the RS make it's quota. It was not done so with overwhelming enthusiasm sometimes but to "go down on a quota" was not a good thing in the eyes of the quota number crunchers at District Headquarters.

In my interview process, I would

sometimes see enough "caution flags" flying to tell the applicant that I didn't think he or she was quite ready for the Marine Corps and to go home and think about it for a few months. Of those applicants, few ever returned. I would share with the recruiter my reasons for not processing his applicant which kept us all on the same page regarding seeking qualified applicants.

At the end of each day, all successful applicants were gathered in an area outside my office where they would be administered the oath of enlistment. As a continuing effort to winnow out any with second thoughts, I would tell them that if they wished to withdraw their application to raise their hand before taking the oath of enlistment. On a few occasions some did and they were sent home.

Until the Marine Corps manpower ceiling was raised in the summer of 1965 to meet deployment needs for Vietnam, we had fairly ironclad rules governing enlistment qualification criteria. I have already mentioned the high school graduate requirement, but juvenile court records, police records and AFQT scores also came into play. If the applicant had a relatively minor juvenile or police record or scored very low on the AFQT and enlistment processing was to be pursued, the applicant became a "waiver case" requiring reference letters and a strong recommendation from the Officer in Charge of the RS to be submitted to District Headquarters for enlistment approval.

Unfortunately when the qualification bars were lowered and the Marine Corps was also required to start accepting draftees in 1965 to meet manpower requirements, a "Pandora's box" of problems was opened regarding maintaining a dedicated, highly motivated Corps of Marines. I personally experienced this phenomena when I returned from Vietnam in 1967 and

assumed command of the Marine Barracks, Naval Air Station, Lemoore, CA. The bulk of replacement personnel to maintain the T/O strength of the Barracks were draftees returning from Nam with less than a year left of their service. Many were determined to "spin their wheels" doing sometimes

even less than the minimum to finish their active duty time. It was a challenging time to say the least.

I gather from the article you sent, John, that even though we are back to an all-volunteer force, the Marine Corps is facing the task of trying to recruit from a pool of individuals with

Surprise in the Paddy

BY MIKE MCINTOSH AND BILL "LURCH" LOCHRIDGE

Lurch: Early one morning while serving with Bravo Company, 1/1, someone reported that a bunch of VC were moving along the bottom of a high sand dune—right along a rice paddy that was east of our position. A few days before, the Bravo Company CO, had stepped on a small mine that blew his right foot off. Medevacked out, we were all pissed off at what had happened to him. While I don't recall his name today, he was a good Marine Company Commander.

I immediately cranked up my tanks and headed toward the rice paddy as lead vehicle. Coming to the edge of the rice paddy I told my driver to put it into low gear and start to cross. We had not gone far when we simply got stuck. Rounds from both sides were zinging all around us. The VC, were hunkered down firing at us big time.

Mike: It was a sultry, quiet afternoon in June of 1966, when gunfire suddenly erupted nearby. As the radio jumped to life, I learned that one of our supporting tanks was under attack in a rice paddy about 100 meters to the south of our temporary company CP. I quickly grabbed my radio to alert our nearby artillery battery to stand by for a possible fire mission. As was normal with those old radios, the transmission

was garbled and generally required a test count to properly tune to the net. I can remember that, in my haste and excitement, I was trying to give the test count to the radio operators rather than having them give it to me. Since the goal was to have me tune to the battery net, not the other way around, the RTO very calmly explained that and got started on his count to me

Once that was accomplished, I joined a small reaction force of headquarters personnel and headed toward the gunfire. When we arrived, we saw one of our tanks mired in a rice paddy half way between the tree line where we were and one on the other side of the paddy. There was a pretty brisk firefight in process so our assorted headquarters crew joined in with rifles and one 60 mm mortar that showed up from somewhere.

Lurch: We fired several 90mm rounds into them, and they stopped shooting. Some just scampered away while others lay on the ground dead.

Mike: After a couple of minutes of rifle and automatic weapons fire, including what appeared to be several rifle grenades, the incoming gradually died out.

It was at this point that the tank commander emerged to survey the

considerably different cultural and societal motivations toward serving their country than in decades past. Let's just hope that as in times past we can take such people, tear them down and rebuild them into a dedicated, cohesive Corps of Marines.

He jumped down off the tank, grease gun in hand, and walked around the tank studying it like a man looking at a used car.

Lurch: I got out of my tank to survey our stuck position. We were in the mud up above our road wheels. One of our Gerry cans containing water that was just right of my position in the tank cupola had several bullet holes through it. Whose they were was unknown.

Later, we pulled our tank out of the paddy with the aid of our other two tanks. The VC that we killed that day had been the rear element of a VC platoon or a much downsized enemy company. They were all armed women.

Mike: As he turned to wave thanks to our motley crew, I could see it was my old Basic School buddy Bill (Lurch) Lochridge. Later while waiting for help to arrive to recover the tank Bill and I had a chance to catch up and discuss the news about the rest of our classmates and other topics of interest to two young lieutenants who were pursuing their trade in Quang Nam province of the Republic of Vietnam. This was the first of several opportunities we had to see one another as we worked our way through Operation Liberty in the summer of 1966.

VTA Challenge Coin Means a Lot

Fred Kellog writes: At my last dental appointment I was chatting with the dentist (Dr Nutter) ... and he said he had a Vietnamese friend who had written a book. The book was titled "The Last Flight Out." The book's author had been an officer in the South Vietnamese air force and flew one of

the last helicopters out of Saigon moments before the NVA crashed the gates. It's a really a great story about ignoring orders from the NVA to land and surrender or be shot down; landing elsewhere to gather family members as well as those of his crew; being locked up when he had to land elsewhere for

fuel; escaping with his crew and stealing a larger helicopter so no one would be left behind; vicious escape routes; threatening to be shot down by the US as he tried to find the US fleet; finally getting permission to land on a carrier seconds before his helicopter ran out of fuel etc. >>

My dentist contacted his friend and snagged a copy of the book for me. In return I gave him one of our Seattle challenge coins. Below is the rest of the story.

From Dr. Nutter: We were visiting Con and Linda at their place in Hawaii. I felt impressed on the way over to pass your medal (challenge coin) on to Con. It was very special and highly meaningful to him! He has gotten together with a few other Viet Nam veterans since he



wrote his two books. Since he is fighting cancer from Agent Orange now he finds some comradery talking with other vets. He never mentioned his war experiences for the first twenty years I knew him.

Thanks for giving me the challenge coin!!! They come to Vancouver several times a year. The next time they come, I'd love to invite you to dinner with us if you think you'd enjoy that.

The Door Was Clearly Marked

SUBMITTED BY JOHN WEAR

In early 1969, I was a young and brand new buck sergeant just back from Vietnam and newly assigned as the Flame Tank Section Leader of H&S Co, 5th Tank Battalion at Camp Las Flores on Camp Pendleton. I had gone to the Tank Battalion Headquarters building and recall, even now, that it was a fairly unimpressive two-story big box-like red brick building.

Back then, the Tank Battalion Commander was a Marine Lt Col whose office was in the dead center of the building. There was a separate

entrance for him that was lined with white colored chaining on both sides of the walkway leading from where he parked his olive drab Plymouth to a door that was marked "PRIVATE ENTRANCE."

I knew it was going to happen sooner or later. As I remember, one day a Marine private was walking toward the battalion headquarters building to report for duty after graduating from Tank Crewman School, when he spotted the sign, "PRIVATE ENTRANCE." He opened the door and

smartly stood in front of the colonel. Although somewhat surprised, I understand the colonel politely welcomed the new Marine aboard and then quickly summoned H&S Company's First Sergeant to his office to pick up his new Marine. I expect that the first sergeant may not have been so gracious to the private.

**This story has been slightly modified from the way that it first appeared in the November 2019 Leatherneck magazine

Finding Buddies and Remembering Tales

BY GERRY HEARNE

As I have at every VTA reunion, I get real fired up to search for the two best friends I made in my early tours in Vietnam. Jim Bentley enlisted from Tucson and RB Chaney from Oklahoma. The search engines simply haven't existed that can find these two Marine buddies. With that said, this time I found a search engine called "BeenVerified." It took a bit of effort but here's what came of my search:

The search engine provides not only names of relatives and associates, but it also gives addresses and I have to say that they give a bunch of them for the two real common names that I was searching for. I also got phone numbers. Again there are a lot of them offered in the search. The ones that seemed most likely were the two guys I was looking for.

Something I saw early made me think Bentley had recently passed away. Most of his wife and associates email addresses and their phone numbers were no longer active. So I turned to RB Chaney. I left an email on one address that didn't pop back as "No longer active" and I left a voice mail for who it seemed most likely, by address, to be or have been a wife.

The next day RB Chaney's ex-wife called me and the short story is he's alive but she said that he's seriously whacked, living with ex-wife's daughter in Tucson. I had a great but sad conversation with her and I arranged to call RB at the daughter's home.

The next day RB and I talked and yes, he's whacked but he remembered me like we'd been together the day before. I'll try to see him before too long.

That same afternoon I expanded back on relative's phone numbers for Jim Bentley. The first phone call was answered by Jim's ex-wife's brother who confirmed the bad news about Jim. He had passed away several years ago.

I'm going to spend some time mastering this program and see if I can help others in their searches.

Through the few days thinking about it at the Seattle reunion and then searching for my two buddies, I was reliving dozens of nights on watch shared with these two. Like nearly getting hit by an A-1E Sky Raider one dusky evening while our tank was parked a hundred and fifty to two hundred yards right off the end of the metal-mat runway at Chu Lai. We'd been positioning left or right of the

runway but I wanted to get closer, feel the plane go by kind of thing.

It was really exciting when the first two flew just 20 yards over us. Then we heard another aircraft move onto the runway, square up for take-off, throttle up, roll a few feet and light up the JATO-bottle (Jet Assist Take Off) that lit up, went out, lit up and went out. And now the plane moving too fast to stop.

Our crew heard the jet move onto the mat; we turned to watch it and

for about 8-10 seconds watched it try a couple of times to get off the mat. It didn't look like it was going to get airborne and Jim Bentley and I (who were sitting on the turret hatches) dropped straight into the turret while the other two crewmen went overboard just before the jet went over the turret one landing gear on each side of the turret. I could feel the jet engine blast when I stuck my head out over the loaders hatch and then I turned to watch the plane that was packing four 500 lb.

Burning Shitters

BY TOM FENERTY

Let's jump right into this one ... Not one word was mentioned in Boot Camp, Infantry Training, or Advanced Infantry Training about this necessary, but unwanted chore maintaining sanitary conditions in a remote forward base with as many as 500 or so personnel coming and 'going' is very important. The vernacular is right to the point ... an outside structure with a plank seat that has

a hole in the center for taking care of bodily functions was known as a 'shitter'-plain and simple. This is how things work when there is no plumbing and no running water. The Marine Corps has a reputation for being 'to the point', especially in naming utilitarian items. Another example would be the canisters that once housed the 175mm artillery rounds ... they were occasionally set in the ground on an angle and used as 'pissers'...Perfect!

