



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



AFTERMATH

<i>Featured Stories:</i>	Was I Only Dreaming? A Tank Mine Incident.....	Page 25
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**See you in Seattle for
our 20th Anniversary!!!**



This is the fourth edition with a large collection of USMC VTA members' stories ... and this time we feature many full color photos of some of the VTA's reunions. As we have done in the previous three volumes of *Forgotten Tracks*, many of the stories and all of the reunion images were previously published in our award winning magazine the Sponson Box. The format and layout of Volume 4 is similar to the design of our previous three *Forgotten Tracks* books. Just so you note copies of this edition will be sent to the Archives of the USMC Museum and Library at Quantico, to the Library of Congress and to the Texas Tech University Vietnam Archives. We want to preserve our heritage.

LOOK FOR THE ORDER CARD IN THIS MAGAZINE ... OR YOU CAN ORDER ON LINE ON THE VTA WEBSITE, <http://www.usmcvtta.org> STORE BY USING A MAJOR CREDIT CARD OR PAYPAL. WE ONLY PRINTED 150 COPIES OF VOLUME 4 SO ORDER YOURS NOW! THEY ARE \$30.00 PER BOOK WITH SHIPPING INCLUDED

ALSO NOTE: There are still a few copies of *Forgotten Tracks* Volume 1, 2 and 3 available at \$30.00 including shipping.

Your stories are the lifeblood of our magazine. I cannot thank you enough for your good spirit, for your candor and for your willingness to revisit memories that, in many cases, you would rather leave undisturbed.

SEATTLE: If you have not already registered for the 2019 reunion (October 31 – November 4)...there is still time to reconsider attending.

I have heard from several of you stating you won't attend the reunion due to the City of Seattle's political position. You should know that we are not even staying in Seattle; the hotel is in the City of Tukwila which is a mile or two from the SeaTac Airport and is 15 miles south of the city. As we all know the nation is experiencing such a horrible political stalemate...please do not allow your own politics to permeate our brotherhood.

To help change your mind we have decided to lift the \$30 “late” signup fee. Remember, you are hurting our comradery over unforeseen politics. Please don’t let your brothers down.

ELEPHANT TANKS: It would really be something of each and every Marine tanker who served as a crewman on the old M-103 Heavy Gun Tank would contact me and/or offer up a written story to share with the membership? If enough of you volunteer to do so then we might be able to have an entire issue of our magazine dedicated to those mammoth 120 mm gun tanks. Send in your photos and stories!!! I seem to recall that the tankers at 2nd Tanks deployed their elephant tanks to Gitmo. There have got to be some stories about that out there.

INTERESTING: The other day I was having lunch with an old high school buddy at a Chinese restaurant. I got my fortune cookie and when I opened it, it read: “Sift through your past to get a better idea of your present.”

OUR STORIES: The other day I was editing the stories that appear in this issue of our magazine and I noted that three of the more prolific writers have fairly recently gone to the “Great Tank Park in the Sky.” If the other 90% of the USMC VTA membership does not get down to business and start writing at least one or two short stories of their time in-country Vietnam ... or even some funny or sad stories from their life after you were released from Active Duty.

WORKSHOPS: Speaking of our stories, during the upcoming Seattle get together, Frank “Tree” Remkiewicz will be conducting several “Let’s get writing” workshops to encourage and help you write a story or two that is inside of you but might not be too easy to have it surface. Tree taught high school for many years and he has a lot of interesting and useful ideas to help you.

“Courage is not having the strength to go on; it is going on, when you don’t have the strength.”
–Theodore Roosevelt

John



until 1stTanks left the country. Anyone interested in the details about this program will find them under my name here:

<https://www.usmc-thebasicschool-1966.com/pdf/stories/civic.pdf>
Semper Fi

Jim Ray
LtCol USMC (Ret)

MCAS El Toro



John Wear writes: My only connection to El Toro was the flight to Oki on the way to Vietnam had originated at that MCAS. At least I think that it did. It was a Continental Airlines flight. Did the USMC allow civilian aircraft that were under contract to land and take off from there?

My second connection was on my return flight. I also think that it was also on Continental (it could have been TWA) from Oki. We were supposed to land at El Toro but, as we approached the US West Coast, the pilot came on the intercom and said that the very heavy monsoon rain in the LA area was forcing us to land at LAX. As we touched down, I vividly recall the plane starting to skid sideways as it hydroplaned on the runway ... but the pilot corrected us quickly and a massive cheer came out of the crowded airliner. As we deplaned, I got down on my hands and knees and kissed the ground. That landing took place in the middle of February 1969, and the vociferous and vitriolic anti-war protesting was in full swing, so they did not allow us into the LAX terminal. But instead we loaded up on grey-colored Navy buses and they drove us south to El Toro. I do not recall a whole lot of what happened from that point until I got to my parents' door step, but they out processed us at El Toro and sent us on our 30 leave.

Today, El Toro is gone. It is a big housing development. Hundreds of homes have been built on the property. It's been 20 years since the closure and they are still cleaning up the toxic waste from 50 years of pollution as it disappears a bit at a time. Also, the development includes a great park. One runway remains which will in time be dug up, plus a

couple hangars. The golf course is now public and still is in as poor condition as it was many years ago. The Third Marine Air Wing moved to Miramar and the Navy gave it up and moved to Lemoore in Central Calif.

A Doggie Tank?



USMC VTA Scholarship Award 2019



Grant R. Hamilton is the grandson of VTA member Garry Hall. He is going into his junior year of college at Vincennes University in Vincennes, Indiana.

Grant's High School graduation GPA was 3.65 while taking courses such as Physics and Calculus. He was also on his high school football and baseball teams all four years. His high school football team won the Big 8 Conference Championship his senior year. He was also a member of National Honor Society.

Grant's GPA for his first two years of college is 3.54. He is an engineering major. The curator of the Indiana Military Museum in Vincennes wrote that Grant, who has volunteered there for several years, "has been an inspiration to many for his selfless devotion in honoring our veterans and the mission of the museum in recognizing the sacrifices by our veterans throughout our nation's conflicts." Grant's excellent 500-word essay reflects his total understanding and appreciation of the sacrifices made by our country's veterans.

This young man will be an asset to our scholarship program.

By Jim Coan, VTA Scholarship Chairman

Rumor Control

Rumor Control, that ubiquitous entity we love to hate, has put out for consumption that the US Marine Corps is entertaining the idea of returning to the M60A1 Tank. The rumor continues: The Army has a large cache of M60's in storage. The reason for the Marine Corps interest in returning to the M60 mainly arises from the Navy trend/focus in "Littoral" operations. Weight and fuel consumption being a major concern for amphibious operations. I would be very interested in your take on all this.

Arthur E. Nash Sr.
anash3@msn.com

Greetings from Arizona.

Sometimes I am amazed at what a small world it is! Yesterday at a Walgreens in Bullhead City, Arizona, I noticed an older gentleman wearing a US Marine hat and, as usual in that situation, I said "Semper Fi, sir."

He responded, "When were you in the Corps?"
I told him, "'62 through '66, most of it in tanks."
He had a surprised look on his face and said he too was a tanker with Charlie Co, 1st Tanks.

I said, "Wow! That's a first. I was in Charlie Co, 1st Tanks at Pendleton."

As we discovered we were there at the same time. For both of us it was parts of 63 & 64, but then he went over to Nam with "C" Co. and served as a tank commander in the 66-68 period up in the Phu Bai Area.

I told him I went over from 2nd Tanks because I had spent a year in a Guard Detachment (Morocco) after leaving 1st tanks.

We talked a bit about 1st Tanks at Camp Las Polgus and how you had to catch the "cattle car" / bus out to the mess hall and the tank park was located across the road. I asked him if he had heard of our VTA. He said that he didn't know that it existed. I told him to Google it but he said he didn't use the internet. I told him I would give a shout out for him, His name is Jim Tate (Sgt.), 1958 to 1978. He's 78 years old now. He seems to be hanging in there pretty good. Sadly, I was so amped up from our conversation that, when my wife said she was done shopping, I said goodbye without asking for his phone number or address!

I will look for him at Walgreens and other stores in the area and hopefully make contact. It's now Memorial Day as of this letter, and I am remembering two of our Fallen Heroes from the Tankers Honor Roll: J.C. Brown & Lee Johnson. I served with them in "B" Co., 3rd Tanks at Hill 55 in 1966. "They Gave All . . ."

Jerry White
Bullhead City, Arizona

Baby Tank



Colorado Springs

John Wear writes: The city of Colo. Springs is in El Paso County. Our county has over 70,000 military veterans living here. Our local daily newspaper seems to have an affinity for reporting on the "Goings and Doings" of the veteran community. They posted this trivia fact today:

1969 – Corporal Ray Ramos, a Vietnam veteran of 23 months in Vietnam, is visiting his parents, Mr and Mrs Jess R. Ramos. Ramos is with C Company, 3rd Tank Brigade (?), 3rd Marine Division. He was wounded in April and will spend some time with his family here before being reassigned. He enlisted in the US Marine Corps in September 1966 and took boot camp at Camp Pendleton in San Diego. ■

WHY WE STILL FIGHT TODAY

A US Marine veteran tank platoon leader sent this as an email about four years ago, but perhaps with the initial flak about the Ken Burns documentary series on Vietnam, it's worth sending out again as a reminder of why we must go on with the struggle to get the truth out there.

I was reflecting on all the events of the past ten years, since I first became involved in studying and then contributing to the detailed history of the Viet Nam War. This has taken a tremendous amount of time for me but I have not been alone in this work. There are many veterans who are historians, and some historians who have been very sympathetic to the views many vets have about their service and the war in general.

But unfortunately, academia was invaded during and right after the war by those who were against the war, and the commonly publicized history of the war from the great majority of writing done from about 1965 through 1985 centered on what I will call The Narrative. And those antiwar professors trained others in their way of thinking, so academia is now heavily spotted with the second and even third generation historians who support The Narrative the way a preacher supports the Bible.

What is The Narrative? Well, it consists of a bunch of “accepted” or “well known” talking points, which go like this.

- The conflict in Viet Nam was between the true liberators from the French and the corrupt southern part of the country, which was ruled by an unelected power elite who were resisting the unification of the nation out of various selfish motives.
- As a civil war, the USA had no business being there in the first place, and the excuse that it was about stopping international Communism was just propaganda.
- The involvement of the USA was based on blatant lies such as the false reports of attacks on US warships and false theories like the Domino Theory.
- Fighting against the many true nationalists of the South, who were then aided by the aroused and committed brother patriots of the North, while the ARVN were never really able to fight well, was an impossible military situation, so the war was unwinnable from the start.
- American meddling never did anything except worsen the situation for the Vietnamese people, and America's gross overuse of weaponry devastated much of the country irresponsibly, and caused deaths of hundreds of thousands of innocents.
- American troops were disproportionately minorities, and the general bad attitudes of both the officers and men resulted in the routine occurrence of atrocities that were covered up.
- In the end, the brave Vietnamese patriots, an irregular group of guerillas with old weapons and few resources, outfought the world's biggest and best equipped army.
- All of this could have been avoided if only the USA had lived up to the commitment made in the Geneva Accords for the holding of country-wide elections, which would have peacefully

resolved the situation and unified the country under Ho Chi Minh.

Every one of those points is false, and actually easily disproven by facts, records, and the personal testimony of those who were there, not just Americans, but plenty of Vietnamese as well. Yet the great majority of Americans, and foreigners for that matter, generally believe some or most of those points. And the media have done a great job as well in supporting The Narrative.

Fighting against this are a comparative minority of historians and witnesses to history, like myself. I spent all of '68 running up and down I Corps, working with various grunt units, but also seeing things from the viewpoint of other units, like the HST teams, the pilots, the S-6 scouts, and others. I sure don't know everything, but I sure know we were not raping and pillaging and murdering every day, and in fact we were doing medical aid visits to every little village we stopped at. (And I have the pictures to prove it.) And we were certainly not outfought by either the VC or the NVA, although they were damn good fighters at times.

Since the war I have met many other vets, and some of our POWs, and many Vietnamese who were in the fight and survived to come here to live. I've ready many good books on events of the war, and cross-checked those with other books and sometimes with the people who were there for the events described in the books. So I have become a fairly decent amateur historian, and even wrote a booklet for students to help them avoid being led astray by The Narrative. (Whitewash/Blackwash: Myths of the Viet Nam War)

I do lectures at high schools and colleges, and sometimes meet in the audience some antiwar people, and then the discussion gets a bit warm. I don't argue feelings, but stick to facts and logic, usually facts the other side has never heard, or chooses to disbelieve, and they aren't always too good with logic. And they invariably get angry at me, and things go downhill, and I get accused of being biased or lying or just really stupid. Most of the people listening to all this tend to start looking at me like I actually know something, and looking at the other guys with rejection in their eyes. But it never slows down the antiwar people, they are like committed disciples of Hanoi, and nothing makes a dent in how they see things. They just get more passionate as they argue, until they get really mad.

But if I really help educate some people, change some minds, it seems like adding a drop of water to a dirty ocean. It takes up a lot of time, but more than that, gives me a lot of frustration and concern at a pretty high level.