These wooden shitters had one half of a 55 gallon drum underneath the hole, and, they would fill up every day. The big question has always been disposal. What to do with the doo?

Without the use of the half-can a hole had to be dug. Unfortunately, it would fill up way too quickly, and a new hole dug necessitating a relocation of the shitter. Too much work.

The solution was to remove and replace the full can, add diesel to the poo, mix it up and then burn off the do-do every day and reuse the 'shitcan'. And so it went.

Two clichés, both 'rank has its privileges, and 'shit rolls downhill' describe the selection process for shit burning duty. With the occasional exception being a form of punishment, most shit burners were new guys with a private or PFC rank. Most grunts inside the wire had a turn or two.

If ever our foes needed a marker for aiming it was that thick cloud of black smoke arising from the brew of diesel and doo. F/O's take note.

You may not know this, but, there really is something known as a 'shit-stick' and based on the total number of personnel in theater only a small percentage of men actually handled the stick. I was fortunate enough to be one of those who had the privilege of stirring the pot. This is something I continue to do every day, although metaphorically now. It's a lot less messy.....

(the below quote is borrowed from a Vietnam Veteran web-site that I couldn't help but copy and share..... it is absolutely priceless)

"Burning shitters: a friend of mine, Al Taylor, one day while we were burning them, closed his eyes and said, 'hear that, it reminds me of bacon and eggs frying'. What could I say?!"

Recommend reading 'Matterhorn' by Karl Marlantes

John Wear writes a reply: Tommy me boy, thanks for the memories...Luckily for me, I went from boot camp, ITR and Tank School right to 5th Tanks at Camp Pendleton for over a year of gar-

bombs and a can of napalm under each wing use a couple of hundred yards to get any elevation as it headed out to sea. I climbed out to find that when it went over the turret to find that the jet had left us with two 7-1/2' antennas rather than an 8' and a 12'. In 30 seconds we were a 150 yards south down the beach. That crewman in the turret would've been with RB Chaney, now in Tucson.

revision duty...versus being sent directly to Vietnam for OJT. During my time at 5th Tanks, I picked up corporal so when I finally was sent in-country, I was an E-4 with about six or nine month in grade. Being an NCO precluded me from being assigned the shitter burning detail. While I watched snuffies suffering the indignant responsibility of dealing with the human waste in the barrel, I never had to visit it up close and personal.

Mike Dugan-A Foxtrot Co, 2/9 grunt squad mate wrote: Dec 1967, Camp Carroll; It had just stopped raining and in minutes the sun was blaring hot. I was sitting at the end of a tent. Just outside the entrance was a pisser (a 175mm canister) buried in the soil about 2 feet deep and about two feet protruding from the ground at an angle of 60 degrees. Someone, I assume from the medical staff, had decided that the pisser needed to be burned off as were the shitters. I watched as an FNG approached the pisser with a five gallon can of diesel fuel. He started by pouring some of the fuel into the 6" diameter tube, then taking some newspaper from his rear pocket. He got it burning really good and then he inserted it into the tube, nothing happen except some smoke bellowing from the tube. When the smoke cleared he repeated the process, again just smoke, his third attempt he changed things up a bit. This time he got the paper >>

burning really good and inserted it into the tube first, and immediately proceeded to dump fuel into the tube. Suddenly there was a loud whoosh and flames blew from the tube like a flame thrower. As the poor bastard attempted to step back he tripped and the can flew up in the air, spilling ignited fuel all over him. He leap up in a flash and started running around frantically trying to put the flame out. As fast as I could I jumped out of the tent, using my flak jacket I knocked him to the ground and tried to extinguish the flame. Joined by two other marines with blankets we were able to extinguish the flame. As we carried him into the shade, his clothing was still smothering and the smell of burning flesh mixed with diesel was putrid. Though conscious you could

tell by the look in his eyes that he had gone into shock. As we waited for the jeep to transport him to the chopper pad for medevac. I noticed he had only been wearing his rain gear pants and no under garment so the plastic material had melted on to his skin. All this time he only had one concern. (Is my cock ok?) He cried out? I couldn't be sure but I assured him that everything was going to be fine, as we delivered him to the Jeep. That had been the second time in a month that someone had asked that question of me. On the 29th of November, Sargent Hamilton had asked the same question as I carried him to the medivac chopper at the battle for the Market Place, in the DMZ. Just another day in Nam!

Jim Mc Peak – a grunt from Golf

We Fought With America In The Vietnam War, But Most Americans Don't Know About Us

Many know the Vietnam War as one of the bloodiest and most unpopular wars in U.S. history. Some even label it a mistake. During the 1960s, the spread of communism brought fear to the American people. For the U.S. government, communism posed a political threat as the Soviet Union, China, North Korea, and other countries started emerging as "red" states. They were afraid more dominoes would fall, so they placed themselves between them. American representatives were sent to Vietnam and neighboring countries to prevent the spread. This is where the story of my people begins.

In the country of Laos, lush green forests engulfed the land. In the rolling hills lived my people. Land locked to their agricultural lifestyles, my people led free and peaceful lives. They were free from all the troubles of the world around them. Their dry, dirt stained hands showed their determination, but they would be tested soon enough.

The year of 1954 was when they arrived. The notorious Ho Chi Minh trail provided the arms and resources

necessary to give the communist Viet Cong an upper hand. The trail flowed through the jungles and forests of Laos near the border and provided enough coverage for safe travels between North and South Vietnam. The Viet Cong and Pathet Lao, the communist rebellion of Laos, started pressuring the Royal Lao Government into relinquishing power. That's when the CIA came to secure the Ho Chi Minh trail; to weaken the communist threat within the war. In those jungles and forests is where they found my people.

The Americans needed someone to lead the fight, someone who could lead my people. General Vang Pao of the Royal Army in Laos was chosen. He and the CIA trained my people. Men and boys traded their shovels for guns and their dry, dirt stained hands became moist with blood. Every able-bodied male would fight in the Secret War, which became known as the highest honor. Sadly, honor could not save all the lives that we lost. April 30th, 1975. The end of the Vietnam War came when Saigon fell.

The communist Viet Cong had suc-

cessfully captured the city and so the great America fled. They only took those they could fit and the rest were left. Soon after, food rations diminished, guns shot only air, and my people became defenseless. They would not be forgiven for their opposition in this war. The Pathet Lao came storming in and thundered the land with bombs. They shot lightning from their guns. If those methods did not work, eventually the rain would come. It was then, the sting of the bee could be felt. Some people fled for their lives. Some lives fled from their people. Those that could escape traveled to the darkest corners of the jungles, where only the worst of nightmares would haunt their dreams. The land my people once called home was now a grave. The only hope of living was the rushing sound of water. The Mekong River was the gate between the current life and the afterlife, stained red to represent its risk. Only a few survived, but if they did, they had another shot at living the peaceful lives they once had.

In Thailand, my people were compacted into refugee camps. The condi-

tions of these camps were worse than the lands they fled. In the early stages they had no water to stay clean, no land to grow food, not even a toilet to pee in. They survived on the rations they were given. Though their hearts, hopes, and spirits were broken, they fought on through the practice of their culture and the power of the community. They did not forget who they were even when all hope seemed to be lost.

December 1975 was when my people fled to the U.S. Although many of them

immigrated to America, countries like France, Australia, Canada, and South America also became their homes. We are now spread all across the world. We don't have our own country. We don't have our own government. We have our history, our culture, and our families. I grew-up in Colorado.

To this day, I question why I did not learn about my history in the textbooks of America. Why were my people left out of the story, left out of history as if none of us existed? All those who

lost their lives, all those who lost their loved ones, and all those who still live today with nightmares of those dark days. The story of my people are not written in the textbooks of history, but it is written within me. That is why I have shared this story with you today, so that I could reclaim my piece of history. So the next time you think of the Fall of Saigon, remember those who have fallen, but recognize those who still stand.

Remember the Hmong people.

Nearly Getting Killed at the WW-1 Battle of the Somme

"We went into action with the first tanks that ever went into action in war. Ten o'clock that night, half of our men were dead or wounded. I was lucky. I was blown up in the Somme. We were going in one night – used to go in single file, you had to keep your eye on the bloke in front of you – we went into the trenches to relieve them.

"You know we only had the light of the flares. The stretcher-bearers and the machine-gunners, they gathered –

I was at the end of the line. I got hold of a bag of rations, and my cobbler was the last man in the 10th Company. And I stepped out of the line to go back with him. We were going to have a feed when we'd got to the trenches, you see. And the stretcher-bearers and the machine-gunners stopped in a group there, while we were standing there, he (the Germans) put a bloody shell clean in the middle of them. Well, there was one fella standing,

half covered me. I felt the heat and the blast on me face, and I think that the poor devil got anything that was coming my way. But she just lifted me off of my feet and put me, well, near as, I suppose, to the wall, on board of me back, but I never got a mark, and I never got my concussion 'cause I was in the open."

From The Loader's monthly newsletter, "The Centurion,"

Marine Corps Ranked Worse Branch In The Military

The author was asked to rank best military branch to serve in and why. He ranks them as such:

1. Army (Best)
2. Air Force
3. Navy
4. Coast Guard
5. Marine Corps (Worst)

And here's what he said that puts the Marine Corps at the bottom of the list:

Of all the military branches, the Marine Corps ranks as the least attractive choice for this author. The Marines are the elite war fighters of the United States military. The leathernecks of the USMC are truly fearsome fighters, tough as nails and ready and willing to fight all comers. The Marines turn recruits into stone-cold killers and they make no secrets about that fact. Devil Dogs live tough lives, sleeping in the dirt, on board ships, charging through the surf and crawling in the sand and mud with one goal in mind: engage the enemy. Unfortu-

nately, when Marines fulfill their obligation and exit the service, they seem to find difficulty in turning this Marine Corps attitude 'off'. Whereas an Army, Navy or Air Force veteran will adjust to civilian life over time and become softer, Marines stay Marines. Visit any neighborhood in the United States and you will find a USMC flag flying high over someone's house. You will rarely, if ever, see a person flying an Army, Navy, Air Force or Coast Guard flag. If you do its most likely because they know a Marine and don't want to be out done. While veterans of other military branches tend to relax as they transition into civilian life, any Marine will be quick to remind you of their motto, "Once a Marine, always a Marine." Marines are protectors and always on watch until the day they die. Marines stay Marines because it's in their blood, in their training. For the other branches, it was a job but for a Marine it is their life. I

don't know what those Marine Corps drill instructors are doing to their recruits, but whatever it is, it works.

Is that a bad thing? Well, that depends on your reasons for considering a military enlistment. If you have a strong desire to kill, the Marine Corps is for you because that is what the Marines do. Either you want that or you don't, plain and simple. If you simply want a challenge, any other branch of the military will provide you with plenty of opportunities to test yourself. The Marine Corps ranks at the bottom of the list because the other branches have more jobs, more opportunities, and allows time for college. Marines don't have much time for school work from a foxhole. So, if you are considering joining the Marine Corps, think long and hard about what that means before going to a recruiter and signing up.

FYI: The guy who wrote this is a retired "Gunny" ■

Qualifying

BY KEN ZEBAL

As a newly assigned 1811 tank crewman I was presented with several opportunities to excel. Fire watch is one example and Assistant Duty NCO another. I thought these, along with guard duty and mess duty, were nuisance assignments that did little or nothing to enhance my skills as the Assistant Loader on C-23 an M-103 heavy tank. However, at the tank park everything was focused on Tanker business. We checked oil (hot & cold), checked track, cleaned guns, cleaned OVM and heavens only knows we cleaned the tank and the turret. Boy did we ever clean that turret, batteries, linkages, radios, ammo boxes and dropping the breach. All this was accomplished in accordance with the training schedule (conduct OJT)

and under the direct and unforgiving supervision of our salty TCs; Sgt. Jimmy Dodgen, Sgt. Ralph Greenwood, Cpl. Harmon, Cpl. Red Brezinski, and Cpl. Morehead.

In those days we didn't actually march as a detail to and from the Company area to the Tank Park but rather negotiated the distance more like as an orderly herd with one NCOIC to make sure we didn't get lost. By way of comparison, we were marched to both morning and noon chow by the A-Duty. Mess hall 407 was almost 50 yards catty-corner across the Battalion Street from Charlie Co. In retrospect, maybe that's how we informally learned drill. As many of you may recall your snuffy (Pvt, PFC and L/Cpl) peers don't

suffer fools lightly and provide quick feedback to drill commands not done in accordance with the Landing Party Manual.

One fine day the NCOs thought we, as a group of boots, needed some special OJT. By then we had gained a little experience with the 12 lb. sledge and tank bar but the TCs felt we actually needed to qualify with the sledge as part of our OJT and to protect their tanks from our unskilled hands. If memory serves, we were actually supposed to strike the end connector with a brass drift or 2x4 or something of the sort. As you might imagine we hit the end connectors with tank bar directly and the end connectors never seemed worse for it.

Are You a Fully Qualified Tank Crewman?

BY BOB PEAVEY

It was the year 2015 and for many of us tank crewman seemed almost like 40 – 45 years ago that we entered Vietnam. Since that time many of us have gone into all different types of professions. For example, I have worked for a metallurgy firm, a Governmental agency, a national accounting firm, custodial services, fry cook, teacher at both undergraduate and post-graduate schools, and several large California school districts. During that time I was required to take many different types of courses to "qualify" for or maintain the position in which I worked. I believe that is nothing new or different for most of us. In fact, if we were to put all our jobs together and listed each one line of standard 8x11 paper at a time, we could probably create a book similar to War and Peace.

So, based on that, who among us has fully qualified to be a tank crewman? I

am pretty sure that we all went through Tank School at Schools Battalion at Del Mar tank ramp. We all went through the process of learning to drive a tank. We all learned the basics of loading the guns (especially the 90). We all learned how to use the range finder and the duties of a tank commander. Once we arrived in country, at some point in time, we went to advanced tank school. This time in a real practical way. But, there were other qualifications that had to be met for any of us to even be on a tank.

Now, when we first arrived in country, we were considered "FNG" and the old salts, who we all immediately trusted, shared some in-country qualifications that were required before new guys were permitted on a tank. The first qualification was with a sledge hammer. We all know how important a sledge hammer is to the well-being

of a tank (second only to c-4). So the procedure went something like this. The crew the new-guy had joined helped the new guy get up onto the back of the tank. The turret had been turned forward so as to not interfere with the qualification process. Now, if you have qualified with a sledge hammer or remember qualifying with a sledge hammer, check this out to make sure I am completely accurate. One of the three crewmen pulled out what would pass for a blindfold, another crewman had secured the sledge hammer, and the third crewman helped out the new guy by removing and holding his cover. Once the new guy had been sufficiently blindfolded so he could not see at all, the crewman with the sledge hammer

(Continued on page 47)

Letter From Vietnam

"There Really Is A War"

BY TIM DRISCOLL

Introduction: I wrote a letter from Vietnam on 4 March, 1968; and I got this brainstorm. How 'bout everyone who wrote a letter on 4 Mar '68 go ahead and email it to the "Vietnam Veterans Home Page" in care of the Editor at deanna@ont.com.

That way, we put 'em all together; and maybe we can figure out what *really* happened in the war that day.

March 4, 1968

Well Mom,

There really is a war going on over here. We made contact in daylight yesterday for the first time since I've been here. You know how they say war is not like the movies show it. Well, they're wrong. It's exactly like the movies.

We were on a Company-size patrol when they hit us. 1st Plt was in the front, we were next, and 2nd Plt was in the rear. Wayne was working with the 2nd Plt on the machine guns.

They hit the first Plt, and everyone got down. Then first moved up 50 meters, and we moved out to the left. As soon as we moved behind a hedge line, an automatic weapon opened on us. We just kept moving.

We finally got out of range about 100 meters down the trail. Then we got on line and assaulted a hedge line 50 meters in front of us. We didn't meet any resistance; so, after we got on the other side, we got down and waited. Then we got the word the 1st Plt was in bad shape and needed us. So, we were going to move out on line about 50 meters and then swing to our right and get the gooks in the middle of us and 1st.

We started out on line, keeping low and moving slow. It was a clear, open field we were going across. We were halfway across when fire opened up from our right. Everyone got down, and the St/Sgt started yelling at us to keep moving; so, we being young, brave Marines got back on line and kept moving.

But then the bullets started zipping around our legs and raising dust. We knew for sure they were shooting at us then. We weren't about to stay on line after that. We bolted to the right, ran about 25 meters, and took cover behind dirt piled up all along this road.

We waited there, just the 1st squad (2nd and 3rd squad were behind us), for about five minutes. They weren't shooting anymore; so, we start sticking our fool necks up to see what was happening. And they started shooting again. Now we knew where they were, though. They were dug in right behind a thick bamboo patch, about 2 squads. At least now we could shoot back. We were doing pretty good—holding our own. Four of them started to run, and we cut them down.

THEN we started receiving fire from our rear. I started getting scared, then, because we had no protection to the rear. They had us pinned down for 1/2 hour. We couldn't even raise our heads to see where they were. Finally the 2nd and 3rd squads moved up and cleared up our rear. We continued the fire fight to our front.

By this time, we had taken a few casualties, including our ST/Sgt—shot through the neck close to the collarbone. A medevac chopper landed right behind us as we set up a hard base of fire, turning our M-16s on automatic. Our St/Sgt wouldn't leave though; and he kept running around yelling orders, his neck all patched up. (He thinks he's John Wayne.)

After a while, we thought we had wiped them out because they kept running and we kept cutting them down. After a while, the fire stopped; and the S/Sgt wanted a frontal assault on the positions. We didn't like that idea because, if there was one automatic weapon left, it could tear our whole squad to pieces.

We finally made him see the light. We threw a few grenades; and, sure enough, they started shooting again. We just exchanged fire for another hour, and then the TANKS!!! came. Three tanks with the 2nd Plt swept through the position from our right. I saw Wayne with the M-60. There were 3 gooks left. The tanks opened fire when they saw them. Killed two and took one prisoner. All that took a little over five hours. One of our Corpsmen was put up for a medal.

Wayne told me later that he was feeding the machine gun, and the A gunner was shooting, when a chicom landed right next to the A gunner. He toppled over Wayne, and Wayne had to take charge of the gun. That Plt had one killed.

Mike sent me a letter and told me not to tell you he is coming to Nam. I'll write him and tell him how lousy everything is around here. We got mail three times last week, and I got a whole mess of letters from you. I got a letter from Sonny, and he says Dan will be OK. I hope so.

Where do you think I should go for R&R (in 5 months)? Tokyo, Hong Kong, Bangkok, Taipei, Australia, Hawaii, P.I. or Okinawa?

I'll write soon....Tim ■

Editor's note: The author Robert Shofner was a US Marine but not a Vietnam veteran. We feel pretty strongly that reading this wonderful story will fascinate many of us. Very tragically Robert passed away in December 2019 before we could publish it.

FROM 75'S TO THE "THING"

BY ROBERT E SHOFNER

They were sometimes called "75 Reckless Rifles" and they were used as anti-tank weapons in Korea. The USMC had horses that carried 75 mm ammo to the front lines. There is a monument on Camp Pendleton dedicated to "Sgt Reckless," an ammo carrying horse. The horses returned from Korea with the Marines in a weapons company. In 1955 I joined a similar weapons company at Camp Le Jeune. It was the 3rd Battalion, 2nd Marine Regiment, 2nd Marine Division.



From there we participated in the Suez Canal incident. The British and French had control of the canal but Egypt and Israel wanted it back. I believe that it may have been a WW2 settlement agreement. We were fired upon when we got near. By who? I don't know for sure ... but we did stick our noses in where we didn't belong.

Several ships were sunk in the canal and we did go ashore



on the Gaza for a short time. We participated in the evacuation of Americans from Alexandria, Egypt. We moved women and children to either Crete or Sicily. I don't remember which one. Please note that this is all from my memory. Weapons Company was split up and sent where we were needed. During the evacuation, my office pinky had me located somewhere in Turkey. PFC Harris has a hard time keeping up with where we were sent. Sometimes we'd all go in three different directions.

The 75 mm recoilless rifle weighed 115 pounds. What I remember most was how awkward it was to carry. We tried everything in the book to make them feel lighter. Four man carry. Two man carry. Even one man carry. We also carried our own normal personal equipment plus a tripod and two rounds of ammo. We were expected to always keep up with the grunt line companies. I lost most of the hearing in my right ear from the very first shot. My ears are even ringing now. Back then we really thought that we were John Wayne.

We hit every island in the Mediterranean and many in the Caribbean. Forced marches, trying to set Marine Corps records of distance and time. One forced march was all day in a hot climate. It did not rain but at the end our utilities were soaked with mud. It was all from sweat and dust. Then one day we were told to stop walking because we were going to start riding. The 75 mm recoilless rifles were given to the Nationalist Chinese (who were fighting the Communists).



Yes, most of us jumped up in the air and clicked our heels!

We were then the "Fathers of the Ontos." On the 20th of May, 1957, we became an anti-tank tracked vehicle company. We were the first in the Corps. We started school in the



500 Building at Camp Le Jeune. Our teachers were the civilian developing engineers of the vehicle. They told us, "Pay attention to what you learn here. It will have to be passed down to the next generation."



We already knew about back blast but to emphasize the effect a goat was put inside of the Ontos with the back hatches open. As salvo was fired and the intense burning of oxygen sucked the air from the animal's lungs. That was the end of an innocent animal. Lesson learned. And since I was a senior corporal, I was made an Ontos Commander.

Our first tour was to Vieques Island, Puerto Rico, in February of 1958. Then in April we formed into an Ontos Battalion. So from a Weapons Company to on Ontos Company to the 2nd Anti-Tank Battalion.

My Ontos put on a demonstration for the Commandant of the Marine Corps and Secretary of the Navy. At 500 yards we fired and disabled six different tanks in just under 30 seconds. We fired across the New River. Our skipper said that after the CMC and Secretary observed the demonstration, they said, "We'll keep it." The company commander was so proud of the Ontos. As an aside, I knew a lot about 60 mm mortars, firing with aiming stakes and indirect fire. I told my CO, "I think that I can fire this thing indirect." He gave me an odd look and never came around me again.