And far, far too often, I get the terrible feeling that all

(Continued on page 11)

David L. Collin

Date of birth: 8-Dec-47

Date of death: February 1, 1968

Home of record: Carson City, California

Status: KIA

AWARDS and CITATION:

Silver Star Awarded posthumously for actions during the Vietnam War–The President of the United States of America takes pride in presenting the Silver Star (Posthumously) to Corporal David L. Collins (MCSN: 2127450), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a rifleman with Company F, Second Battalion, Fifth Marines, FIRST Marine Division (Reinforced), in the Republic of Vietnam on 1 February 1968. During Operation HUE CITY, Corporal Collins' platoon was taken under devastating small-arms, automatic weapons and rocket fire by a numerically superior North Vietnamese Army force. In the initial moments of the attack, the lead squad sustained several casualties and was pinned down. Although carrying his radio, he moved forward through the intense enemy fire to direct accurate fire against the enemy. As the unit was reinforced

with tanks, and because of the lack of communications between the tanks and infantry, Corporal Collins dashed through the fire-swept streets and climbed on top of one of the vehicles to direct their fire. Although he was exposed to enemy fire, he steadfastly maintained radio contact with the tanks and fired his weapon. Undaunted by the heavy volume of fire directed at him, he courageously maintained his precarious position and continued to direct the tanks until he was mortally wounded. By his bold initiative, gallant fighting spirit and loyal devotion to duty, Corporal Collins reflected great credit upon himself and the Marine Corps and upheld the highest traditions of the United States

Naval Service. He gallantly gave his life for his country. Action Date: 1-Feb-68 Service: Marine Corps Rank: Corporal Company: Company F Battalion: 2d Battalion Regiment: 5th Marines Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

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

Douglas “Wayne” Craddock



Douglas “Wayne” Craddock, known by many as Santa, passed away on February 25th at the age of 71. He was a native of Pearl River, Louisiana, and a resident of Baker for over 40 years. He is survived by Cynthia, his wife of over 38 years, his daughter Rhonda (Lance), sons Cullen and William, grandchildren Brooke (Tanner), Bernard (Mallory), Brennan, and London, and one great-grandchild Bernard. **He was a tanker in the USMC who served 2 tours in Vietnam.** Wayne had a remarkable career in surveying that began in the early 1970s and spanned 45 years ending with retirement from NTB Associates, Inc. in 2017. During his career he worked on many large projects like the Louisiana Superdome, the Riverbend Nuclear Power Plant, and the John J. Audubon Mississippi River Bridge among many others. Over the years as a party chief he also mentored dozens of others who went on to achieve great careers

in the profession as well, in large part thanks to him. He was also very active in with the VFW posts #4224 and #3784 serving as chaplain, quartermaster, and Jr. Vice Commander at various times.

USMC VTA member Pat “Frenchie” Cannulate alerted us to Wayne’s passing. While Wayne never became a member of the VTA, he will be missed by those who knew him.

Dimitrio Panciarelli

We received a telephone call from Kathie Panciarelli, the widow of Dimitrio, telling us that her beloved husband passed away on January 10, 2017, in their hometown of Gresham, Oregon. She indicated that he had been a crewman on B-24 with Bravo Co, 1st Tanks, 1st Mar Div. He was seriously WIA on May 13, 1969, in a rocket attack during which he unfortunately lost both of his legs. The only other name that his widow recalled was Bob Willoughby from Oklahoma. Kathie said that she has the letter that her husband wrote home from the hospital and she promised to send us a copy to share with the membership. ■



Here is a scoreboard that has come
to be

The points are not numbers that
You normally see

They are faces and names from
Sea to shining Sea
with neighbors and friends
and family

What’s not seen here are the

Wounds of all degrees

The Blind

The Insane

The Amputees

Or the men and women

Who took the Oath

Like Me

With wounds of the heart

That no one can see

Written by S/Sgt. Joseph P. Keely
United States Marine Corps, Vietnam 1965 – 67

Disabled Veterans can fly Space Available Flights for free 100% service-connected disabled Veterans and Space-A Travel

When congress signed the *John S. McCain National Defense Authorization Act* last year, 100% service connected disabled Veterans became eligible for Space Available Travel. Better known as ‘Space-A’ or military hops, **Air Mobility Command (AMC)** maintains an extensive network of flights throughout the continental United States, Alaska, Hawaii, Puerto Rico, the U.S. Virgin Islands, Guam and American Samoa. Supplementing this network, several Air National Guard and Naval Aviation Units have flights available.

To be eligible for Space-A flights, Veterans must have a permanent and total service-connected disability rating. These Vets must also obtain a DD Form 2765, “Department of Defense/Uniformed Services Identification and Privilege Card (TAN).

The Space-A Program fills surplus capacity and seating on DOD aircraft. A popular perk among retirees, now eligible Veterans can take advantage of the program and fly for free. So, whether the Veteran is looking for a getaway to Hawaii or a trip

to catch-up with their Veteran brothers and sisters on the other side of the country, the Space-A travel program can fly you there.

Some things to know before flying Space-A:

- Disabled Veterans, along with retirees, are in priority group 6. This means active service members on emergency leave; post deployment respite and other important transportation needs will have priority.
- A contingency plan and resources, including commercial airfare, need to be available in case of a scheduling change or sudden unavailability.
- Dependents of disabled Veterans are not eligible for Space-A travel.

Eligible Veterans looking for flights should review schedules at AMC passenger terminals. Most AMC terminals, on military bases or at commercial airports, have a Facebook page that posts flight schedules and seat availability. Once a flight and destination are selected the Veteran can register in person at the terminal, or by email/fax.

Guest Opinion

(Continued from page 8)

of us still working at the true history of the war are fated to be Don Quixote, tilting at the windmills of academia. That the sheer momentum of that triple-damned Narrative cannot be overcome, or even dented seriously. It is a truly sickening thought.

But why do we go on, why must we go on?

Two reasons. The second is that it is a continuing part of our service to the nation, to try to get the real history studied and understood, so that we can eventually reap the benefits of really learning the lessons of that war. Or conversely, to help the nation avoid the disasters that will continue to accrue by accepting the false lessons of the war. This is no small matter.

But the first reason is all those names on The Wall, and all the others who served, and suffered. I include in that our brothers in arms of the ARVN and the Montagnards, some of whom still suffer to this day.

Long, long ago I had to memorize a WW1 poem, In Flanders Fields. Still applicable, still poignant. And the last verses echo to-

day. “If ye break faith with us who die, we shall not sleep.”

I cannot but think of all those men, especially those I knew, whose faces are still bright in my all too declining memory, or those I saw die and held or carried, whose blood congealed, sticky, on my arms and hands. I cannot let their memories be trampled and sullied by these arrogant fools and enemies of the Republic.

So regardless of the discouragement, the deep worries, the time my wife says I can’t afford; I’m in this for the long haul. It will end only when they close the lid on me, and I am back with those I knew in those awful times.

I want to say that I am proud and honored to be part of his group who are fighting to keep the truth alive. We are perhaps another band of brothers in another battle, one that is so terribly important. I salute them all on Memorial Day, and all the other vets still standing proud for their service; and perhaps we will yet knock over one of those cursed windmills. ■

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

A Mother Sounds Off

September 1970–Leatherneck Magazine

It’s “sound off” time for me. For some time now I’ve been wanting to sound off about the way I feel about the Marines. In November of 1967 I took my second-oldest son to the recruiting office in Kalamazoo to enlist in the Marine Corps. He had been a bummer and a drop-out in school. Well, he was accepted and believe you me, he’s a man now, thanks to the training and discipline he received in the Marine Corps. He is now stationed in Da Nang, Vietnam, where he is in radio repair.

In January of 1969, I took my oldest son to the recruiting office where he enlisted and was accepted. He too, had his problems; married, divorced and also was becoming a bummer because he seemed to have lost all purpose in life. He has learned to become a man and accept things as they are and the responsibility that goes along with it. He’s a man his son can be proud of. I feel the Corps is the only one that could do this for him. He is now stationed at Camp Pendleton, getting ready for duty in Vietnam. He volunteered for service in ’Nam, and will leave in a couple of weeks.

In February of this year, another trip to Kalamazoo and the recruiting office. This time it was my third son. He had his problems, too. It took about a week of getting papers in order for him, but his enlistment was accepted and on the 21st of this month he will be graduating. What a thrill it would be for me to see him graduate, but there are still five more at home so, financially, trips are rather taboo, but I couldn’t be prouder if I were there.

Now, next year, 1971, I have a girl who will be 18. Who knows? She’s so proud of her brothers and has been reading a lot of literature about the Marine Corps.

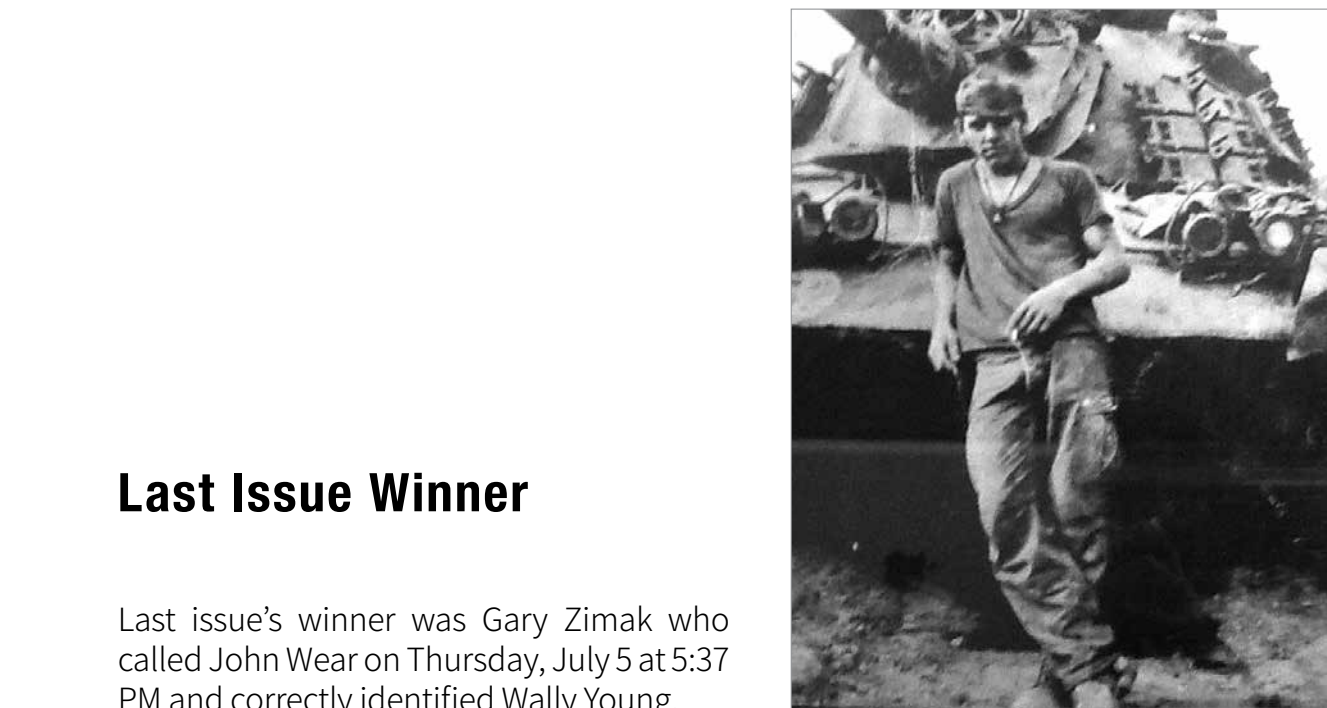
Now that you have the story of my sons, may I say “Thank you so much” to the Marine Corps. The way you have molded these boys into men is just great. I know that there are many other lads you have done this for, but these are mine and with all my heart I say thank you. The road they were headed on was not good but now I know they will do the best they can in whatever job they will be given. They have been taught by the Corps that the best is always the top goal. I have talked to some mothers who ask me if I’m not fearful for my boys in this Vietnam thing. I can only answer that the road they were headed down, where so many youths today are going, dope, drinking, stealing, protesting and no purpose in life, is a fearful thing, too. I know the Corps has trained them the very best, so I leave it in God’s hands and that of the U.S. Marines.

I’m so proud of my three Marines but I’m also thankful to the Corps for these men. Thank you again.

Mrs. M.A.K.
Bloomington, Mich.

You’re the one to be congratulated for raising your sons in such a manner that they accepted the challenge the Marine Corps offers every young man. You may believe that the Marine Corps has made your sons into men, but in fact, it is young men like your sons who make the Marine Corps. They are the Corps.—Leatherneck Ed. ■

Can you guess where this exotic port of call–liberty location was?
We need the city and country’s name.
The first person to contact John Wear (Phone: 719-495-5998) with the right answer will have his name entered into a raffle to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

Last issue’s winner was Gary Zimak who called John Wear on Thursday, July 5 at 5:37 PM and correctly identified Wally Young.

V. A. News & Updates

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

VA Appeals Status Tracker • How to check the Status of Your Claim

Knowing what stage of the appeals process your claim is in can help you avoid missing deadlines and better understand how the VA claims and appeals process works.

Generally, there are eight steps that disability claims follow:

1) Claim Received. Your claim is moved to this stage once it has been received by VA.

2) Under Review. A Veterans Service Representative is reviewing your claim to determine if there is a need for additional evidence. This includes the results of your Compensation and Pension Exam, which VA will schedule.

3) Gathering of Evidence. If the Veterans Service Representative deems that your claim requires additional evidence, he or she will request it from the appropriate sources.

4) Review of Evidence. All evidence is received and is under review.

5) Preparation for Decision. At this stage, the Veterans Service Representative has recommended a decision and is preparing documents detailing that decision.

6) Pending Decision Approval. The Veterans Service Representative's decision is reviewed, and a decision is made.

7) Preparation for Notification. Your decision is being prepared for mailing.