(Oooops! I think that I many have screwed up!). Later I learned that they did in fact, fire indirect in Vietnam.

Back then there was a new cartoon about a bird and a coyote. It was called "Road Runner." My Ontos became "Road Runner." And on Jan 1, 1958, they promoted me to buck sergeant.

When we were 75's, we deployed with the 6th Fleet on APA (US Navy ships) the USS Olmstead, Cambria, Francis Marion and others. These were troop ships. We would tie a



line to the 75's and lower them down along the cargo net to "Mike" or "Peter" boats below. With the Ontos, we traveled on an LSD (Landing Ship Dock) or an LST (Landing Ship Tank). The D's were the USS Fort Snelling or the USS Hermitage. We traveled from New River to Radio Island on a smaller LCU (Landing Craft Utility) and at Moorhead City we boarded the larger LSD. It took us 13 days from North Carolina to Gibraltar and on into the Mediterranean Sea. I made the crossing of the Atlantic four times.

We would patrol around the Mediterranean looking for hot spots like Egypt, the Gaza, Israel, Lebanon and Syria. We had general quarters and prepared to go ashore several times but most of them were false alarms. Then on July 15, 1958, the ship's captain of the Ft Snelling announced over



the squawk box, "Land the landing force!" We went onto the Lebanese beach that afternoon. We were locked >>



and loaded. The objective was to take the Beirut International Airport. After lots of confusion on the beach, we couldn't tell the rebels from the civilians. We secured the airport and set up a perimeter around it. At night there was lots of sniper fire and no sleep. One night my loader was on watch and he fired off 200 rounds of .30 cal. in one burst. Luckily the machine gun barrel did not burn out. Later a daylight patrol found an old house that was all shot up with a woman in it that was scared to death. Unfortunately her donkey was pulverized. We did not know what to do so we took up a collection for her. We gave her \$30 and a case of C Rations. She seemed satisfied.

After three days the US Army showed up from the sky. The 101st Airborne "Screaming Eagles" relieved the US Marines of our positions. My light section of Ontos went back to the beach and boarded an LCU. We went up the coast and landed at Tripoli. We all know that in the Marine's Hymn that Tripoli is in Libya but I can say that we landed in Tripoli...Lebanon. We were on Operation Blue Bat. We drove south through Beirut and past the Basta area of the city. In the official USMC "After Action" Report there were ten thousand rebels (the enemy) held up in that section of town. We drove down parallel to the airport, took a left and headed for the Syrian border. On the flat land it was 117 degrees and there were scorpions everywhere. As we headed toward higher elevation, it cooled off somewhat. In the valley the terrain had one road and it was rutted badly. After we crossed a bridge, we heard that it was blown up by the rebels. We also heard that there was a high ranking Lebanese official killed in the explosion. When we finally got to the border, we were told, "Don't fire unless fired upon." Later they said, "Anything that tries to cross the border, take it out." Again, in the USMC "After Action" Report, they said that there were 120 Russian tanks massed on the other side. I also remember Sgt York in WW1 saying something like, "Shoot the last one first then work your way forward. The enemy will never know what hit them." So we dug in, filled sand bags and camouflaged our Ontos. The thought was that our position was along a winding road. The Syrian tanks ran in groups of four. I planned that when the tanks

came around a bend on the narrow road we'd take out the last tank and then the first tank, trapping the other two tanks in the middle. Luckily for us, they never showed up. (Thank God!)

We stayed in that position for the duration. We had our corpsman plus an Army MASH unit nearby. There were also massive clouds of flies. It was so unsanitary. There was way too much diarrhea and dysentery. As hard as we tried to keep clean, the flies won.

We had hit the beach on 1 July, 1958 and we were the last ones off of the beach on 25 October, 1958. When we got back on board ship, we dumped all open ammo over the side.

By the time we got back to Moorhead City on 13 December 1958, I was a short timer. My release date was 12 January, 1959. Back then we got a 30 days for what we called "mustering out time." Our new skipper announced, "All combat Marines get 30 days leave effective immediately." At that point, everyone disappeared. I stayed on base in order to check out and become a civilian. I said good bye to all of my buddies on that last day. I was so young that I never realized that it meant "forever." For my Korea Cut-off Date, I got \$100 per month for three months as I mustered out.

FALLING THROUGH THE CRACKS:

On 10 November, 1971 (our birthday) Colonel Manning presented an Ontos to the Patton Museum as a gift from the CMC. It sat outside on a concrete pad. It had de-milled weapons that were welded closed. The hatches were also welded shut.

In 2004, I met Steve Slaughter (an Ontos Marine Vietnam veteran) and we began the restoration of Ontos Serial number 226684. This particular vehicle was built in Rock Island, Illinois. From there it went to Warren, Michigan;



Albany, Georgia and finally in November 1971 it went to Fort Knox, Kentucky. Steve and I worked for two years from completely tearing the vehicle to the smallest screw, sand blasting everything back to grey iron. We reused as much as we could to make it authentic. Most people do not want to go that far with a project. We both agreed that we would not do the project unless we went all of the way and did it 100%. Some small parts we returned on a lathe. >>



The engine was sent out for repairs. Everything was totally dismantled: Rifles, body and all. Many times I worked on the Ontos alone. One day, my birthday, as I was reassembling parts, I wrote out a "time capsule" and hid it in a dry, safe place to keep for posterity.



In 2006, we entered our Ontos in the Kentucky State Fair. I stayed with it the entire 11 days. Many thousands of photos were taken. It seemed to be the most popular thing at the fair.

Later, Fort Knox got caught up in the BRAC (Base Realignment and Closure) effort by the federal government to try to save money. At that time, all armor was to be moved to Fort Benning, Georgia except for General Patton's personal memorabilia in the Patton Museum. I tried every way in the world to have the Ontos moved to the National Museum of the Marine Corps in Quantico, VA. I went from two different Marine generals to the museum director and curator. I really do not think that they realized what we had. I have to admit that the Ontos that they have on display at the museum would be put to shame compared to ours that is now at the Fort Benning museum. Later, I called Lynn Dyer, the director of the Armor Restoration Project at Ft Benning and I told him about the time capsule. I hope that it will never be disturbed.

While doing research at the Fort Knox archives, I came across a journal of 2nd AT Battalion. I did not know that it existed. When I looked, there were photos of all of my old buddies from April 1959. I had been out of the Corps for three months when the photos were taken. All of them had been promoted and had a



chest full of ribbons. There were my best friends, Randell, Scarborough and Winebar. I realized that my DD-214 was missing a lot of information. Only my name and USMC serial number were correct. Sometime while I was in Lebanon the Corps added Lance Corporal to my name. Talk about confusion, I was already a Corporal. And by the time I got



out, I was promoted by the Commanding General of 2nd Mar. Div. to E-5 Sergeant ... but an "office pinky" put E-4 Corporal on my DD-214. I hope that my relatives in the future do not think that I am just a big windbag.

I have had a few letters published in Leatherneck magazine. I also had an interview on the History Channel program, "Mail Call" with Gunny R. Lee Erme. That program (Episode 97) was filmed at Ft Knox with our Ontos. We talked for a half hour but when it was edited, it was only a few minutes long. Also, in 1961, when Russian Premier



Khrushchev build the Berlin Wall, I got a form letter from JFK where he said in essence, "Uncle Sam needs NCO's." Boy! That's another story!!! ■

Pete Ritch's note: In 2015, Jimmie Dorsett, a US Marine tank mechanic who served in Vietnam while assigned to B Company and H & S Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division in 1969–1970, wrote the following essay regarding his Marine Corps service and some of his life experiences. As a side note Jimmie was a crewman on the B Company Tank Retriever with track commander SSgt Harold Riensche and Jimmie was wounded in action on March 24, 1969 when the retriever was ambushed after hitting a land mine near the DMZ.

USMC TANK MECHANIC'S VIETNAM AND LIFE EXPERIENCES

BY JIMMIE RAY DORSETT, CORPORAL, USMC

50TH ANNIVERSARY, MAY 29, 2017, VIETNAM VETERANS DAY

Vietnam used to be the longest war that the United States took part. It began in 1957 and ended in 1975. Vietnam was a very small country in Southeast Asia and was divided into communist ruled North Vietnam and democratically ruled South Vietnam.

North Vietnam and their communist-trained South Vietnamese rebels fought to take over South Vietnam. The United States and South Vietnamese Army tried to stop them but failed; the war became an international conflict. The United States forces rose from 60,000 in mid-1965 to a peak of 543,000 in 1969 during and after the "Tet Offensive." On March 29, 1973 the last U. S. ground forces left Vietnam. Over 58,000 American men and women died in the war and 365,000 were wounded. Their lives were changed forever. The U.S. spent \$150 billion on the war in which the combat forces ultimately failed to achieve their goals. The war hurt the pride of many Americans while it left bitter and painful memories for everyone.

My Dad, James C. Dorsett was US Army in WW2. On March 11, 1968, I enlisted in the US Marine Corps after I turned 20 years old and before the Army could draft me! After my USMC boot camp and basic infantry training at Camp Lejeune, I was further trained as a welder/sheet metal worker. We were then sent to California and deployed to "WESPAC" (Vietnam). I was assigned to H & S Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division, near Dong Ha, a fairly large town in South Vietnam.



SSgt Harold Riensche walking past the B Company Retriever, 1969

In 1969 our tank retriever was dispatched into the DMZ (Demilitarized Zone) to retrieve a tank that was stuck in what the tankers referred to as "quicksand." When we got to the stuck tank, all we could see was the turret and the gun barrel! Four other crewmen and I hooked up our ½ inch towing cable in order to pull the tank out ... but the cable broke. So, we double hooked ¾ inch cable to the stuck tank and then attached to our retriever three more tanks in a line. This "conga line" of tanks pulled with all of their might and the stuck tank got loose. By that time, it was late evening and it starting to get dark. Our commander (SSgt Harold Riensche) instructed us to take shelter at a small out-reach-camp till morning and then we could return to Dong Ha with the disabled tank in tow. Everyone else on the other three tanks made it back to the base safe.

During the night we took turns standing watch by two's so that we could stay alert. Near midnight we encountered enemy gunfire. (We later heard that our out-reach-camp got overrun by the enemy and destroyed the very next night!)

The following day, we took the damaged tank back to headquarters to be repaired. We then resupplied our retriever and traveled back into the DMZ to join our tank battalion in the hills. They had left tank tracks for us to follow. There was now six of us as we had picked up a Marine who was returning to our tank unit to help. Being a welder, I was the extra man riding outside of the retriever on this trip, so I took cover between the turret and the huge boom/crane on the back of the retriever. As we followed the tank tracks into to the field, our driver encountered a large boulder. He swerved out of the tank tracks and down a hill in order to miss the big rock. That's when we hit a land mine! The sound was deafening. After the explosion I could not hear any sound whatsoever, not even the sound of gun fire! We immediately went to work to repair our retriever that had broken several wheels and one side of track. As we worked on the repairs using spare parts that we carried on board, the four men around me started to run and hide. (Remember, I could not hear). I watched our driver fall face down and he did not move! We were being ambushed by enemy gun fire and grenades. I could see sparks on the tank retrievers' sides and >>

knew that bullets were flying ... but again I heard nothing.

I took cover behind the retriever, then jumped under it. As I did, I saw a young boy holding an AK47 machine gun. He could barely hold the gun up firing at me! I quickly took cover under the retriever with the others and as I did this, my left arm fell on my chest like I hit my funny bone. It turned out that a bullet hit me through my elbow. I reached for a buddy next to me to comfort him because he was crying so loud and a bullet hit him through the temple and killed him.

We later called for help and three tanks came to our aid. The first tank was a flame-thrower and he proceeded to burn a circle around us using a jelly-like substance called "napalm." You could smell the enemy's hair and flesh burning!

As an aside, several of our tanks were napalm flame throwers that we used to burn down trees, brush and foliage to eliminate hiding positions of the enemy guerilla fighters. Napalm is a burning fire jelly that sticks to everything and you can't put it out or shake it off! This is also an area where 20 million gallons of "Agent Orange" was sprayed over forests, fields and brush to destroy vegetation so our enemy could not hide. That operation was called "Ranch Hand".

During the ambush I started hearing sounds again and I could hear the other Marines hollering. The Gunny (SSgt. Riensche) came down out of the retriever and asked me if I could move, I said "Yes".

He said "I'm going to move the retriever out of the way/" so I wiggled my way to another Marine to pull him away from the wheels and tracks. Once we were in the clear, I saw a large group of South Vietnam soldiers (our side) had come running into our clearing after hearing all the shooting going on. About this time, I was hearing Medevac choppers, so the Gunny asked me if I could work and I said "No" because something was wrong with my left arm. He told me to take the other Marine (Cpl. C Ammon) and leave.

With one arm I grabbed my comrade, took him to the

chopper and handed him over. With one foot and one hand on the chopper, they took off. When I arrived at the field hospital, they found a bullet hole in my left arm and several pieces of shrapnel all over me! I was assigned to R & R to Guam for about a month to heal up. After healing, it was back to Vietnam and a job at the rear maintenance shop to repair tanks. They awarded me a meritorious E-4 rank, a Purple Heart and placed me in charge of the repair shop.

Around the end of 1969 to the beginning of 1970, the tank battalion was reassigned to ship-out of Vietnam and go to Okinawa, which eventually was handed back to Japan in 1972. Once we settled down in Okinawa, it was back to repairing broken tanks again. Not long after that, I received my going home papers and traveled back to the US of A. At home in Virginia, I asked for help at the local Salem, VAMC, to seek some medical help to tend to my war wounds and to get my GED. After two years, I was able to go to college. Also, after returning home, going to college, getting married and having children, I started having medical problems.

First was my heart failure problems, with "A-fib"; then in 2014 I was surprised to learn that I had three kinds of "leukemia." Biphenotypic acute leukemia and CML Blast Crisis (claimed as acute myeloid leukemia, Philadelphia chromosome positive, with combined ALL and AML, Pht, ALL and ALL).

Second, I discovered prostate cancer in 2017 and had radiation treatments from 7/6/17 to 9/5/17 ... (43 days). The doctors told me that all if this was caused by "Benzene," so I researched benzene to find its cause:

Number One—found in the Camp Lejeune water supply.

Number two—found in "Agent Orange", sprayed in Vietnam.

Number three—found in napalm sprayed by our tank division in Vietnam.

Today, 8/31/18, I am still fighting and the war is still on! Three cancers in remission and one incurable cancer. I continue to Battle. ■

Prologue: As of 1/31/2020, Jimmie has been in and out of the hospital and ICU for a year, but in phone conversations with Harold Riensche and Pete Ritch, you can hear in his voice a joy and excitement when sharing their Marine stories. Sadly, on March 20, 2020, Jimmy reported for duty at The Great Tank Park in the Sky.



Jimmie Dorsett, Dong Ha, 1969.



Jimmie Dorsett, at home in Virginia.



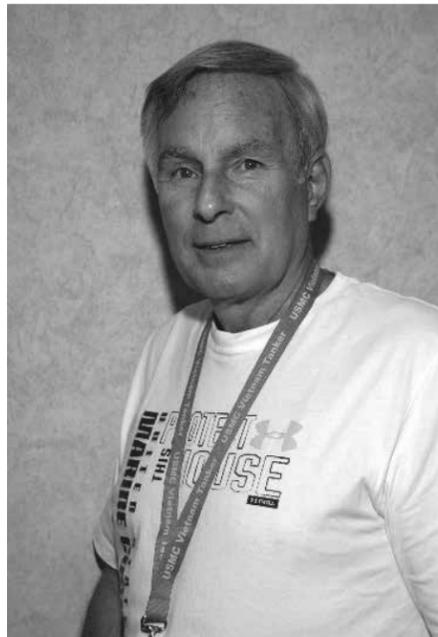
Jimmy (on right) in the barracks in Okinawa, 1969

In the Beginning

BY TERRY HUNTER

When Dick Carey first contacted me about joining the VTA it was early in 2000. I had Dick send me a list of the names of tankers he had collected. I really didn't recognize anyone and so I decided not to join. Sometime later I was out of town on a business trip to Des Moines, Iowa, with the President of an investment and insurance company that I was a broker-dealer with. His name is Mike. We were having dinner with a couple of other guys that represented a company that we wanted to write insurance business for. One of these guys brought up something about Vietnam. That's when I found out Mike and I had been in Nam about the same time. In all those years (10), I had worked together with Mike and we never brought up or mentioned Vietnam.

Mike invited me to attend an American Legion lunch in downtown Minneapolis. I thought it was going to be a lunch at some armory or some other venue with about 1,000 other vets. It turned out to be a lunch at the Minneapolis Club (...top shelf, white table clothes, white china, crystal etc.). It was with a small group of men that were President's & CEOs of companies around Minneapolis and St Paul. Most of them were World War II and



Korean vets. Mike and I were the only Vietnam vets. The group met once a month and they suggested that I join their small American Legion post.

Later at one of the lunches, I overheard the man sitting next to me mention the name "JJ Carroll." I told him that JJ Carroll was a guy I had been told to get in touch with earlier. The man told me he (JJ Carroll) was a great guy and to give him a call. I then recalled that Dick Carey had told me to call Carroll when I told him that I

wasn't going to join the VTA. Carey had sent me JJ's card and I had filed it in my desk at home and had forgotten about it. That afternoon, when I got home after the Legion lunch, I found the card and gave JJ a call. His office was 10 miles away, near the Mall of America. We decided to meet that afternoon. When we met at his office and started talking, he brought out a book named "Operation Buffalo" he thought I might like. A few days later I started reading the book and I was blown away because it was about the action our tank platoon was involved with when I was wounded and medevaced. Up to that point in time, I had not known the name of the operation.

Later I checked back with JJ to tell him how important the book was to me and to thank him for it. JJ mentioned the tankers reunion to me. He told me that it was going to be held, in all places Minneapolis, right next to the Mall of America – just 10 miles from my home. That's when I knew I had to join. I often wonder back to that dinner meeting in Iowa, if the mention of Nam had not come up maybe I would never have joined the VTA. It seemed certain events just fell into line to make it happen.

First Time Attendee Thoughts about the 2019 Seattle Reunion

BY CARL HOKANSON

I have no idea where to start but, I will try. Back in early 2015 I was on EBAY looking for Marine Tanker Pins. I came upon a pin that was "USMC

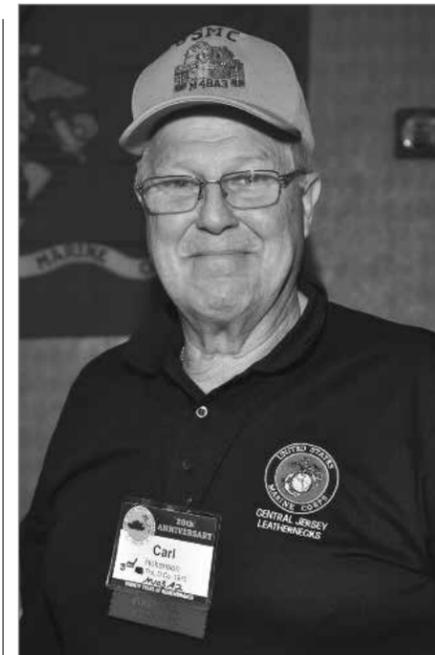
Vietnam Tankers Association." I went to GOOGLE to look up and research it. In reading, I learned that the association was founded in 1999 and was

made up of Marine tankers that had served in Vietnam from 1965–1970. There was a contact number and information listed. I called and was told that

"ANY" Marine tanker could join. I told him that I was with the 1st Platoon, Delta Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, 5th Marine Expedition Brigade FMF. Yes the M-103A2, ramp queen, "Elephant" tank, from February 4, 1970 to February 9, 1971. I was then sent to 3rd Platoon, Alpha Company, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division from February 9, 1971 to August 26, 1971 when I was discharged. (Note: I went to First Tanks due to the fact the Marine Corps did away with Delta Company and the M-103A2 tanks. I also explained that my orders to go to Vietnam were cancelled and that I did not serve in Vietnam. I was told that as a US Marine and as a tanker that I could join. The next day I wrote out the application, sent off my check and joined.

In January 2016 I received my first issue of the "Sponson Box" magazine. What an honor it was to see my name as a "NEW MEMBER." In reading the issue and looking at the "Committees and Chairman," I saw the name of CW04 Bob Embesi. I said to myself, "NO F*ckin' Way!" I had served under a CW04 when I was Delta Company, 3rd Tank at Camp Pendleton, California back in 1970. I called the telephone number listed and left a voice message. A few weeks later to my surprise, I received a call from "YES!" CW04 Embesi. I was speechless. After 50 years he and I talked for 45 minutes, telling war stories. It was so great to hear from him. He told me that he and another member on his tank crew wrote a book on their tour as a tanker in Vietnam called, "Praying for Slack." I purchased the book, began to read and could not put it down. The other member who authored the book was Bob Peavey. In the Committee Section of the Sponson Box also listed his phone number. I called him numerous times with questions.

This is where the reunion "First Time Attendee" comes in. Bob said that he and possibly CW04 Embesi, would be at the 2019 Seattle reunion. Knowing that, I cleared my calendar



right away and booked the trip. I ordered and started reading "Forgotten Tracks." Again I was in amazement, when in the first few pages of Volume I, I read the name of TJ Siva. He was another person I served under when I was with the 1st Tank Battalion. After so many years, (Note: Siva was just as crazy back in the 70's as he was in Vietnam), I called CW04 Embesi about Siva and he told me many stories. Other tankers that I served with included, Gunnery Sgt. James Reed and Gunnery Sgt. Sam Kalicki.

So now I am walking into the reunion hotel. I go to the Welcome desk and was greeted with, "Hello Corporal Hokanson." I am saying to myself, "Who the heck is this guy and how does he know my name?" Staring at him he finally said his name, Mike "Belmo" Belmessieri. I was still a little confused. He said that we served together with Delta Company, but that he was with flame tanks. Finally my brain kicked in and I remembered, "Oh my God it's true!!!" It was 50 years ago. He handed me my name tag with the red flag for first time attendees.