8) Complete. The award or decision is sent to you via U.S. mail, along with the details surrounding this decision.

VA allows veterans to track the progress of their claims throughout the claim stream in three ways:

- By visiting a local VA regional office;
- By calling VA's national toll-free phone number at 800-827-1000;
- Or by logging into gov and using VA's appeals tracker.

Online VA Appeals Status Tool VA has created its online appeal status tracker in an attempt to improve transparency and allow veterans easier access to their appeal's status. VA describes this tool as easy to use and provides accessible information to veterans. To use this tool, veterans can sign into vets.gov using:

- DS Logon, which is the same logon as your eBenefits account;
- My HealtheVet account; o ID me account.

If you do not yet have a login, create an ID me account at <https://api.id.me/en/registration/new>. Once you are logged in, select the "Check your claim and appeal status" option to access the appeals tracker tool. The main page entitled "Your Compensation Appeals and Claims" will

show the type of claim that is under appeal (e.g. Appeal of Compensation Decision), the date you received the claim decision, the appeal's status (e.g. a Decision Review Officer is reviewing your appeal), the issues on appeal (e.g. increased rating), and a "View Status" option that will lead you to detailed information about your appeal.

On the "View Status" page, veterans can view the current status of their appeal followed by a description of what happens during the next step of the process (e.g. The Board will make a decision). On this screen, you may also select "See past events" which displays a timeline of events that have already occurred throughout your appeal process. Below this timeline, you will see the "Current Status" of your appeal. If your appeal stage requires action, an alert box will be highlighted in yellow under this portion of the webpage. This section will describe what action must be taken in order to continue on with your appeal and the date by which it must be completed. For example, if a veteran recently received a Statement of the Case, this section will instruct the veteran to submit a VA Form 9 within 60 days of receiving it and provide the deadline.

The "What happens next?" feature will display a projected wait time for reaching the next step in the appeal process. Using the same example as mentioned above, the "What happens next?" section will show an estimate of when your case will be transferred to The Board if you do not submit new evidence with your VA Form 9. In this case, a timeline of two events will be provided because veterans are able to submit new evidence in support of their claim at this stage. If you did submit new evidence, you will subsequently receive another Statement of the Case, called a Supplemental Statement of the Case, and a new projected timeframe.

Once your appeal has been certified to the Board, you will be able to see a progress bar beneath "What happens next?" showing where your appeal is on the Board's docket. This progress bar shows the total number of appeals on the docket, and the number of appeals ahead of you. Although you are able to see the progress of your docket number, no time estimate is provided here as the Board is not required to adhere to any deadlines.

At the top of the page, there is a tab entitled "Issues" where you are able to see what issues are currently on appeal and previous issues that have been closed whether they were granted, denied, or withdrawn. If you need assistance during any point of the appeal process, do not hesitate to contact a VA-accredited claims agent, Veteran Service Organization, or VA-

accredited attorney. [Source: Chisholm Chisholm & Kilpatrick LTD I July 5, 2018 ++]

VA Disability Review • Frequently Requested to Check Severity of Disabilities

A thorough review of disability examinations is often requested by the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) to check on the severity of a previously rated service-connected disability. VA staff use review exams, and any other relevant evidence, to assess the current severity of a disability and, if possible, reduce the initial rating assigned. VA regulations point out specific timelines for "examination checks," but, it is not a hard and fast rule, and, oftentimes, ignored by VA personnel. But, rest assured, it will happen at some point. By law, VA should and will request a review exam under the following circumstances:

- VA needs to assess the severity of a disability;
- Additional or more relevant evidence indicates there has been an important and significant (or material) change in a disability; or
- Because of law, VA personnel are required to conduct a periodic review.

The Examination Process

Oftentimes, a contracted medical professional or VA medical professional will conduct the disability review exam. The medical examiners and staff will not answer specific questions about benefits, pension program or compensation. Nor, will they consult with a veteran about the disability compensation process. Acting as a stoic conduit within strict bureaucratic protocol, the medical examiners methodically go through a set of procedures to assess disability conditions. Typically, the examination is conducted in a medically approved facility, with the veteran and medical staff member. In very rare cases, VA personnel may decide that an examination by telephone would be the most appropriate route.

The medical examiner will often conduct the following procedures:

- Ask a veteran questions related to the disability in question;
- Perform a physical exam related to the disability;
- If multiple disability conditions are to be examined the medical examiner will conduct one examine at-a-time;
- Send the veteran for lab work, which may include: blood work, X-rays, MRI, etc.;
- While conducting exam, the medical examiner will pay very close attention to how the veteran reacts to certain procedures;
- At the conclusion of the exam, sometimes the medical examiner is required to go over the veterans medical file with him/her;
- In some instances, if the veteran is

accompanied by someone familiar with the disability the veteran is having examined, the medical examiner may ask that person questions related to the disability being examined. It is important to understand that the medical examiner is not involved in making a rating decision about the disability. The medical examiners' job is simply to conduct the examination based upon certain set of criteria established by VA. However, the words the examiner uses in describing the examination review, may ultimately affect the thinking of the VA rater and how a disability is to be perceived. The medical examiner may select words and sentence structures that may be perceived in a way that a reduction in compensation benefits is necessary, or that an increase is appropriate or no change at all is necessary.

Based on a thorough review of the disability examined, VA raters may issue a new or updated medical decision and contact the veteran by mail. After the decision has been made, VA will do 1 of 3 possible outcomes:

- The veteran's disability rating will remain unchanged;
- It was concluded that the disability has worsened and an increase in compensation benefits may be approved. If not approved for an increase it will be annotated in a veteran's disability file that an increase was not warranted, but the worsening of the disability condition has been recorded and recognized;
- The disability has improved significantly enough that a reduction in compensation benefits may be appropriate at this time.

If a veteran misses a review exam, it may negatively affect the outcome of any potential increase in compensation benefits. The veteran should always call their VA Regional Office (VARO) to reschedule their appointment as soon as reasonably possible once they realize they won't make it to the scheduled review exam. Harsh, but true, if a veteran misses an exam without details as to why, VA may be required by law to propose an immediate reduction in the disability that was to be examined or an immediate termination of compensation benefits for that specific disability.

It's very important that a veteran review exam results as soon as possible. All too often, what is written by the medical examiner differs quite a bit from what the veteran witnessed. For instance, some veterans have reported that the medical examiner indicated that a certain instrument was used during the exam, and the veteran was sure no such instrument was ever used. Checking the accuracy of the medical exam is crucial. Some veterans use the Post Examination Assessment Form immediately after medical examinations conducted by VA medical staff. In doing so, the veteran has an opportunity to record exam results as he/she remembers them, and the form provides a structured format the way VA personnel like to work with.

Lastly, it is vital to the outcome of any medical examination conducted by VA personnel

that the veteran comb over all details of correspondence sent to them related to the medical examination. Addressing any and all issues related to the medical examination is a must. If VA is asking for information, it is very important that a veteran respond to the question as soon as humanly possible. Some veterans may require the help of a certified VSO in interpreting information sent to them be VA personnel. Understanding what a veteran receives from VA is of utmost importance. [Source: USVCP I June 2018 ++]

VA Vet Choice Update 84 • Program Eligibility Mileage Change

Many veterans are unaware of recent VA changes to policies, programs and procedures that have a major effect on their benefits. For instance, to expand eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program, VA will determine eligibility for the Veterans Choice Program based on the distance between a veteran's place of residence and the nearest VA medical facility using driving distance rather than straight-line distance. This change has been published in the Federal Register for reference if needed. The change from straight-line to driving distance roughly doubles the number of eligible veterans eligible for the program. VA sent letters to the newly eligible veterans to let them know they are now eligible for the Veterans Choice Program under this new expansion policy. If a veteran does not remember receiving a Veterans 21 Choice Card or has other questions about the Choice Program, they can call 866-606-8198. Additionally, VA changed the mileage calculation for beneficiary travel. The change will ensure consistency in VA's mileage calculations across the two programs. For clarification of VA changes, veterans are advised to contact their Veterans Service Officer (VSO) or local VAMC. [Source: USVCP I August 31, 2018 ++]

VA Individual Unemployability Update 07

What it is in plain, understandable English: Unfortunately, many veterans are too often confused about Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) 100 percent disability ratings and whether or not they are allowed to secure gainful employment if rated at 100 percent. While complex, and sometimes confusing to the most experienced VSO, let's take a look at the four types of 100 percent disability ratings in plain, understandable English.

1. Combined. When a veteran's service-connected disabilities are combined to reach 100 percent, he/she is allowed to work full time or part time. For example, if a veteran is rated 70% for PTSD, and 30% for IBS, the two disabilities equal 100% (sometimes – see rating table), and the veteran is allowed to hold a full time or part time job.

2. TDIU or IU. Total Disability/Individual Unemployability. This is a specific type of claim made by a veteran, requesting that he/she be paid at the 100 percent rate even though his/

her disabilities do not combine to reach 100%.

The request is often made because the veteran is unable to maintain "gainful employment" because his/her service connected disabilities prevent him/her from doing so. The basic eligibility to file for Individual Unemployability (IU) is that the veteran has one disability rated at 60 percent or one at 40 percent and enough other disabilities that result in a combined rating of 70 percent or more. The one disability at 40 percent criteria can be a combined rating of related disabilities.

Meeting the basic criteria is not a guarantee that the veteran will be awarded 100 percent under IU criteria. The medical evidence must show that the veteran is unable to work in both a physical and sedentary job setting. A veteran not meeting the percentage criteria may still be awarded IU if the disabilities present a unique barrier to gainful employment. If a veteran is granted 100 percent under IU he is prohibited from working full-time, because in filing the claim for IU the veteran is stating he/she is unable to work because of his/her service-connected disabilities. However, receiving IU does not necessarily prevent a veteran from all employment circumstances. The veteran can work in a part-time "marginal" employment position and earn up to a certain amount annually, but not allowed to surpass a certain amount.

3. Temporary 100 percent rating. If a veteran is hospitalized 21 days or longer or had surgery for a service-connected disability that requires at least a 30-day convalescence period, the VA will pay at the 100 percent rate for the duration of the hospital stay or the convalescence period. For example, if a veteran has a total hip replacement for a service connected hip disability, the VA will pay 100 percent compensation for up to 13 months, the standard recovery period for a replacement of a major joint. The duration of 100 percent temporary disability for any other type of surgery will depend on what the doctor reports as the recovery period.

4. Permanent and total. A 100 percent "permanent and total" rating is when the VA acknowledges that the service connected conditions have no likelihood of improvement and the veteran will remain at 100 percent permanently with no future examinations. The P&T rating provides additional benefits, such as Chapter 35 education benefits for dependents, among others. Veterans sometimes make the mistake of requesting a P&T rating simply because they want education benefits for their dependents. The one caveat that veterans need to keep in mind is that when P&T is requested, all of their service-connected disabilities will be re-evaluated. If improvement is noted during the subsequent examinations, a reduction from 100 percent can possibly be proposed.

Because many veterans are service-connected for conditions that VA says have a "likelihood of improvement," most ratings are not considered permanent and are subject to future review. The only time veterans can't

work a full-time position, that is considered a gainfully-employed job is if they were awarded 100 percent disability through a claim for IU. Additionally, a 100 percent rating under either IU or combined ratings may or may not be rated as permanent and total. A temporary 100 percent rating is just that: temporary due to being hospitalized or recovering from surgery on a service-connected condition.

Should You Hire a Lawyer to File a VA Disability Claim?

22 Oct 2018

Military.com | By: Jim Absher

You may have heard horror stories about veterans just like yourself having problems getting benefits from the VA. You may have also heard the time-honored phrase “get yourself a lawyer before you deal with the VA” from your friends.

Should you hire a lawyer? How do you pick a lawyer? How much does a lawyer cost? We attempt to answer those questions here.

Should You Hire A Lawyer When Dealing With The VA?

Of course, that's a personal choice, but before you go and hire a lawyer to help with your VA claim, there are a few things to know. First, the only reason to hire an attorney is if you believe that they can help you get a better result from the VA on a disability claim that has been denied, or not rated high enough for your liking. That's it. There is no other good reason. Secondly, current law prevents a lawyer from charging you for any assistance in filing an initial claim for VA disability benefits. The lawyer can only charge you for help when you challenge a VA decision on your disability claim. So, most likely, a reputable lawyer won't even touch your case until you have filed for disability compensation and gotten a decision back from the VA that you disagree with. Most lawyers won't work for free. Any lawyer who says they will help you file a claim and then charge you for it is breaking the law.

If you do need help filing your claim, for whatever reason, you should contact a veterans service organization for free help.

How To Choose A Lawyer

It's important to find a lawyer who knows about VA claims and will represent your interests. Here are some questions to ask any attorney you're considering hiring.

- Are you VA-accredited?
- How long have you been practicing veterans law?
- When did you last attend veterans law training?
- Will you represent me all the way through my appeal to the Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims and are you admitted to practice before them?

You can use the National Organization of Veterans Advocates (NOVA) website for help in finding a lawyer. NOVA has an online directory of attorneys (and non-attorney agents) who have been accredited by the VA as well as many

If a veteran is approved by the VA for IU, not only do they receive the 100-percent service-disabled rate of pay but they may also receive additional benefits including health insurance for their dependents, Property Tax Credit, a service-disabled military ID card and a \$10,000 life insurance policy with a waiver on monthly premiums. To apply for IU download Veteran's Application for Increased Compensation Based

on Unemployability form VA Form 21- 8940. Complete the form, and mail it to Department of Veterans Affairs. Evidence Intake Center, PO Box 4444, Janesville, WI. 53547. Veterans may fax form to 1-844-531-7818. Keep in mind, it is always best for a veteran to work with an accredited Veteran Service Officer (VSO) who can explain the complex workings of the VA benefit system. [Source: USVCP 1 July 9, 2018 ++]

you. Veterans law attorneys work at the federal level so as long as they are certified by VA to represent veterans, you can choose any lawyer. You may never meet your lawyer face to face. They will do all the work for you by mail, email and on the phone. When choosing a lawyer you should talk to at least 2 or 3 before you sign any contract. Choose someone who is prompt to respond to your questions and eager to discuss your case. If you are shuffled from one paralegal to the next and you aren't able to speak with the lawyer, move on to someone else.

Free Legal Help Is Always Available

If you are hesitant about paying out a lot of cash for a lawyer, you should know that free, or pro-bono, legal assistance is widely available to help veterans. The National Veterans Legal Services Program (NVLSP) provides free legal assistance to veterans appealing a denial of disability benefits to the U.S. Court of Appeals for Veterans Claims. The Veterans Consortium Pro Bono Program provides free representation to veterans who are appealing any case that was rejected by the Board of Veterans Appeals. This includes decisions denying disability benefits. Request help using their contact form or call them at (888) 838-7727 or (202) 628-8164.

The GI Hotline is a network of twenty veterans service groups that provides legal assistance with discharge upgrades (as well as other legal issues for veterans and active service members). Call them at (877) 447-4487.

Law School Clinics. Some law schools offer veterans free legal assistance from law students who are supervised by attorneys and/or paralegals. Check if a law school in your area has a free legal clinic for veterans.

Know All Your Legal Rights And Benefits

Be aware and get what you are entitled to. Keep up with all the legal benefits available to you as a service member, veteran, or spouse by signing up for a free Military.com membership, which will send all the latest information straight to your inbox, as well as give you access to up-to-date legal benefits and more.

Related Topics

Military Advantage Legal Assistance VA Disability Benefits

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Short Stories

A Mother's Prayer For Her Marine

Tom Hayes wrote: My mother sent me the below prayer in 1968 during the Tet Offensive and while I was with H&S Company, Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks. You might remember that when both company and battalion HQ were recently located at Quang Tri. We were about 100 yards from Highway 1 and right next to the airfield. On January 31, 1968, we got rocketed and lost our corpsman and several Motor-T guys when a rocket or mortar landed right in the middle of their tent. Crazy times!!!

God, Father of Freedom, look after that boy of mine, wherever he may be. Walk in upon him. Keep his mind stayed on Thee. Talk with him during the silent watches of the night, and spur him to bravery whenever called upon to face the cruel foe. Transfer my prayer to his heart that he may know the lingering love I have bequeathed to him as the everlasting gift.

Keep my boy contented and inspired by the never-dying faith in his mother's God. He is my gift of freedom. May that freedom forever remain untarnished, God. Through the lonely confused hours of training and combat, and throughout

all the long days of hopeful victory, keep his spirit high and his purpose unwavering. Make him a proud pal to all with whom he comes in contact and make his influence a noonday light wherever his duty takes him. Satisfy the hunger of his soul with the knowledge of this daily prayer of mine.

To my country, and to the world freedom, O Heavenly Father, have I bequeathed this boy of mine. He is my choicest treasure. Take care of him, God. Keep him in health and sustain him under every possible circumstance of events. Warm him anew under this shelter and under the stars. Touch him with my

smile of cheer and comfort and my full confidence in his every brave pursuit.

Silent and alone, I pray, God, but I am only one of millions of mothers whose prayers stream day and night to You. This is our Gethsemane. Lead us victoriously through it, God. And lead that boy of mine through his. Fail him not...and may he not fail You, his country, nor his mother.

Thank you, God. There may be little or no room for some (or for all) of these...please keep me posted what you cannot use

The Short Time Invasion of North Viet Nam

BY JOHN HUGHES

In March of '68, two large boxes were delivered to the two tanks at “C-4.” Surprisingly, these boxes contained fording gear including big stacks and covers and sealant to make the engine water-tight for deep water fording. It was a “What the hell?” moment.

I was the driver of C-21 and Don McMillan was the loader. I cannot remember who our gunner was. I thought Sgt. Hancock was the tank commander, but when I spoke with him later he said he did not remember the incident, so based on my memory alone the tank commander was probably Sgt. Hall. My good buddy Ronnie Ingram was driving C-22 for S/ Sgt. Hill, the tank commander. We all spent the day installing this fording equipment. This was a first for at least some of us.

The next morning we started out from C-4 moving north and west from the South China Sea. We took it kinda’ slowly as driving with fording gear

could cause over-heating. The infantry company that was with us was “B” 1/3, and they rode on top of a half-dozen amtracs.

It took us an hour to an hour and a half to arrive at a wide river/stream. It wasn't as wide as the Cua Viet River, but it was at least 3 times as wide as the Cam Lo River.

Time to go. Ronnie and I buttoned up and prepared to ford. I went first and the other vehicles followed behind me. The water rushing past the vision blocks still haunts my dreams. The fact that the turret was facing forward meant I couldn't get out of my compartment the normal way in case I drove into a hole or the engine just quit and I needed to escape. Luckily, none of that happened.

Once across, we set up a perimeter on the north side of the river. The grunts had a look around and found a small bunker back in the tree line. There was nothing in the bunker and

it was blown in place. We broke open the C-rations, ate, mounted up, and crossed back over the river and landed back at C-4.

Nothing else happened. There was no contact. In fact, there was no sign of the NVA, save the bunker. It turned out to be pretty much of a bust.

Were we looking for some sort of enemy information or intelligence or a sign of troop movement? I never knew. The fact is they don't tell lance corporals the real dope very often, anyway. Did we, in fact, cross the Ben Hai River into the North? Damned if I know! There is only one thing I am sure of and that is there no other river north and west of C-4.

Editor's Note: Please note that this wonderful story started when “Hughie” attended one of our writing seminars during the 2017 VTA reunion in St Louis. After Frank “Tree” Remkiewicz got him started, Hughie's story unfolded. And >>

now here it is for all to read and enjoy. If you have even the smallest desire to tell a story, please plan to attend one of the free writing workshops that

“Tree” will conduct in Seattle. If you cannot attend the reunion but have a desire to write a story but need a little (or a lot of) help, you can contact

“Tree” at Phone: 209-996-8887 or email at: fremkiewicz@gmail.com

Four Tales from the Cherry Arms Apartments – 1965

Our Off-Base Weekend Escape Place
BY BILL “LURCH” LOCKRIDGE

THE PUMPKIN and how BOB LIESEGANG got his nickname “The Pisser”:

Our apartment located on the third floor contained two large bedrooms, a very large walk-in closet, head, fully equipped kitchen, a combo eating area and living room with TV, and a balcony that looked down at our landlady’s (who was really the apartment complex manager) ground floor patio.

During weekends when we were not required to be at TBS, the place was hopping from Friday night through Sunday night...one party to the next.

Dick Nagle loved to decorate. He built a wall of beer cans floor to ceiling that hid our kitchen from the front door. Remember, he loved “Mr. Reds” as he called them—beer with tomato juice, I believe.

One evening, a couple of weeks before Halloween, he and Bob Liesegang decided we needed to add a Halloween touch to our apartment. So, off they went in search of something appropriate. Late that night they returned with a rather large but aging pumpkin that they said they had “found” along a road. The pumpkin was placed in honor on our balcony.

Halloween passed, but pumpkin stayed outside weathering more and more as time moved along. One mild Saturday afternoon after a wild night before, a bunch of us were in the living room watching TV when Liesegang came staggering down the hallway. He needed fresh air and went out onto the balcony. Suddenly we heard him say “Good-by, pisser,” and he threw pumpkin off the balcony. Our landlady was hosting a little party below when pumpkin hit her patio deck and exploded. I can still hear her screams today.

Afterwards, Bob’s nickname became “The Pisser.” So, now you all know. However, while both Bob and Dick admit that the story is true, they both claim that they were at the library the day pumpkin went over the side. I don’t buy their alibi because I was there that day.

How BILL LOCKRIDGE got his nickname “Lurch”:

Recall, our apartment had two large bedrooms and a large walk-in closet. Since I was the last person to sign-up on the rent, I got the closet. A small fold-out bed was placed inside that allowed me to sleep when needed.

One Saturday morning, after a heavy night before of partying, I was asleep in my closet. Out in the living room, Pisser and Butch Neal were watching The Adams Family. Remember, The Adams Family had a butler named Lurch who lived in their closet. Well, the next scene, as I was later told, had Lurch coming out of the closet. All of a sudden I heard them calling, “Hey Lurch, time to get up.” So, out I came only to hear them laughing their asses off as I stumbled along the hallway. Thereafter, I became “Lurch” Lochridge.

The nickname followed me to Vietnam and on to 3rd TK BN. When I was assigned as 2nd Platoon Commander, Bravo Company, 3rd TKs, my company CO was Capt. Ev Tunget. He would get on the radio and instead of asking for Bravo 2 (my actual call sign) he would say something like, “Where the hell are you Lurch,” or “So, Lurch, how many enemy KIAs did you guys get today?” And, so it went on and on with Lurch this, and Lurch that. Even our BN Commander LtCol Bill Cor-

son started calling me Lurch. In briefings he would stand up and announce that Lt. Lurch Lochridge was next to speak. One thing I do know was that I never sounded nor looked like—I hope—the Lurch in The Adams Family series.

I don’t ever recall telling my parents about my nickname—they just wouldn’t understand. Besides, by the time I got back to the “World” I was Capt. Lurch to my wonderful friends.

The FETAL PIG SOCIETY:

As I recall, one of our roommates who had graduated from VMI brought along a fetal pig in a jar that was placed on a shelf above our TV set. When asked about it, he said it was used as an award to the ugliest girl that he and his brothers, who had searched around the local town for such fine ladies, and then brought them to a beer and booze party. At precisely 12 Midnight they would all vote on who had brought in the ugliest girl. Then the award was presented.

Well, not to be outgunned a few of our roommates and guests decided to resurrect the event. I don’t remember who they were, but they did it. I was away that night on a hot date. Perhaps, Pisser, Nagle, and/or Neal can advise us about this incident?

LAST STAND of OUR LANDLADY:

It was another mild Saturday night. Our balcony doors were wide open, and our heavy loud music and voices penetrated the night. That was until our landlady blew a fuse. Out onto her patio she went yelling for us to stop the noise or she would come up and give us hell.

We knew she had a pass key that

would allow her to enter. However, before she arrived we toned down the music, and slowly turned all of our furniture up-side down and scattered around. Even the TV was placed face down on the floor. To add realism to the scene, someone was placed under our couch that was just to the right of our front door, with his arm stuck out and we poured ketchup over it. Man, it looked a major fight had taken place. A couple of other guys were laid out on the floor too among scattered beer cans.

So, now it was the time to execute the plan. First, the door chain was secured so that she could not get inside. Then, the music was turned up to high volume that was also joined with

screams that filled the parking lot below and of course her patio too.

As expected, she ran up the stairs and put her pass key into our door lock. While the door chain stopped her from coming inside she could see just enough off to the right where the arm with “blood” stuck out from under the couch. Screaming and hysterical she ran back down to her apartment. We knew she would call the police to come. So, quickly we cleaned up the place and sat down watching TV. Several minutes went by when she and the police arrived. We opened the door and told them that nothing had happened; it was simply our crazy landlady again trying to get us into trouble. The cops looked around and

Rat Patrol

BY: DICK PEKSENS

ambush. Our CO, Captain Tom Roberts went all the way to Division trying to prevent these suicide missions.

Charlie Company was unsuccessful in escaping this new task and the mission began as scheduled. I took one of the first rides up the pitch black road with the jeep leading the way. It was a unsettling feeling knowing that, if ambushed, we had no grunts to give us fire protection from RPGs. The second week of this madness resulted in one of our tanks hitting a command detonated 200-pound bomb which had been placed under a small bridge along the MSR. The enemy had let the jeep pass before detonating the bomb.

Recollections

BY: GREG KELLEY

Da Nang to west of Hue. I was a PFC at the time and was the Gunner on Alpha 2-4, 3rd Tanks for most of ‘67. We were attached to various operations and we spent time at The Washout, Con Thien, Gio Linh, Cam Lo, and places in between. We ran through the DMZ just into North Vietnam several times on quick strikes. I forget which operation it was, but we got caught and almost entirely surrounded while on a

found nothing wrong. They simply said for us to keep the music down and to close our balcony doors. Our landlady couldn’t even speak except to say that she would get us big time.

Well, the big time came when our Basic School Platoon Commander, 1st Lt. Herb Pierpan showed up the following weekend after the event had occurred with our landlady in tow. Herb was really pissed off about his “boys” and their conduct that they had displayed. We were grounded to Base the following weekend, and by mid-November – just before our Little Creek, VA training was to start—we were out of the Cherry Arms Apartment forever.

The grunts in the jeep claimed that the tank was blown 4-5 feet off the ground by the explosion. The infantry reaction platoon was sent to the sight and the tank crew was taken to First Med. Amazingly, none of the tank crew was killed. The driver had his legs broken in multiple spots by the tank batteries and everyone had a mild to serious concussion. The crew was evacuated to the hospital ship off the coast of Da Nang. In the enclosed photo, you may note the lack of road wheels and the infra-red night light. That was the last “Rat Patrol”.

major operation into North Vietnam. The grunts took very heavy casualties in that engagement.