I walked into the Torsion Bar and saw a group of guys sitting at a table, I asked to join them. One of the guys said, "I know you!" What the F*ck?

He held up his name tag and when I saw the name my jaw dropped, Ron Colucci. He was someone else I had not seen for 50 years. A side note; Ron Colucci and I grew up in the same little town in New Jersey. He graduated High School in 1968, joined the Marine Corps and became a tanker. I graduated High School in 1969, joined the Corps and became a tanker. He went to Vietnam while I stayed in the United States. We spent most of the reunion sharing stories and we still keep in touch. What a wonderful opportunity I had to see so many Marines that I had not seen or spoke to in 50 years. As the days went on, I continued to put faces to names I read in "Forgotten Tracks." Amazing!

Then I got one more shocker. As I was standing by the "PHOTO BOARD," there was another gentlemen standing behind me. We turned and looked at each other's name tags. When I saw his name I could not speak. I just could not get the words out of my mouth. My jaw was on the floor. He said, "Hello Corporal Hokanson, How are you doing?" Fifty years later. When I could get my breath. I said, "Fine, Staff Sgt Cecil." I then gave him a big hug. Staff Sgt. Richard Cecil was my Platoon Sgt back at Camp Pendleton. You guessed it. 50 years ago back with Delta Company, 3rd Tanks. What a coincidence that he also was a first time attendee.

What a Weekend! Meeting, talking and being with all these Marine tankers. Making new friends. It was one HELL of a great trip. I have to say after being there that I am HOOKED! I am so proud to be a Marine tanker and knowing such outstanding and brave men. It is a blessing to be a part of an outstanding association. An association run by men who still "GIVE THEIR ALL" to keep the memories of these great men going. So, as a first time attendee, I am so humbled, proud, and happy that I joined. ■

R&R RIPPED AND RELAXED

BY RIC LANGLEY

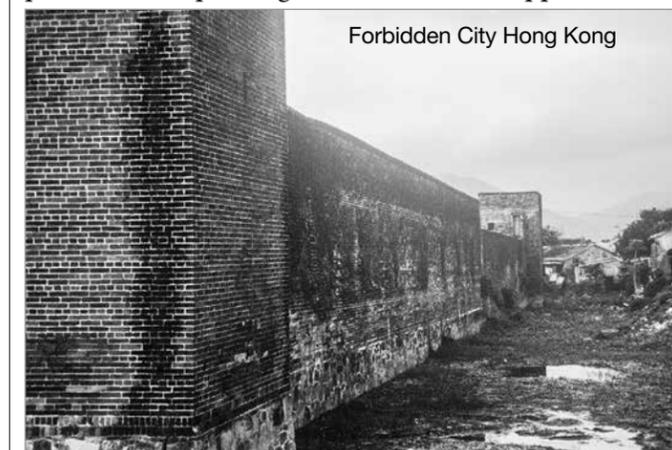
We moved from Dong Ha to Camp Carroll and began the daily road sweeps and convoy escorts. It was a good life. We had tents and a chow hall, showers and nightly movies. The road sweeps and escorts were usually uneventful. Only occasionally would we be called on to accompany the grunts on some kind of operation. We knew it was too good to last; the fighting was still raging up by the DMZ. The platoon Sergeant, R. B. English, passed the word that our platoon had been authorized two R&R positions. The procedure was to ask the most senior members of the platoon, who had not been on R&R before, if they wanted to go. If they were not interested, they would work their way down the platoon roster until someone accepted. I talked to Poteete and we decided to take the R&R and get the hell out of country for a short time. There were not many people ahead of us so the chances of us getting the spots were really good. Gunny English talked to us, about the R&R, we both said hell yes when do we leave? A few days later we were back in Dong Ha to retrieve what civilian clothes we had and get our written orders. We were going to Bangkok, Thailand or so we thought. We grabbed an early flight to Da Nang and checked in at the R&R office late that morning. They told us to be back there the next morning before 9:00 AM. If we were late, we would lose our seat. They directed us to the transit barracks where we could get a hot shower a meal and a good night's sleep. We found the almost deserted barracks and picked out a couple of racks. I was heading for the showers but Poteete said he was going to Dog Patch, the small community the natives had set up just outside the main gate. I just wanted a hot shower and some rest so he was on his own. I had a good lunch and settled in for an early afternoon nap. By that evening the barracks was almost full with guys from all service branches and all parts of the country. It was interesting to talk to them and learn how different their war was from ours. They all said the same thing, "You guys are really catching hell up there in I Corps". Poteete made it back in time for dinner and a couple of beers at a small club we found close by. We were back early and in our racks for a good night's sleep, excited about the the flight the next day and the five days of R&R. We arrived at the R&R office with lots of time to spare, no way were we going to miss that flight. Checking in at the desk we were told that the trip to

Bangkok had been over booked and there was no room for us. But we were in luck they had a trip to Hong Kong, leaving in just a few minutes, which had some seats available if we were interested. Hell yes, we were interested. We didn't care where we were going as long as we were going. They issued us boarding passes and almost immediately the loud speaker announced our flight number. With our ditty bags in hand we made our way out to the old DC6B four prop engine plane that was hopefully going to get us to Hong Kong. This plane leaked oil so badly that they had to put fifty-five gallon drums under each engine to catch the oil. The flight was without incident and we landed at the Hong Kong airport safe and sound. They led us into a large briefing room, had us fill out a bunch of forms, exchanged our money, assigned us hotels and laid down the ground rules for our stay in Hong Kong. The larger group was broken up into groups of five to ten according to what hotel they were staying in and loaded us into small vans or cabs to be transported to their respective hotel. We were at the Park Hotel somewhere in the middle of this very busy city. What a shock! From living in the boondocks, the day before yesterday to this, we were dumbfounded to say the least. After checking in and dumping our gear we began to explore Hong Kong. The first stop was, of course, the Tiger bar located down stairs just off the lobby of the hotel. We downed a couple of San Miguel beers, Poteete's first introduction to the fine Philippine brew and headed out on the street. We both needed some additional civilian clothing so we inquired at the desk where we might find a clothing store close by. As always, the clerk just happened to have cousin who owned a store just two blocks down the street. A short time later I walked out of the store with two shirts and two pairs of pants for less than twenty dollars. Hong Kong was known for its fine tailors and clothing stores. Back at the hotel to drop off our purchases we realized we had only had those two beers for lunch so we hit the bar for some munchies and more beer. The tall buildings were starting to throw long shadows as night approached. Out on the street we decided it was time to take a Rickshaw ride and kind of get a lay of the land. We piled into the Rickshaw, the poor skinny Chinaman had a little trouble getting going at first but once under way he maneuvered in and out of traffic with ease. The whole >>

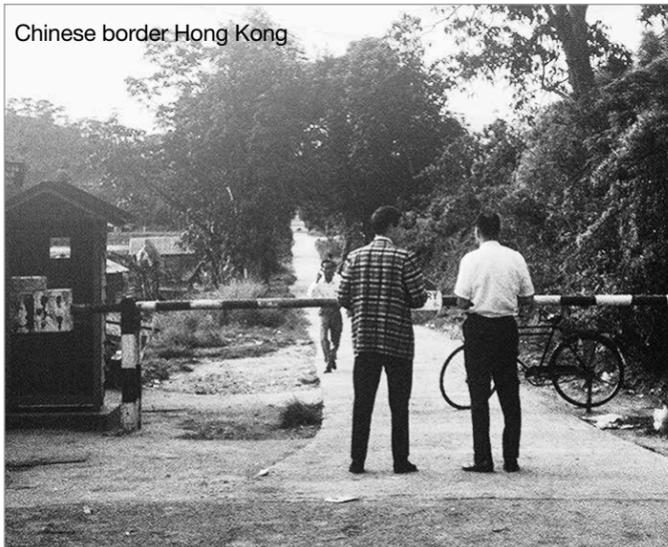


time he jabbered away and pointed here and there. Of course, we couldn't understand a word he was saying so we just nodded our heads and agreed. An hour of bouncing around in the back of that Rickshaw was plenty for both of us. We motioned the guy to pull over; we jumped out handing him five Hong Kong dollars. He thanked us and bowed and left us with a big smile on his face. We must have paid too much but it was worth it; he had worked hard to show us the sights. It was now completely dark except for the hundreds of neon signs that flashed and flickered lighting the streets. Spotting a sign about a half a block down the street we looked at each other and without saying a word we headed in that direction. The sign read Pink Lady Bar and Grill. Our kind of place. There were only two or three people in the bar when we entered so it was quiet and welcoming. We each pulled up a stool and immediately the young bartender approached us with a smile, introduced himself as Charley and asked us, in perfect English, what we would have. I ordered us both a Black Russian and a menu. The drinks were good the food was good and the conversation with Charley was outstanding. What a nice young man and the place was only three blocks from our hotel. For the next five days a stop at the Pink Lady Bar and Grill would always be on our agenda. After a couple of days of exploring the city we inquired about the possibility of a tour of the country side outside the city. Again, the desk clerk had a relative that gave tours to tourists. We agreed to the price of ten dollars a piece for the tour and were told to meet our guide the next morning at 8:00 in the lobby. 8:00 AM was a little on the early side for us but we managed to roll out of the sack and were in the lobby and waiting when our guide arrived. Our guide greeted us with a bow, a hand shake and perfect English. He was an older gentleman, to us anyway, about forty-five or fifty years old. We found out later in

the day he was a college professor and did these tours to supplement his family's income. He explained the tour would take all day including stops for lunch and dinner but if there was some place we wanted to stop just to let him know and we could stop without a problem. I broke out my wallet to pay the \$10.00 we had agreed on but he told me pay him when the tour was over, he wanted to make sure that we enjoyed the tour before we paid. We were escorted to the front of the hotel where the guide's VW bus was waiting. There were two guys in the bus, our guide introduced everyone as we piled in and away, we went, into the Hong Kong traffic. Our new friends were in the Navy from one of the ships docked in the harbor. We had only traveled a few blocks when someone came up with the idea to stop and buy some San Miguel beer and snacks to hold us until lunch. Our guide whipped the van into a parking lot jumped out and in no time at all he was back with a case of beer, a cooler with ice and a bag full of grub. Even though he didn't want to take it we all gave him more than enough money to cover the cost of the goodies. We cracked our first beer of the day as the view from the bus faded from congested city to quiet country side accompanied by a constant dialog from our guide. Throughout the morning we made several stops at interesting spots along the way. Around midday we pulled into a parking lot outside what appeared to be



some kind of walled fort. The guide explained that this was an old forbidden city but was also our lunch stop; of course, he had a cousin who owned a restaurant there. The lunch was outstanding and the tour of the old city was fascinating to say the least. Back in the bus and just enough time for a short nap before we arrived at the border between Hong Kong and China. We actually stood and looked into China, a country that in a round about way we were fighting in a war with. Is that surreal or what? On our way back to the city we took a route along the shore line passing many fishing villages and small communities along the way. As the sun set, we arrived at our last stop, a floating restaurant >>