(Editor’s comment: Greg ran into 1st Sgt Barnett Person who was the Plt. Sgt. for that run to the DMZ and who was awarded the Silver Star for his actions...and boy did the sea stories fly around the room!)

We got hit very badly at The Washout one night. My tank >>

commander at the time was a Gunny, but can't remember his name. I think that he had been pulled out of stateside recruiting duty. It damn well could have been Gunny (RB) English. Whoever it was, I remember he got hit in the eye with shrapnel one night & medevaced out the next day. We were overrun at The Washout...I don't remember if it was the same night that the Gunny took the shrapnel. Ben Cole was on the north side of The Washout for some of the time we were there. I went through about 5 or 6 tank commanders and I'm embarrassed that I can't remember any names very well. "Nicodemus" was one TC while at Gio Linh for a while. We were overrun at Con Thien too. I spent 43 days there jumping from trench to trench while the horrendous incoming came in. We got really good at knowing which

ones were close and which ones you didn't have to jump for. I read the account of "My Two Days at Con Thien" written by John Wear, and chills ran up my spine as I remembered an incident incredibly similar that happened on road sweep out of Con Thien while I was on Alpha 2-4, two tanks and a handful of grunts just like this account. We got hit badly. As I recall, we were "suckered" into it by small arms. The tanks were committed deeply into the tree line a hundred yards or so off the road, and one was pretty much knocked out. It was such a blur and it's been so long that I only recall a few details. I was the gunner on 2 - 4; we were firing .30 cal. and canister rounds like crazy and one of the canister rounds broke open into the breach of the 90 when we were rocketed, disabling it with the slugs jamming it. I remember the

same air-strike that was so close that it sucked the loader's hatch open. I recall jumping out with my loader (it could have been Lance Corporal Calderon?) to attach the cable and hooks to the other tank to pull it out while we were getting showered with small arms and machine-gun fire. I recall one or more crewmen from the "other tank" were wounded, and one was hit in the thigh pretty badly. I recall thinking "he got the million dollar wound". I recall having to leave one of the grunts in the trees screaming. I recall sweeping the area a couple of days later with a couple of squads and a few tanks, and finding the grunt who had been screaming. The NVA had tortured him badly before he died. Was this the same incident? Too much the same not to be, I think.

Flags on Tanks

BY: JOHN WEAR

I recently got an email from the wife of an Active Duty Marine officer who asked me why I thought that Marines flaunt the rules and why they sometime get away with it. She questioned the recent use of a pirate flag mounted on the antenna of a fighting vehicle. It reminded me of an interesting story that happened at Dong Ha in the summer of 1968:

One of our tank crews from Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks had captured a fairly large North Vietnamese battle flag during a large sweep operation conducted just below the DMZ in the summer of 1968. After the operation, the tank came back to the company headquarters located on the sprawling Dong Ha Combat Base (about ten miles south of the DMZ). Once inside of the main gate, the crew unfurled the captured enemy flag and mounted it on the radio antenna. As the tank barreled down the road there were many terrified REMFs (in the rear with the gear non-combat types) who mistakenly thought that an NVA tank was running amok inside the



Marine base. A couple of MP trucks chased after the tank (at a distance... after all it was a fully combat loaded 52-ton tank) to make sure that all was OK. After the tank ended its run to the tank ramp, the crew got chewed out for driving too fast and causing a

dust storm...the brass did not care about displaying the flag!!!

UPDATE: I was speaking on the telephone to one of our members about us both being in Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks in 1968 when he told me that his tank had been on an operation with one of the 3rd Mar. Div. grunt outfits. The grunts had captured a large NVA flag, and when his tank returned to Dong Ha for quarterly maintenance, he flew the flag on his radio aerials and got in a little trouble for doing so. I am sorry that my age and brittle mind has somehow misplaced his name. If he would give me a call and kick me in the butt, I will reveal his name in the next issue of our magazine.

Pickup Truck to the Rescue

BY: FRED KELLOGG

In November I attended a reunion held by the 2nd BN/1st Marines in New Orleans. During one of the meetings (actually a welcome hour on the 1st day—Cheese and Wine Hour) I met a person who was being held upright by a woman. They came over to where I was sitting and asked if I happened to be one of the tankers involved in the ambush outside the gates of Khe Sanh on May 19th, 1968. I said yes, and the guy started talking about the tanks that were involved. I was surprised he knew so much about my particular tank and the one crewed by Lieutenant Himes. As we talked he became very emotional and began to shake uncontrollably. I later asked the woman (turned out to be his wife) if he was suffering from PTSD, palsy or some other malady. She explained that most of it was from PTSD and I told her that reunions were the best therapy and that I would let people know to welcome him and make him feel comfortable.

Here is the story:

On May 19th, this person, Peter Ambrose, was a newbie at the Khe

Sanh combat base when they heard all the gun fire from an ambush taking place down the road. Soon, someone driving a military pick-up truck came screeching to a stop and slid sideways "just like you see in the movies" according to another Marine who was there. The driver began shouting that there were wounded Marines that needed help and he needed volunteers to go get them. Peter jumped into the truck bed as another newbie jumped into the front seat—the three of them then headed into the maelstrom.

Hime's tank was blocking the road and burning furiously so they drove around it and stopped. Using the burning tank as cover they pulled the wounded Marines out of a bomb crater and manhandled them into the truck. So close were they to the burning tank the rescuers suffered burns. With grenades exploding all around and hand-to-hand combat taking place a few yards away they managed to get everyone to the aid station in time to save their lives.

Here's the best part: The other Marine who had jumped into the front

seat of that pick-up truck was also at the reunion. I had met him several years ago and knew his story, so I brought him over and introduced him to Peter. They both lit up and gave each other a big hug. Within 10 to 15 minutes Peter was happily chatting away and it appeared that a lot of his shaking had begun to subside. I walked over to his wife and told her to take a look at her husband—he was having the time of his life. In my opinion, it was just what Peter needed to begin closure.

Peter was excited to talk with me and appeared to love tanks. I later found out that he had gotten out of the Marines, but later tried to re-enlist for tanks. The Marines told him he was too old and they wouldn't allow the re-enlistment. So like any other motivated Marine he marched himself down to the Army recruiter and enlisted with a tank guarantee. Peter even made Desert Storm serving in his beloved tanks.

What are the odds of having two of the three Marines at the same reunion who were in the same pickup truck that morning??

Go Get Me Another One

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

A very small female North Vietnamese soldier named Ho was conscripted into the North Vietnamese Army in 1968 when she was 14 years old. Ho didn't have much education or experience other than working in the family rice paddies and sometimes tending water buffalo, a job her older brother usually did.

After a short indoctrination period, Ho was assigned to the 475th Ammunition Resupply Company which was based in a suburb of Hanoi near an ammunition dump. Ho's sergeant Nguyen impressed upon Ho and the other young and inexperienced conscripts how important their mission

was and how critical it was that they be successful in their war against the imperialists. Little Ho and her team mates were motivated and ready to help bring victory.

Ho was issued new sandals and a uniform that was way too big for her, and then issued a single 82mm mortar round. Ho and her team mates asked themselves, it's just one round, how hard can this be? That was before they began the long march south along the Ho Chi Minh trail to re-supply the NVA 325th Division who was engaged against the 3Rd Marine Division in Northern I Corps.

After over two months of con-

stantly marching at night through heat, rain and mud, up hills, through valleys and enduring nightly B-52 bombing with little or no sleep and having nothing to eat each day but a few grains of rice and what they could forage, Little Ho's resupply column finally reached its objective close by Co Roc mountain.

Quang, Ho's team leader, called the ammo humpers up one at a time, unceremoniously took their ammo and placed it in a small but growing pile with the other 82mm rounds. Ho was stunned and just stood there dumbfounded. She was wet, tired, muddy and hungry. >>

Her sergeant saw this and said. “Little Ho, what are you waiting for?”

Don’t just stand there. Go back and get another one.”

Little Ho deserted the NVA shortly after her return to Hanoi.

Three Strikes and You’re Out

BY: RICK ELLIS
2 July 2018

I was a platoon commander with A Company 1st Tanks early in 1968. I had been in the field for quite a while, and some of my troops were having pay issues. I got on the horn with the Company 1st Sergeant, and he said, “Lieutenant, you haven’t been back in the rear in a long while. Why don’t you swing by here, and get the records of the men who are experiencing problems. You can go spend the night at Battalion H.Q., and have a good meal and a few drinks at the O’ Club, then go to Division the next day and talk to the Comptroller weinies. I’ll square it with the Skipper.”

That sounded good to me, so a couple of days later I pulled into Battalion H.Q., and had the shock of my life. My guys were still wearing the old green jungle utes. They were all tattered, torn, and pitted with holes from battery acid. Most of them had knees that were frayed or split. The Marines at Battalion H.Q. were all wearing brand spanking new camouflage utilities. They all had blocked covers and spit shined boots. In comparison I looked like Joe Shit the Ragman. I ran straight over to Battalion Supply and whipped out my notebook. I had the personal data on my troops, including clothing sizes, and I was going to order 2 sets of the new utilities for everyone. I felt like Santa Claus. “Sorry Lieutenant,” I was told. “We have a limited number of the new uniforms, so they are only for Battalion H.Q. personnel because they are more likely to go to Division H.Q., and the old man wants them to look sharp when they do.” I demanded to speak to the Battalion Supply Officer, a major, and tried to plead

my case. My guys were in the field where the action was, and they deserved new clothes before a bunch of rear echelon commandos. I was getting really angry and about to get in trouble; but the major, who I am sure had heard this before from others, calmed me down and told me he would get us some of the new uniforms as soon as they came in. Strike one.

I was only slightly mollified when I went to Division H.Q. the next day. I had a few other errands to run for the Skipper, so I got there late in the morning and was directed to the Comptroller area, a long series of hard back hootches. I didn’t know which of the hootches had our pay personnel, so I stuck my head into the first one to inquire, and there was no one there. I went to the second, then the third, then the fourth with the same result. Finally I called out, “Is anybody here?” No answer. I was pissed. I walked back and forth muttering about “rear with the gear, non-hacking jackasses,” and a few harsher expletives. My guys were either on ops, or worked on the tanks all day and stood guard every night. They got little sleep, and these jack wagons were enjoying a long lunch! Suddenly a high pitched voice piped up from somewhere close by. “You don’t understand, Lieutenant, we work until 1700 every night and half a day on Saturday.” I completely lost it. “Where are you, you little pencil dick?” I screamed. Dead silence. I finally cooled off, and later that day got my pay issues resolved. I never forgot, however, how those in support can be out of touch with the reality of what front-line Marines are going through. Strike two.

Another interesting evolution was the shoulder holster incident. When I checked in to Battalion and drew my gear, all they had for issue was hip holsters. Tankers were supposed to have shoulder holsters, but few of us at the company level did. I noted, however, that a lot of the officers and SNCOs at Battalion had shoulder holsters, even though none of them had anything to do with tank operations.

Several months later my platoon was guarding a bridge way out in the toolies. One afternoon a jeep with a trailer pulled into my CP. An officer hopped out and asked me how many tank crewmen I had at that site. I told him, and he and his driver started offloading boxes of shoulder holsters from the trailer. He gave me a shoulder holster for each man, and a couple of extras “just in case.” I asked him what was going on, and he told me that a Marine had written to his congressman claiming that several tank commanders had been killed or injured by snipers when they had gotten hung up trying to get down into the turret because they were wearing hip holsters. He said in his letter that the people at Battalion H.Q. had the gear that the troops needed, and they only had it because they thought it made them look cool. How true his allegation was I don’t know. I do know, however, that shortly thereafter shoulder holsters began raining out of the sky. It was decreed that every crewman WOULD have a shoulder holster, and he would have it yesterday. Amazing how one angry congressman can get results when common sense cannot? Strike three. ■

THE DAY WE SET OUR TANK ON FIRE

BY DENNIS MARTIN
F-13 Crew: TC Dennis Martin; Gunner Gary Lisowski; Driver Lee Dill
October 1968

First, some background on me. After tank school they sent me to Camp LeJeune for my first duty station with 2nd Tanks. There were three gun tank companies and H&S Company. Alpha and Bravo were M-48, 90mm gun tank companies; Charlie Company was M-103, 120mm gun tanks, and H&S Company had two platoons of M-48’s and one platoon of M-67 flame tanks.

I was assigned to F-13, which was an M-67 flamer. I spent nine months shooting flames before they sent me to Vietnam. When I got to Nam they assigned me to Alpha Co. and made me a driver on A-22, a gun tank.

After Hue City, the Flame Section Leader, W. C. Davis (who was originally from Michigan, not far from my home) was getting ready to rotate back to the World so they needed a replacement for him. I don’t remember why they didn’t put Ray Drews in that position (maybe he was a “short-timer” too) since he had vastly more experience than me. I was a fresh-from-stateside corporal with maybe one month in-country. I believe that they were desperate. I don’t think anyone else had any experience with the flames, so that’s how I got to be Section Leader.



Dennis Martin and Gary Lisowski doing morning PM on the ignitors

Now.....”THE DAY WE SET THE TANK ON FIRE”....this is what I remember. That day started out slow. Nothing happening that morning. At the noon formation, Captain Montgomery called me out and said that the engineers wanted us to help them burn out some brush where they were going to string up concertina wire for the perimeter fence. The crew of F-13: Martin, Dill and Lisowski were released from the formation and headed out to help the engineers.

We had a load of napalm already mixed and pressurized on the tank, so when they showed us what they wanted, we went right to work. As you know, 360 gal. of napalm doesn’t go very far and the weeds were green to boot. We used up that load and went back to mix another load. I seem to recall that we did that task about three times before we got sick of mixing the shit. Then came the bright idea of mixing our own “cocktail” out of diesel and gasoline. I actually think that was Lee Dill’s idea since it was quick and easy. After all, it wasn’t like we had anything strategic to burn, just a massive bunch of green weeds.



Applying our “cocktail” to the weeds
With the first load of our “cocktail” everything seemed to be going well. I think it was the second or maybe third load the next day that we caught the tank on fire.
What we didn’t know was that, while the firing >>



control valve did a good job of holding back the napalm until you opened it to fire, but it was not designed to hold back liquids. Our “cocktail” leaked past the control valve and dripped out onto the fender of the tank. Ooops!!!

Lisowski hit the snuffer valve and put out the fire on the tube itself, but the “cocktail” continued to leak and the fire on the ground reignited the fender and the tube. I yelled for the driver to back up, but he did not respond. It seems



that he recognized an opportunity to take some sensational photos and was out of the driver’s hatch snapping pictures.

Thinking back on it, there would be no record of the incident had our resourceful driver not been thinking outside the box ... or should I say “outside the tank.” The Flame Tank Gods were smiling on us that day. We traversed the turret with gun hanging over the side and watched as the remaining diesel and gas mixture leaked onto the ground and burn itself out. As I remember, that was our last load ... or at that point the engineers wanted no more part of our services! ■

Photo from Vietnam



RL Smith, JM Hunter and
SJ Williams aboard the Pt.
Defiance LSD-31 in Subic Bay,
PI, 1965 heading to Chu Lai

Was I Only Dreaming?

BY TERRY WALLACE

I remember few details about my Vietnam tour except for the significant things that were stamped into my head. Most names, faces, dates, operations, places, and other details were lost soon after my tour ended. Except for a few close friends, notable places, and significant events, most of my memories are blurry at best. The memories I do have are sensory impressions that play in my mind all the time in living color, with sounds, smells, and emotion. They have left indelible marks.

I can still picture the faces of a few friends; some wild card games; dark, rainy nights standing watch in turrets or bunkers shivering under a poncho; driving tanks through all kinds of terrain and dusty roads; paddy dike breaching; the pounding of the 90; clattering of 50s and 30s; the smell of gasoline and napalm; you get the picture. C-rats and C4, explosions, and maintenance; things Vietnam tankers lived with.

I remember the moods: the forever wait for rotation home, fear of incoming, longing for mail, and frustration over delayed firing orders from command. Above all, the miserable taste of an unwelcoming homecoming has lingered on and poisoned me for all these years.

Then, a couple of years ago in PTSD therapy, I recalled the Godzilla of my memories: the sights, sounds, and smells of the day I drove over the mother of all mines in my flame tank. I guess I had been locking that one away for a very long time. Of all my memories, this is now the clearest one and the most detailed. While I have no names and no idea of the location, the pictures and smells of that day will never leave me. Here is my story:

On a clear afternoon, I was driving our flame tank down a road at cruising speed, the second tank in a column of three from Charlie 1. We are on our way to relieve another unit, or to rescue somebody, or something else urgent.

I was enjoying the drive, as I have always loved to drive, and I think I could see Marble Mountain off to my right, which would indicate that we were heading west or southwest. I also remember there was a bridge in the distance where we were heading, since we had traveled that road before. As always, I was paying attention to tracking the tank in front of me.

Suddenly, I felt the tank lurch violently upward from my left; all sounds we’re silenced, and everything went black. It was an eerie feeling, as if I were not even there. The only sensation I remember is the strong smell of cordite. Other than that it was like I was unconscious in a black and soundless place. I didn’t even hear the explosion.

I don’t know how long I was out, but the next thing I remember was a headache and a disoriented feeling as I sat

in the motionless driver’s compartment trying to collect my thoughts. It was then that I noticed my crew members scurrying down to my compartment from the turret to see if I was alright. Relieved that they were unhurt, the next feeling I had was one of extreme anger. For some reason the only thing I could think of was the injustice of it all. After all, I had been tracking! I was pissed that I had been doing my job and I’d still hit a mine. In my upset state I didn’t consider that it was perhaps command detonated or set for the second tank, something that the VC did because they pretty much hated flames.

Contrary to any reasonable order or instinct, I climbed out of the hatch, jumped to the ground, and started yelling to anyone who would listen about the fact that I had been tracking and that I couldn’t believe this happened. I now know that that could have killed me and possibly some others, but I was not thinking very clearly then. Surveying the damage, I noticed that there was no track on the left side, the top three support rollers and first three road wheels we’re gone, and the fenders were warped and cleared of anything that had been up there.

My crewmates and a bunch of others herded me to the other side of the tank, where they were trying to calm me down. I believe I was still in a daze, and I still had a headache, so I don’t remember much about the conversation. But I do remember the face of someone, who I think was a sergeant, ask me if I wanted him to put in for a purple heart for me. I was outraged at the suggestion, partly because I was in denial about being hurt at that point, and partly because I felt I didn’t deserve one since so many had been badly mangled and I was still in one piece.

I don’t remember how that mission ended, how I got back to the tank park, or much of anything else. I do know that the remaining month or two of my tour went by in a daze, and that I think I remember helping to dismantle damage to the tank. To my surprise, I was told that the force of the blast had ejected the escape hatch under the driver’s compartment, and had warped the hull and cracked it from the forward point in front of the driver’s hatch to the bottom of the tank. I was also told that the tank would need to be scrapped. I have attached a picture that I took of the damaged tank during the period when we were working on it.

If you are still with me on this, then fast forward to present day. During my VA treatment for PTSD, as many of us have had to undergo, I was diagnosed with a TBI, which my VA neurologist says, based on symptoms, testing, and MRI, was likely due to the mine explosion. The memory loss, con-

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THE HUT 4 CHRISTMAS TREE

BY: STEPHEN FALK, H&S COMPANY, 1ST TANKS

Editor’s Note: Since this is the last issue of our magazine for the year, it seems only fitting that we feature a Christmas story.

It was Advent, 1967. I hadn’t been home in over a year and was feeling a little lonely, even though I had my friends around. I had begun to receive a few Christmas cards, some from friends, some from family, and a bunch from people I did not know in Palo Alto, California.

I realized that though some things were just as they had been, something was missing, something was really missing. I needed to have a Christmas tree. Gary Felix had just gotten some Christmas lights from his wife Nancy. He plugged them in in his hut, and there was a difference in his attitude, and the ambience of his hut. I realized what was missing: a Christmas tree.

I ran into Monte and told him what I was thinking. Next we told Kenny and both of them agreed that we needed a tree in Hut 4. But where were we going to get a tree? It seemed easy. It seemed simple. We would go cut down a tree. But, there weren’t any Christmas trees in Vietnam. Well, we were Marines, we could do anything. We could surely find a Christmas tree, even if it seemed there wasn’t one to be found.

The day was winding down and we had no assignments pending, so we decided to leave right away. We walked up to the motor pool, grabbed a Jeep, and drove out the front gate. We drove straight down the road toward “Petticoat Junction” and headed toward the airfield. There wasn’t anything around that looked much at all like a Christmas tree. But we had to come up with a tree—it wouldn’t be Christmas without a tree. We had already forgotten about an 8-foot blue spruce or a douglas fir, or even a lowly balsam. We kept driving around, but we didn’t find anything.

Suddenly, something caught my eye. It wouldn’t be anything like the tree at Rockefeller Center, but it was a tree, it was an evergreen, it would have to do!

Before we left the motor pool, I had remembered to take the fire axe from the cab of the fuel tanker; we needed an axe to cut down our tree. So, upon seeing what would be our Christmas tree, we pulled off the road, took out the axe, and set out to hew down our tree.

Well, the tree was small, and full of life, but it was vibrant and resisted the axe. My effort to cut the tree with one mighty blast failed. Monte tried it next, but he, too, failed. Kenny laughed at both of us, knowing he could do better, he took the axe and had a go of it. Each mighty swing just bounced off, and the tree continued to stand. Finally the trunk yielded to the axe. One more swing and the tree came down, but, as it did, we heard yelling in Vietnamese. Looking around we saw an indigenous Vietnamese waving

his arms, gesticulating vehemently, and going back into his house. He emerged quickly with a shotgun. We understood clearly what he was trying to say, or what he was indeed saying in Vietnamese.

The next few seconds were a jumble of activity, confusion, and laughter. All three of us tried to jump behind the wheel, grab the tree, get away from the threat, and not forget the other two, the tree, the axe, or anything else. We were in deep sand, and the Jeep had to be put in the lower transfer case for traction. It was slow in low, but finally got moving. The Vietnamese guy began to fire at us. Luckily he was no marksman. We could not tell how accurately he tried to shoot, but we were unscathed.

Hurriedly, we returned along the road to Petticoat Junction. I don’t remember who was driving. I’m not sure any of us remembers driving, but we got away... And we had a tree!

Upon returning to the compound, we were joyful and we bragged to everyone that Hut 4 was going to have a real Christmas tree. Well, most of us had seen Charles Shultz’s “Charlie Brown’s Christmas Tree” and this would be our version of that tree.

We had no Christmas tree stand, and the trunk was so crooked it would not stand even if we had a stand. We wired it to the wall of our hut. Marcia had sent a few decorations to liven the hut for Christmas. A few of the other guys also had decorations, but not much. Upon seeing our tree, Gary generously took down his lights and we put them on the tree. It was beautiful! It was marvelous! It was beyond expectation. We would not have to go through Christmas without a tree.

We were later told to report to the officer of the day who chastised us for going out without permission, without weapons, seemingly without sense. But we were happy. The many pictures of the guys who lived in Hut 4 and our friends in front of the tree bring back memories of the time when we were brothers who shared life together.

The Christmas Celebration

Collectively, if not any “pull,” we had connections. Among the guys in Huts Three and Four we could influence, sometimes outright change assignments, duty rosters and the like. No one among us saw this ability as wrong or detrimental to others; it did, however help in such things as planning a Christmas party. My little part, besides obtaining the tree and decorations, was to make sure we had food. I had a connection with the mess hall. This meant we would at least have ham, cheese, and maybe a steak or two. I had written home to Marcia to send a bottle of whiskey. The request included directions for mailing. A loaf of Italian bread hollowed out served both to disguise

(Continued on page 34)

Photo from Vietnam

Submitted by Dick Peksens



Charlie Co., 1st Tanks—1969



Two Tours in RVN Compared

BY KEN ZEBAL

Generally speaking, in the early 60's it seemed like we were a peacetime Marine Corps. Men on three or four-year enlistments were accustomed to spit and polish, inspections and being driven to perfection by NCOs, SNCOs and Officers. We knew the tank, its guns, and OEM equipment inside and out. We learned by On the Job Training (OJT) under the critical eyes of NCOs and SNCOs – our so-called “tank school” was practical application, both on the ramp and in the field.

Those few NCOs with combat experience had earned it in Korea. Many NCOs had been on a crisis deployment



such as Lebanon '58, Thailand '60, and Cuba '62, but by and large there was no actual combat experience in the NCO ranks. On the other hand, most of the SNCOs had combat experience from Korea, WWII or both. The same was true for our officers. Most field grade officers had combat experience and most company grade officers did not.

Tony Pinnetti and I got our orders to the 3RD MARDIV on Okinawa at the same time, and after leave we hitchhiked across the US to Camp Pendleton for processing at Staging Battalion. At the time, Staging Battalion seemed like an administrative holding place; lectures, inspections and down time. We rode busses down the Pacific Coast Highway (there was no freeway then) from Camp Pendleton to the B-Street Pier in San Diego and embarked on the MST ship General Hugh G. Gaffey for the trip to Okinawa, with stops in Honolulu and Yokohama. On board the ship there were lots of Marines, some Army, and some dependents; including wives, children, and their pets. All this was very heady stuff for a 19-year-old. After being at sea for a few weeks, we finally docked at Naha, Okinawa. The 3rd MARDIV band, including a group of dancing Geishas, was there

to greet us, as was a fleet of 6x6 trucks with signs indicating which battalion it was from. Tony and I went directly to the 3rd Tank Battalion truck for our ride to Camp Hansen.

On Okinawa, our platoon was attached to BLT 3/3. We were in the field all of the time and had been training with



3/3 for months and months before mounting out one night from Camp Hansen for White Beach. At White Beach, our tanks took on a full combat load of ammunition and then loaded on landing craft (LCM-8s or LCUs) to embark on the USS Thomaston (LSD 28). We weighed anchor and headed south for Viet Nam.

On 12 May, 1965, BLT 3/3 landed across the beach at Chu Lai, secured the force beachhead line, and moved in-



land toward Highway 1 and Objective One, which was a series of hills overlooking Highway 1 and the Marine expeditionary airfield. However, we weren't the first ones to land at Chu Lai; 2/4 had already landed as had the Seabees who were hard at work laying down an expeditionary landing strip for A-4s and F-4s.

At Chu Lai we wore green sateen utilities, leather boots, and had to have our sleeves rolled down. After a week or so the 3/3 CO decided it was okay to take our utility jackets off when doing PM on our tanks – rules and regulations

were like that back then.

We washed our clothes in the ocean, and after they dried we beat them on the slope plate and then rubbed and shook them to get the salt off because, as we had learned, salt causes nasty rashes in sweaty places. We even wore skivvies for a while. After we ran out of gun rags we used our skivvies as gun rags and began wearing “jungle skivvies,” but we never gave up our socks.