Chinese border Hong Kong

that was ablaze with neon lights and paper lanterns. Our dinner was very good and very leisurely. We spent about two hours eating and drinking rice wine. I thought I was going to explode. It was a short ride back to our hotel where we paid our guide, double what we had agreed on, wished our new Navy friends good bye and headed up to our rooms. What a great day, not once did Vietnam enter my mind. The next day would be our last in Hong Kong so we slept late, had breakfast together in one of our rooms, steak and eggs and two quarts of San Miguel, and just kicked it. Late in the afternoon we headed for the Pink Lady doing some shopping along the way. I was feeling badly that I hadn't purchased anything to send home to the wife. We had talked twice on the phone, leaving me homesick and feeling sorry for myself. With a pair of earrings in my pocket and my conscience not bothering me any longer we strolled into the Pink Lady for a few drinks and to say good by to Charley. After probably too many drinks we stumbled back up the street to a steak house we had spotted as a possible dinner location. With a great steak and a few more drinks under our belts we knew it was time to hit the sack. The next day was going to be a long one and not one that either one of us was looking forward to. We were picked up early the next morning and transported to the airport for the flight back to Vietnam. We were taken to the same room we had visited just five days earlier upon our arrival. As I looked around the large room, I could see that everyone seemed to have had a good time. Hangovers were very common, bruises and black eyes, probably from bar fights, on a

few of the group and everyone looking like death warmed over. All signs of a great time. The flight back to Nam was much different than the flight to Hong Kong. No joking or laughing everyone was very quiet and subdued. It was time to put on our game faces again. The flight was only a couple of hours so when we landed, we had plenty of time to catch a flight back up to Dong Ha but we came up with another plan. We decided to stay another night in Da Nang and have some more fun. What could they do to us "send us to Nam?" Dumping our gear at the transit barracks we had lunch, a nap, a shower and then headed over to the small club to party. The place only served beer but it was still packed. Making our way through the crowd we grabbed a couple of beers and found a table way back in the corner where we could enjoy the atmosphere. It was weird, I felt like in some way I was home. As the night grew later the beer flowed and the crowd got louder and louder. We decided that after one more beer and we would make our way back to the barracks and call it a day. About half way through our last beer I saw a large gray-haired Marine come through the door. I told Charles "I know that guy" it was Ed Ostini a guy that I graduated from high school with. I tried to wave at him but he couldn't see me way back in that corner so I pushed my way through the crowd. As I am struggling to get through the mass of people, I come face to face with another guy that I had gone to school with, Siby Espinoza. I knew he was in country but the chances of running into him like this were slim to none, and then to bump into two guys the same night was really strange. We rounded up Ed and the four of us decided to grab some beer and adjourn out front of the club where we could talk. Ed was in supply in Da Nang and hated it. He had been in country only a short time and kept saying that he wanted to go up north where the real war was. We tried to convince him that he had better stay put and enjoy what he had. Siby was on his way home after his thirteen-month tour as a grunt. He too told Ed to be careful what he wished for. As the sun started to rise, we said our farewells and wished each other luck. Back at transit we checked in and found that a flight to Dong Ha would be leaving within the hour so we rounded up our gear and waited. It had been a wonderful five days. Good company, good food, good showers, good sleep. It had truly been, for me, an R&R. I was not looking forward to the next few months. ■

Ben Cole is gathering information about Third Tank history around the area of Con Thien and Bastards Bridge, AKA, the Washout, during the Summer and Fall of 1967. If you have something you would like contribute please contact him at b_cole@bellsouth.net or 770-861-7640.

Tom Hayes Remembers Charlie Co 3rd Tanks

Editor's Note: Tom Hayes was a Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks office "pogue" who sends me an occasional hand written story ... kind of like the letters that we wrote back home when we were young Marines in Vietnam.

Comments from Tom Hayes

I am writing about my article that appeared in the January 2020 issue of the Sponson Box magazine titled "Grunts of Charlie Company." Boy! Did you use poetic license in re-writing what I had written in a letter concerning the fight along the Cua Viet River at My Loc in November 1968!!!

"The tankers were busting caps on their tanks" – What the

Editor's Note: I wonder if the below photo is what Tom is referring to?



I also remember a tanker – who is a member of our organization – Corporal George Flaviani from Detroit. He was all fired up with leaving Nam to go home because Detroit won the '68 World

hell does that mean? I still enjoy reading the Sponson Box even though I have to read about all your 1811 heroes.

Also in the Jan 2020 magazine was an article about "Ray Ramos" – I remember him well. He worked on the company tank retriever. I used to borrow his .45 pistol when Gunny Langford sent me to Dong Ha to get the mail for the company. I gave him (Ramos) my M-16 in exchange. Yes, Ray Ramos was a little guy – about 5'5" or 5'6" and really a good person. He also was in the river fight at My Loc. Is he still alive? Also I wonder if Andy Anderson or Mike Andregg remember me? I feel so old when I cannot remember the names of the guys in my company.

Our company commander was Capt. Laurence Kutchma. It was spelled wrong in the article. I have a copy of his signature. I remember when we left Nam the battalion gave us a document – A picture of sorts of Nam with the Bn CO, Bn Sgt Major all signing up and your company commander. Also the document was a picture of a tank.

Series. I got his paperwork, orders, SRB all in order and sent to him on his way. He previously had served a tour in Nam when he was with the Army. *(Continued on page 45)*

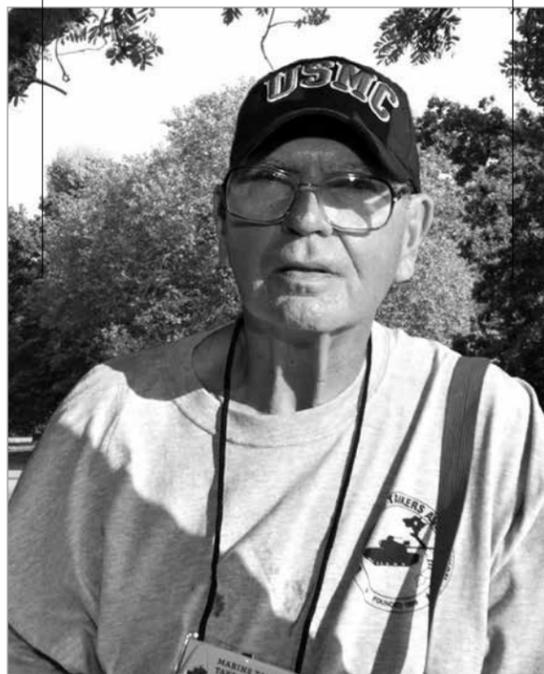
Embrace the Challenge

BY DAVE RALSTON

Like many veterans, I came home from Vietnam with a bad case of survivor guilt. I suffered for decades, drowning the thoughts and feelings of guilt with alcohol. Like a second chance from God, my eyes, my heart and my mind were finally opened. The climb out of the abyss began, and I have been sober for more than 25 years apologizing to as many people as I can along the way. The USMC VTA reunions are a big help, providing closure to my RVN experiences. But it amazes me that I continue to be enlightened along life's journey.

When I retired from teaching middle school science after 40 years in 2010, I did not expect running to become my favorite pastime. I had vowed never to work again and to fish as much as I could, regardless of the season. I did that quite well – until March 2015. That spring as a result of a routine physical exam, I received two diagnosis – obesity and atrial fibrillation, or A-fib, a heart condition causing an irregular heartbeat. Both conditions were dangerous and either could have been fatal. After two procedures, the cardiologist corrected my irregular heartbeat. But the obesity problem was up to me to fix. In retrospect, I realized the situation was a "last second chance" from God. I had to rev up my life and lifestyle completely.

2015 was an eye-opening year for other reasons. While attending the VTA reunion in Washington, DC, that year, I made my first visit to the Wall and to Arlington National Cemetery. My oldest daughter and her husband had traveled to DC,



Dave in 2017 at the St Louis reunion

joining me on this pilgrimage. The emotions that welled up inside me while experiencing these hollowed places drained me. I realized, perhaps for the first time that those of us who went through the RVN experience and are alive today were granted another half-century of life's journey. The men and women whose names are etched on the Wall and on markers in Arlington did not. They gave their all. I vowed right then and there for the rest of my life I would be a giver not a taker.

I had addressed my obesity by virtually starving myself. To take my mind off of hunger pangs I would go for walks. At first, I moved 100 yards or so and had to rest. I struggled but kept at it and began to see the weight drop off and my health and conditioning improve. It wasn't long before I was walking two miles a day without

stopping to rest and my speed was modestly increasing. Then in 2016, I entered my first 5K race (3.2 miles). I posted no threat to anyone regarding speed, but I felt a great deal of accomplishment because I finished the race and unlocked my competitive juices. Soon I adopted the motto, "Old as dirt, fast as a glacier, but I finish what I start."

That year I finished 20 races. In 2017 I challenged myself, training every day and did 50 races, including two half-marathons (13.2 miles). In 2018 I trained more, competed in 80 races, and started to realize I had undergone a metamorphosis of physical, mental and spiritual parts of my being. This past year (2019), I had a chance to do 100 races, including a marathon (26.4 miles). I found that I enjoy training every day and racing every chance I can. More than this, however, being around the positive energy of races, and interacting with familiar as well as unfamiliar faces is more rewarding than any medal for finishing a race.

Races across country trails bring me the greatest satisfaction, not just for the difficulty of fording creeks, climbing sand dunes, or trudging through mud paths in sweltering heat, but for being out in God's bounty and enjoying their experience with other runners. Part of my "gear" for every race is my old USMC cover and my cane. Sometimes I hear in jest, "We can't let that old man beat us" and I reply, "Don't bet against a Marine", but I know no disrespect is intended. In fact, what is humbling is the gracious respect I receive at these events. In turn, I have the utmost respect for the

other participants, those of my age or older with remarkable fortitude. For example the many people I have met who are overcoming long odds and have compelling stories of their own. Sometimes if a runner falters, struggles or is injured, I will lend assistance. Probably because of this, or because I am normally at the back of the pack anyway, I got the title of "sweeper," but to me, it's "No one is left behind."

When I am lined up for a race, I am reminded of the 58,000+ men and women who never had the opportunities I have had and I dedicate each race that I run to them. In some small way I try to represent their honor. The road life takes us may have potholes, speed bumps and sometimes wrong turns. Too often we worry about the destination and forget the value of the journey. We

may falter, but even in failure there are lessons to be learned and we must go on. We are all heading to our own finish line. To finish life's journey happier, healthier and spiritually well-rounded is my goal, and these last five years have helped with this objective. ■

VA News & Updates

(Continued from page 18)

long-term trial looking at a variety of eating patterns, no question," she said. But in the meantime, diabetes continues to be diagnosed in record numbers, particularly among military veterans. "Do we have 10–20 years to wait for that? We're in the midst of an unprecedented diabetes and obesity epidemic," she said. "We have to do something now." [Source: Insider! Gabby Landsverk | February 18, 2020 ++]

VA Dental Benefits

President Donald Trump signed into law a new measure allowing VA to expand reduced or no-cost dental care coverage to veterans on 2 MAR. House Joint Resolution 80 approves a request from the Department of Veterans Affairs to begin a pilot program to increase VA-funded dental care options. Only about 8 percent of veterans who get care at VA currently qualify for VA-backed dental coverage.