Usually, a section of tanks stayed in reserve at the 3/3 CP and the other section was direct support to one of the rifle companies on an outpost or patrol or a road sweep. We had strictly enforced Rules of Engagement (ROE) back then. It was common for us to take enemy sniper fire or automatic weapons fire and then ask permission to return fire, only to have it denied a half-hour later, even when we could clearly see the Viet Cong shooting at us. We had enemy incoming from time to time, but it was usually only mortars. On the other hand, there were a lot of anti-personnel mines and boobytraps, lots and lots of them. Punji stakes were common, too. The first KIA I saw was an ARVN who stepped on a mine and turned into a pink cloud of sorts with flying body parts. My first kill was an LBGB (little bitty gook boat) which attempted to run a 3/3's blockade on the Song Tra Bong.

Early in the war it took months to authorize hostile fire pay at \$55 a month and authorize franking privileges granting us free postage. We were initially authorized the Armed Forces Expeditionary Medal because the Viet Nam Service Medal hadn't been developed yet. There was no Armed Forces Radio (Good Morning Viet Nam) and no Stars & Stripes newspaper published. Back then our tanks had those big round incandescent searchlights – not Zenon and no flechette (beehive) rounds, no jungle utilities, and no jungle boots. As a rule, we ate C-rations, but we sometimes had one hot meal a day. We didn't have resupply problems either; we had plenty of ammo, fuel, water, C-rats, and, when we needed it, maintenance came to us as a contact team. Then too, the operational pace was manageable.

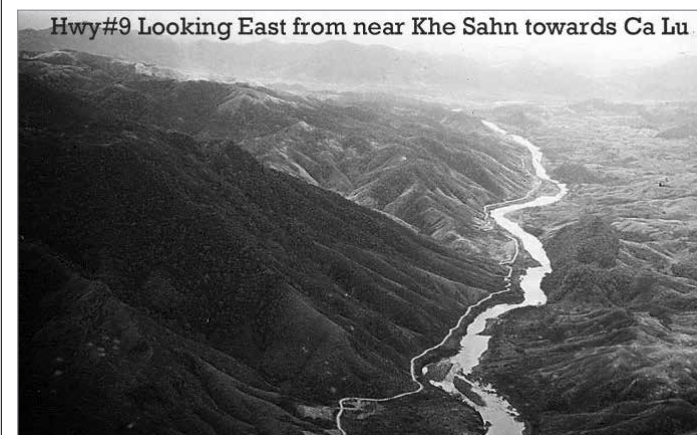
After OPERATION STARLITE, things changed. After the 7th Marines were added to the friendly Order of Battle, we began aggressively patrolling, establishing outposts on hills that had been LPs and Ops and we began enlarging the Chu Lai Tactical Area of Responsibility (TAOR). We went looking for fights. Our enemy was the Viet Cong with a few regular NVA, but not many. You may recall that the VC tactics were hit and run, mines and boobytraps, snipe and hide, and frustrate us by being elusive, and frustrate us they did. However, we learned quickly and adapted rapidly, and we took a heavy toll on the enemy everywhere we went. Over the course of my first tour our platoon had one Marine KIA, approximately 66% WIA and we also lost two tanks to enemy fire. I won't repeat here what's already been previously published in the Sponson Box about the aftermath of STARLITE, Hill 69, or Hill 54.

Back in the world, most Americans knew about Viet Nam and there were a few anti-war protests, but nothing remarkable. Campus protests focused more on the draft, racial equality issues, and women's liberation rather than war-related issues. The press spoke about escalation and troop build-ups but, again, it appeared fairly benign.

My second tour in RVN began in late March of 1968. This time Staging Battalion consisted of very few inspections with lots of field training. Due to the US political climate we took busses from Camp Pendleton to El Toro in the middle of the night and flew from El Toro on a civilian airliner full of Marines, and when we landed at Kadena there were no welcoming band or dancing Geishas this time, and we had no illusions about what was waiting for us. After a few days of administrative processing and lectures, we boarded another civilian airliner and flew from Oki to Da Nang. I am really not sure if those flights were Continental or another airline. Da Nang Air Freight had changed. My first visit to the Da Nang facility in 1965 revealed it to be about the size of a golf starter shack with one NCOIC, a piss-tube out back, and Marines lazing around waiting for their flight to R&R or elsewhere. In that short period of time, Air Freight had morphed into a large one-story cement-block building with an official check-in desk, waiting area, bunkers and a fully functioning head.

A group of us were quickly mustered for the C-130 ride to Dong Ha and then to 3RD MARDIV at Quang Tri. You guys remember C-130 rides, right? No seats, just walk in, link arms and sit down for the ride. From Dong Ha to Quang Tri and the 3rd Tanks CP was a short 6x6 truck ride. At battalion, along with the other FNGs, I was issued 782 gear and received several briefings by different people. Around the Battalion CP were two H&S Company gun tanks that had obviously been in the recent fighting at Hue. These tanks had bullet holes in the sponson boxes, fenders, vision blocks searchlights and gypsy rack ammo boxes, shrapnel dings on the turrets, and a few penetrations.

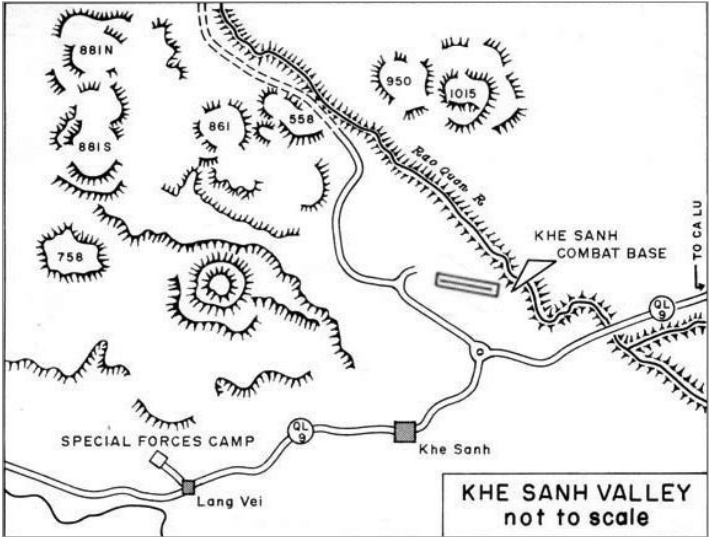
The next day, I checked in at Charlie company and caught a rough rider convoy to the 3rd platoon. The rough



rider ended up being a visual tour of places I was going to get to know: Dong Ha, Cam Lo, Gio Linh, Mutter's >>

Ridge, Rockpile, Camp Carroll, LZ Stud and Ca Lu. I checked in with the Plt. Sgt. at Ca Lu and was assigned as gunner on C-32. Almost immediately we received several incoming rockets. The platoon had already made the first run from Ca Lu to open up Highway 9 and had encountered plenty of enemy along the way. I was going up on a subsequent run. My job was to ground guide the tank once we got somewhere around Bridge 26 or 28, or someplace like that. So, I took the grease gun, the magazine pouch, and walked right down the center of Highway 9 with a platoon of grunts (I think) somewhere around and a platoon of tanks behind.

Our platoon was constantly busy. We ran two road sweeps each day, one from LZ Hawk to Ca Lu, and an-



other from LZ Hawk to Khe Sanh Combat Base keeping Highway 9 open. We usually had at least one tank at each company outpost which were at Bridge 34 and Bridge 36 on Highway 9. The one near Bridge 36 was interesting because it was a very small hill just off the road near where Highway 9 makes a left to Khe Sanh 'ville, Lang Vei, and points north, and the fork to the right went past the coffee plantation and that long straightway to KSCB which to the west looked like moonscape. We had defensive perimeter fire from Camp Carroll and Rockpile at the same time as NVA incoming 152's from Co Roc. It seemed like we couldn't win for losing. Being attached to 2/3 was a bit odd, since the Bn. CO was adamant about using single tanks rather than as sections—dangerous thinking. From each outpost we ran patrols to LZ Hawk with the infantry as well as defending their outpost positions. Bridge 36 was the most vulnerable, although Bridge 34 was the most isolated.

After Khe Sanh was evacuated and all the convoys had ceased, our platoon was sent to Gio Linh and ran patrols in and around the area between Cam Lo and The Washout. During my second tour there was one KIA, approximately 50% WIA, and we'd lost one tank to enemy fire.

In those days we were fighting the NVA. They were professional; organized, trained and equipped. We took a lot of



incoming from their rockets, 152mm arty and 82mm mortars, and then, there were the mines. Big anti-tank mines that would blow off road wheels, support rollers, the track, and/or warp the hull—lots and lots of AT mines. It was a target-rich environment, a free fire zone if you will, with very few, if any, rules of engagement. We were in an all-out war. The fighting was very different during my second tour. We had fewer firefights but they were much larger and much more deadly. During my first tour we were in frequent firefights but they were small, short in duration and, in general, not decisive. The enemy would hit and run, or even worse, we'd engage them and then they'd break contact and evade, which we found very frustrating. They were an elusive enemy. On my second tour the enemy, again, chose the time and place to fight but they did stay and fight.

Some of the officers were on their second combat tour as were some of the SNCOs. The troops, however, had a different situation. Many were on two-year enlistments and some had been drafted. At the time, it seemed like these men didn't know the vehicles very well, but they could fight. They didn't seem to know the guns very well either and crew maintenance suffered. There wasn't much love for the tanks back then, they were merely an instrument of war, not an object of affection that rode to war.

Envision a scenario where someone enlists, goes to boot camp (three months), ITR (one month), and boot leave (one month) before staging battalion (several weeks). Then they are sent to RVN and begin a 13-month tour; that's approximately 18 months give or take a few such as maybe a month or so of tank school. Then they return home for another month of leave and get an early out having honorably served for approximately 20 out of 24 months. This depicts a common scenario where young men enlist, go to war, and then return home having served their country in the truest spirit of the Roman Cincinnatus. Most of these men simply served their country honorably out of a sense of patriotism, expecting nothing in return. They weren't spit and polish stateside Marines, they didn't have months and months or years of training as 1811s. They enlisted, got trained, went to war and got out.

(Continued on page 32)

Quang Ngai, RVN-1969

BY CWO-5 STAN PRICE, USMC/USMCR (RET.)

It was January 1969 in the Quang Ngai province of Vietnam. We had just made the largest amphibious assault of the Vietnam War. We were participating in Operation Bold Mariner. That was just over 50 years ago.

Last year, in May 2018, I was attending the Red River Veterans Memorial Motorcycle Rally in Red River, New Mexico. It was just before they started the Veterans Motorcycle round trip ride to Angel Fire, New Mexico, that I saw it. I looked over to the side area and there was the "Traveling Wall," the one that has memorialized the Vietnam Veterans who have made the ultimate sacrifice. I trotted on over remembering Cpl. Amil Jackson. He was with us during Operation Bold Mariner in the Quang Ngai province. We had landed and pushed inland a ways when we got stuck in a minefield. One Marine had gotten injured. Cpl. Amil Jackson immediately jumped off his tank and, with the assistance of another Marine, put that injured Marine on a stretcher and were headed to a waiting medivac chopper (two heroes helping another Marine). I heard a loud explosion (bouncing Betty) about 75 ft. to my rear. I turned and there was Cpl. Jackson and the other two Marines lying on the ground, injured. The corpsmen were there almost immediately providing all the medical assistance that they could (bandages, tourniquets, etc.). More stretchers were brought up and all three were hustled to the waiting medivac chopper where they were immediately taken back to the ship for medical care. A couple of days later, we finally got word that Cpl. Jackson and the other two Marines had all died. A memorial service was held later for all three Marines.

When I returned to the states, I thought it might be nice if I could find Cpl. Amil Jackson's family and maybe add a little bit to their closure. I remembered that he had told me he was from San Antonio, Texas. That's where I started looking. Quickly, I found out that "Jackson" was a very common name and that this was going to be quite a challenge. I had sent out numerous inquiries over the next several years with no results. I had all but given up. Then, my motorcycle ride to Red River, New Mexico and the "Traveling Wall." I went over to his name and rubbed it with a pencil and a piece of paper. His name showed up on the piece of paper. There were several people there under a tent that looked like they were part of the "Traveling Wall," so I went over to them and asked if there was a way to find Cpl. Jackson's family. They said "no" but that I should look on the Wall's website, and that sometimes people wrote down information that might possibly be helpful for me. I wasn't aware there was

a website, so when I got home, I spun up the Wall's website up and there were several short paragraphs written by a half dozen people remembering Cpl. Jackson, each in their own way. About four of them had email addresses so I wrote them each a note inquiring about the Jackson family. I held little hope in receiving any info since none of the people I had just emailed had a "Jackson" last name.

A few weeks later, a lady named Lucia G. emailed me and said she had gone to high school with Cpl. Jackson and even had a crush on him, but she had no information about his family. She did say she would make some inquiries but made no promises. I thanked her, figuring that would be that last I heard from her. Surprisingly, a short time later, she emailed me back and said that Cpl. Jackson's mother had died in 2016 (she included the obituary), but she thought he still had a sister living in San Antonio, but with a different name. She gave me the name on Facebook, so I went there and messaged the new prospect.....noth-



ing. I waited for almost five months and no one responded. One day, I pulled up that Facebook page again, checking for a response, but nothing. I went to the “friend’s section” of the page and there was a man on her list with the same last name as hers (Cpl. Jackson’s sister). I messaged him and found out that he was her son, and “yes,” she was alive and living in San Antonio. He got her permission for me to contact her and I followed thru and did just that.