The bill was introduced by Rep. Phil Roe (R-TN), ranking member of the House Veterans Affairs Committee, to kick off a new avenue for veteran benefits through the MISSION Act, which replaced the Choice Act in June 2019. "In addition to increasing veterans' access to care, the MISSION Act also created a Center for Innovation for Care and Payment to give VA an avenue to test new payment and service delivery models that have the potential to better serve veterans and taxpayers," Roe said. "This

resolution would approve the Center's first waiver request – to allow VA to coordinate free or reduced-cost dental care in the community for veterans who are ineligible for dental care through VA. This would greatly enhance not only the dental care provided to those who have served but also their overall health and well-being. "

Poor oral health can have a "significant negative effect on overall health," according to VA. Clinical research has found potential connections between gum problems and heart disease, bacterial pneumonia and stroke. VA Secretary Robert Wilkie asked Congress for the opportunity to pursue the pilot program, which would allow VA to enter agreements with private dental service providers in the community who agree to provide free or discounted dental care to veterans who are enrolled in VA health care, but who may not qualify for VA dental care.

"The MISSION Act gave Veterans real choice over their healthcare decisions," Wilkie said in a statement in December, when he originally made his request. "Through this pilot proposal, we want to ensure veterans have access to quality dental care through a network of providers who are proud to serve America's heroes." For more information on the proposed pilot program, click here. For information about your eligibility for the program, please contact your local VA medical center. [Source: ConnectingVets.com | Abbie Bennett | March 4, 2020 ++] ■

Tom Hayes Remembers...

(Continued from page 43)

So Mr John Wear, our C Co, 3rd Tanks CP was always in the field. We got shot up alongside Highway 1 near the Quang Tri airfield at the start of Tet. We had a lot of wounded Motor T guys when a mortar went right in their tent. Killed our corpsman. We had a hell of a time getting our wounded up to Dong Ha – It was fogged in and no choppers would fly. We put the wounded in trucks and they were very pissed off and hurting because all of the truck tires were flat from shrapnel from the mortars. Driving over the sand was bouncing the wounded all over as they were in pain. Finally they got on Highway 1 and got to Charlie Med at Dong Ha.

About two months later we left for Cam Lo Hill and catching arty from North Vietnam. And then we left for Mai Loc in October '68. After the river battle, I went on R&R in Australia. When I got back, C Company was all back in Dong Ha and out

of the field. I rotated home in December.

I do have to say that I don't compare my time in HQ at all to tankers in the field along with the grunts. But I get tired about always hearing about REMFs. Maybe the guys in battalion and division were in the rear but Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks Headquarters was out pretty far trying to keep up with the different platoons that were all over the place.

My hat is off to you guys like you, Garry Hall, PFC Jaynes, Gunny Claypool – KIAs, WIAs. But what about other HQ platoons in A Co or B Co? Were they in the field as much as Charlie Co? I would like to see some replies from other HQ platoons...even their First Sergeants, Company Gunnies, 0141's, 2500's, 2841's, 3500's, Cooks, Supply Sergeants, 2311's, Ammo Techs and 2141's. ■

Editor's Note: VTA charter member Bob Peavey was recently introduced to a USMC Vietnam veteran and former "fast mover" (jet) pilot named Dennis Grose. Bob wrote this reflection a short time later.

Thank your USMC "Fast Movers" for CAS

BY BOB PEAVEY

I owe any and all of you A-4 drivers a big thank you. It was May 12, 1968 and we had been getting our asses kicked all day long 20-miles southwest of Da Nang. It was 120+ degrees and we were approaching a railroad berm on what was called Goi Noi Island. The intense fire had not let up and we had been begging for air all day . . . and when it came it was like Christmas morning for a 10-year old. We could see the pilot's faces as they flew down the berm with Nape & Snake and several gun runs afterwards. With each run you could hear the grunts all around my tank yelling, "Get some!" When they finished their magic they must have known they had really pulled our asses out of the fire because they came from behind us, perpendicular to the berm, and pulled up over the berm only to barrel-roll a few seconds later! Yes, it was a victory roll. They were deafening as my tank aerals whipped back and forth from the air and

Marine Air. Thank you!

Bob Peavey

Dennis Grose replies: That was our job. The Phantoms were always putting themselves in for awards. I guess when they actually hit the target they thought that was a big deal. Hitting our targets was what we did and we did it well. If a new pilot joined our squadron and after about 10 missions he turned out to be marginal, he was gone. Probably to the Wing as an embarkation office or pacification officer. I had an instructor in primary



exhaust they were pushing! I would swear they were no higher than 75 feet above ground! I loved those little planes; they seemed to carry almost as much as a Phantom and they always brought it low and on the money. I have gotten air support from all 3 services during my tour. It was very easy to tell what service was providing CAS on any given day. If you could barely ID what kind of plane it was . . . you were getting USAF support. If you could barely read "Navy" on the side of a plane it was, of course, Navy. But if you could see the pilot . . . it was Marine CAS! We used to kid that you could see what color his eyes were. Nothing was ever laid down closer and more accurately then

flight who was a screamer. The one flight I had with him I will never forget. Besides screaming he would throw his knee board at the back of my helmet. He was a CH-34 pilot during his VN first tour. The grades he gave me were in the toilet. I had never even been in an airplane before arriving in Pensacola. Fast forward to 1969 and low and behold this ass hole arrives and joins my squadron. He had transitioned from choppers to the A4. I was just a 1st Lt, the most junior pilot in the squadron, but I could fly and hit the target with pin point accuracy. I was awarded the "Best Bombs and Rockets" grades in VMA 214 before deploying to VN. VMA 214 was

"Pappy" Boynton's old squadron from WW-II. I was very cocky and approached the (now) Major Stanley Zenda. I asked him if he remembered me. His comment was, "No, students all looked the same, only the names changes." I told him that out of 150 flights in training my single flight with him was the worst. He fucked my head up for a couple weeks. He knew I had zero respect for him. During his first 10 flights he was between average and marginal. They kept him for a few more flights because he was a major.

One dark night during his first two weeks, he was scheduled to stand the hot pad. On this watch you preflight the aircraft, start it and go through all the configuration and post engine checks, shut it down then stand ready for the call while dressed in your flight gear. When a mission is called in it meant a Marine ground outfit was in deep shit. You literally ran to the airplanes, started them

and taxied as fast as was safe. Calling ground control and stating the words, "Hot pad," stopped all flights on the base and you were cleared for takeoff, immediately. As the dumb shit major was taxiing onto the runway as the wingman, he ran his wing into the lead aircraft's wing. That ended the flight and I never saw him again. He was gone the following morning...and good riddance. Our squadron flew thousands of flights during 1969. A total of seven Distinguished Flying Crosses were awarded in 1969. Just a reminder that is a pilot's Navy Criss. We also lost seven pilots. I was awarded two of the seven and being the junior pilot in the squadron that caused a bit

of a ruckus among the heavies. I didn't write myself up. One came from Charlie Co, 1/4 during the battle for Hill 484. I'm attaching a picture of one of my hits on that godforsaken hill. We lost 21 Marines that day and another 50 plus wounded. I attend their reunions every year in Marion, North Carolina. The second award came from the 101st. Airborne on a dark and stormy night in the Assau Valley. I was lucky to make it home that night. I was soaking wet and my ass was puckered. A black ass night in the dark mountains. Medivacs couldn't get to the unit and the gomers weren't in the wire. We dropped where they directed us and that ended the battle that night. That was our job. Many other missions were



BS, tees in the open, etc.

Another mission I will never forget happened just over the DMZ. My wingman lost his radio and diverted back to Chu Lai. I continued on alone

and dropped my bombs. I then headed south and saw Khe Sahn off in the distance. I had never seen it close up. So I dumped the nose and set up for a run down the runway going about 400 kts very low. Arriving back at Chu Lai, I inspected the aircraft and it was full of bullet holes. A couple very near the cockpit. I was lucky, the airplane brought me home. I was called to the skipper's office and got my ass chewed. The belief was to get hosed like that I had to be doing something wrong. They were correct. I just played stupid.

Lucky hit, the gomers ordnance bunker. That's not my bomb hit, that's the secondary explosion. Hill 484, Northwest of Dong Ha just below the DMZ. ■

Are You a Fully Qualified

(Continued from page 30)

would hand it to the new crewman to be, and explained how qualifying with a sledge hammer was done. Simple he would say, no big deal, all you had to do was hit the center of the rear of the tank a couple three times. If you did it well, you would qualify and move on to the second qualifying task. It seemed like an easy enough task and so got to it. The rookie would hit the rear of the tank four or five times just to show you were not just competent but very competent with a sledge hammer. What everyone knew, save the qualifier, was that prior to swinging the hammer, the crewman that was doing an incredible favor for the person qualifying by holding the cover of the qualifier, slipped the cover into the center of the tank engine covers. Well, the deed being done, the blindfold came off and lo and behold, there was this poor new guy's cover with three or four holes shredded into it by the edge of the sledge hammer. Once qualified, the new guy did not get a certificate or any other type

of paper. There were no written attestations for having qualified with a sledge hammer. But, for the purpose of reminding yourself just how helpful this process was, many Marines kept the shredded cover in his sea bag until he rotated home.

Now, on to the second qualifying task. This task was not so subtle and usually not performed on the same day as qualifying with a sledge hammer. In a few moments you will see why. So the crew now has a new guy broken in by qualifying with a sledge hammer. Everyone is feeling pretty good. In fact, the whole crew is out squaring away the tank they crew for. It is typically a fine day in Vietnam with the temperature in the low 100s and the sky blue, the dirt red, and the concertina wire in place. Probably the new guy had stood his first few watches and was beginning to think, "Hey I got this tank stuff licked." Along comes a break, marines always took a break during work of about one break per week. We were a hard working hard charging group of Marines. Anyway, we all take a break and grab a beer. Beer-thirty occurred about whenever

beer-thirty occurred and no one missed it. So beer-thirty passes and it is time to get back to work. As the work is about to commence, the tank commander says to the new guy, "Hey Frank (or John or Grady or whoever was new), go over to Alpha 23 and get me a can of muzzle blast, would ya?"

Now unfortunately for me, I failed this test. I knew from my time in Schools Battalion about muzzle blast. So when asked, I said, "HUH?" And the TC repeated the request. I said, "A can of muzzle blast? Are you kidding me?" For me, the qualifying test was over and of course I did not pass but I didn't have to get the can of muzzle blast either. I must state that over my time in the 'Nam I did see several others qualify by getting a can of muzzle blast and returning with a can of muzzle blast and a slightly embarrassed/miffed look when they asked for muzzle blast from the TC and got an earful.

I congratulate those who fully qualified on both exams. You are a true and complete tank crewman. For those of us who failed that second test, there is still time! ■

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