Wow, what a surprise. She was ecstatic to talk to someone who had been with Cpl. Jackson when he died. This was in January of 2019. I found also from our talk that Cpl. Jackson’s father had died even before Amil went into the USMC. I was never aware of that, so my hunting over the years was almost fruitless, as Cpl. Jackson’s mother had remarried and changed her name.... not a Jackson anymore.

Ironically (and by complete coincidence) I had to attend a Project Healing Waters Conference that was scheduled for the first weekend in March of this year. I asked her permission to see if maybe we could meet somewhere while I was in San Antonio. I was really apprehensive about this as sometimes bringing up these kinds of memories are too hard for some folks to handle, especially in face-to-face meetings. Well, she agreed, and we set a date and time to meet somewhere in San Antonio on Saturday, March 2, 2019. I had no idea where this would happen. To my surprise, she said she and her husband will be getting a hotel room at the same place where my Project Healing Waters Conference was being held and we could meet in their room after the day’s conference activities. So, at around 8:00PM, I knocked on the door. She opened the door and people behind her were taking pictures. Wow, I think I



Cpl. Amil Jackson is the dark-skinned marine in center with his head closest to the top of the pic. We were all just playing around that day, January 1969

was the one in shock. I was invited in and introduced to her husband and brother (also Cpl. Jackson’s brother). We all sat around and talked till almost midnight. It was a wonderful and emotional meeting. I left with an open invitation to come back and visit, and I offered them my home for them to come visit us in Colorado anytime. Cpl. Jackson’s memories have been refreshed.

So, why did I do this when so many folks said it was not necessarily a good idea? It’s because it’s all about remembering and not forgetting those who are not with us anymore in body. We can keep them alive (at least their memories) by remembering. They leave us a legacy of memories and we should cherish those memories. ■

Two Tours
(Continued from page 30)

The vehicles by that time had been in combat for a few years and had most of the major components swapped out. Logistics had matured, but then so had the operational tempo. One result was rushing to get things done which resulted in most things getting done and some things getting done right. The operational tempo drove short cuts that didn’t always save either time, money or lives. Because tanks were a high demand/low density asset, the demands were far greater than their availability. It’s entirely fair to say that battalion maintenance worked around the clock, 7-days a week, just to break even. One result was no down time and no slack. The learning curve for both enlisted Ma-

rines and officers was 90 degrees perpendicular, and they met the challenge time and again, much like those who fought in WWI, WWII and Korea, and is a tribute to Marine Corps training and esprit de corps.

Back in the world, it seemed like the whole country was talking about the war in Viet Nam. There were constant protests and the talking heads on TV were actively working against the American fighting man and the American people either by design or by default. Campus protests had turned violent and race was now a big issue, as was drugs. We were a nation divided and I choose to fix all the blame on politicians and the media. ■

.....
Photo from Vietnam



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



The Hut 4 Christmas Tree

(Continued from page 26)

and protect such liquid during mailing. The bottle arrived in time. Others made this request, as well, and things looked promising.

Monte's cousin Louis Troiano had a MUCH better connection. He managed to get an entire case of various spirits through manipulation of his resources in Da Nang. Louis helped make the party what it became. None of us, as I recall, had any duty Christmas Eve.

(L to R) Kent Harter, Steve Falk, Ken Morrissey, Carmine Montemarano, and Dale Welker.

I don't suppose there can be much precision in describing what actually went on. We ate, we drank,



we laughed, we cried. Cleverly, Monte set up a tape recorder for everyone to say just the right things people say on Christmas, but we were kids, we drank too much, made too much noise, and recorded little that could either record the history of the night, nor wisdom for the future. Many Marines visited the hut that night, though St. Nick didn't make it. Officers and Staff NCO's dropped in for a drink, as did many others. I only remember it seemed fitting, since I couldn't be home for Christmas, that I was with my Brothers.

Editor's note: As I think most of us are all aware that we lost long-time VTA member and prolific writer, Steve Falk, back in July of last year. This is the last story that he wrote to share in the Sponson Box magazine. We'll all meet again when each of us checks into the Guard Shack in Heaven. ■

Was I Only Dreaming?

(Continued from page 25)

fusion, distractibility and agitation issues I have are almost certainly due to this incident, since they were not there before Vietnam. I am receiving treatment and medication, OT, and counseling services from the VA for these issues.

So here's the rub: the VA in its wisdom has denied my claim for TBI related to Vietnam. They had granted my claims for PTSD and hearing loss, but said that there is

no record that I was involved in a mine explosion. I have found records in the form of command chronologies that list many tank mine incidents in Charlie Company during the months that it occurred, which were in either late June or July of 1967, or maybe even in August.

If any VTA member can recall this scene or the tank in the attached picture, I would encourage them to contact me and perhaps clear this up for me. I am two years into my appeal now, but NODs take four years in Maryland. If not, at least I am glad that I have shared this because I'm sure I am not the only one who has had this kind of experience. ■



The Grunts of Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks

BY JIM LANGFORD



I was First Sergeant of Charlie Company, 3RD Tanks, from July 1968 to February 1969 when the company was cadred ... (redeployed to Okinawa). During one night in October, 1968 when we were set up on the north bank of the Cua Viet River about one mile west of its mouth, we were attacked by an estimated company of NVA. I had the entire company in a 180 degree perimeter with my flanks on the banks of the river. In addition to my tanks, I also had a platoon of amtracs and a section of Ontos. In the river water, I had two US Navy PT craft armed with .50 cal. MGs. When we fired the final protective fires, the Ontos and tanks loaded with

canister and flechette rounds really tore into the attacking enemy troops, completely causing the attack to cease. We have no idea how many were killed because the enemy was able to drag away all the bodies. Blood and tissue told us we caused many casualties, though. Our artillery support was from 1st Amtracs (based at Cua Viet) to whom we were opconned and their arty fire followed the enemy for some distance as our later foot patrols of the area showed.

Semper Fidelis

James L. Langford
1stSgt USMC (Ret.)

FOLLOW UP:

I regret the delay in getting back to you, but I was trying to check my facts with other members of the company for veracity. Unfortunately, the time that I was trying to reach

them, it was also the Vietnam Tankers Association reunion in Crystal City, VA, so I couldn't get hold of anyone until today. >>

L/Cpl Andy Anderson, one of my tank crewmen, reminded me that the fight was November, not October. For verification, there was a big hurricane (Typhoon Bess) that hit I Corps area in September of 1968 and we were flooded out of our position further west in a little town of, I believe it was My Loc 3, but I can't swear to that name. It, too, was on the north bank of the Cua Viet River. Due to the flooding from the typhoon, during which we lost three fuel bladders, we relocated our company as soon as we could travel to our new position further east and closer to 1st Amtracs Command Headquarters at Cua Viet.

There are some background things I must explain to show why my details are a little sketchy. First off, Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks, was my very first position as a first sergeant. In fact, I was still a gunny when I reported in, but I had the 9999 MOS. Until my promotion, I had always been a 0369. Saying that shows that I had little knowledge of tank company operations.

To compound the problem, the day I reported in, July (something or other) of 1968, my company commander, company gunny, and company maintenance chief were all killed coming down the beach from north of the mouth of the Cua Viet by an enemy command detonated mine while they were riding an "Otter" tracked vehicle. My platoon commanders were scattered, literally, from Khe Sanh to Con Thien and all points east. There were no officers at the company CP in Cam Lo Hill. Eventually, after about a month, 1st Lt. "Magnet Ass" Steve Larson and one other tank officer came to my rescue and we moved the company from Cam Lo Hill to My Loc 3. We also got a new company C.O.

You have to understand, too, that Charlie Company was NOT operating as a Tank Company. To this day I have no idea why the High Headquarters people put a tank company, reinforced with a platoon of amtracs and a section of Ontos all together with NO infantry support on the North Bank of the Cua Viet River, but they did. There I sat with all my officers and men all carrying 1800 MOS's and I'm the only 0300 grunt in the crowd. I became the de facto operations chief of this mini-battalion and had to train my officers, Staff NCOs, and men on how to be grunts. I had to show all of them how to plan artillery barrages and concentrations and H & I fires. I had to teach tankers how to go on patrol, set ambushes, and fight like infantry. Fortunately, I had been an Instructor in Second Division NCO School and knew how to do just that. They took to it like ducks to water, especially the lower enlisted men. All these men knew tanks as well as, if not better, than any other tank company in our beloved Corps, but they knew not even a little bit about grunts. However, all Marines are riflemen and they, my tankers, proved that over and over.

Getting back to the big fight. When the company moved into the destroyed ville there was nothing, and I mean nothing, there but rubble. We got an engineer crew with

bulldozers in and pretty soon we had three rolls of concertina strung all the way around our position and revetments for the tanks and amtracs. I used the tracs MGs to fire across the front of our position and did the same with the tank guns. I kept the tanks well supplied with canister and flechette rounds as I did the Ontos. My men fought mainly from within the armored vehicles with only a few fighting holes outside for "just in case." Every day and night I sent out patrols and, at first, I went with them until I was sure they knew what to do on their own. The same with ambushes. We never had contact one with the enemy during any of these functions, but, invariably found anti-tank mines in front of our wire where in earlier operation we would send amtacs and tanks to patrol the TAOR. We lost a 6X6 inside our position in the early days before all the wire was up, and my first wounded were from that loss. Thereafter, I put the engineers to sweeping the compound daily until we got all our perimeter wire put in place. I, personally, found myself in a minefield of nineteen anti-tank mines when I went out one day to check out an explosion I heard in front of our position. I found a water buffalo with her head and front shoulders blown off when she stepped on a mine. I stopped and discovered I was in the damn middle of the field. Being an experienced grunt, I had brought a small patrol with me and they were still outside the minefield. I sent back for the engineers and soon we had blown the field.

I emphasize all of the above to show that, while we knew there were enemy around, we never expected a major attack. There were no contacts. Force Recon had even inserted a patrol in the area and the only movement they saw was one of my ragged assed patrols coming in one evening. We almost had a horrible accident because Force Recon called in an air strike on them and I just barely was able to get that stopped before the strike. We had a few words over that incident, I assure you. The next day, some colonel from Division visited us and wanted to "walk the land." I took about half the company and we made a foot patrol of about a thousand meters north to see what was what and saw nothing to indicate there was any enemy within miles.

That's about all I can add to this story, but for more information, John Wear is the President of the Vietnam Tankers Association and has more reliable data on the history of tank affairs than anyone I know. He is always correcting my poor memory because, having spent twenty years in the Corps and serving with dozens of units, I get confused about who did what when and who was I with when we did it. I had three tours in 'Nam and the only one not with a grunt company was this one with Charlie Company, Third Tanks.

Semper Fidelis,

Top Langford

Editor's note: 1st Sgt. Jim Langford went to "The Great Tank Park in the Sky" in 2017. He will be missed by many of the Marines who were very fortunate to be under his tutelage. ■

MY TIME ON A-51

BY: LEE DILL
07/01/18

What to do with the shitbird? This became the main issue for most of the crew of A-51 in the summer of 1968. The tank was located between Phu Bai and Da Nang and attached to 3rd platoon, and this crew had seen some action in Hue City during Tet. They were extremely salty with six months in-country. They thought their shit did not stink. Now they had a new guy that had just two months in-country and he had been on flame tanks. What to do? What to do?

Normally I could care less, except in this case, I was the shitbird. Let me start at the beginning. I graduated from Tank School #2 in my class just behind Tim Hanks. I was gung ho! I was then sent to Vietnam and I ended up in flames as a gunner for F-12 under Cpl. Drewes (who was an experienced TC). But I had no interest in being a gunner on a flame tank. It was too claustrophobic, too tight in that turret! So I lobbied until they said send my young ass to A-51 and I said, "Thank You." But it turns out that I said thank you too soon!

The plan was to make me the new driver and move Scott to loader with Whitaker gunner and "Moose" the TC. (Scott and Whitaker were my size; just a few pounds more than me. "Moose" on the other hand, was well named). Moose looked to me as if he was a present day offensive tackle in the NFL. He was massive. He was also very quiet until he got pissed off. I knew right away if he had the desire, he could snap me in half in a heartbeat. This is how strong he was.

One day we were going out and needed a final track adjustment. We were tightening the idler arm using that huge wrench with a cheater bar. Moose decided we were too slow, so he stepped in, tossed the cheater bar aside, and tightened the idler arm with just the wrench in about 10 seconds in an awesome display of raw power! He was a force to be reckoned with.

We were in rice paddy areas on the coast and

Moose decided I would drive. Up until this moment I had driven on roads only. So Moose described the strategy: Accelerate across the paddy so as not to be stuck, then slow down when you get to the dike. Take the tank up one side of the dike to its balance point, let it rock forward using the forward momentum, gently go down the other side of the dike, ease it into the paddy, then drive it at high speed up to the next dike. Repeat the process. Simple. What could go wrong?

One thing that went wrong was me nailing the next dike at a high rate of speed so that Moose was convinced I had broken a torsion bar. It turns out that I did not ... but from that point on I was the shitbird. Nobody wants the shitbird. So, for the next months I tried to win the hearts and minds of the crew, but they were having none of it.

Did you know that you are not allowed to dodge hot brass on the tank deck after firing 17 rounds wearing just shorts? Yep, only shitbirds worry about being burned.

Did you know that, as a loader you had to get up every two hours to load five rounds for H&I fire while the rest of the crew pulled the trigger, four weeks straight?

Did you know that only an idiot would volunteer to go on a four man "killer team" to prove something to his crew members? I signed up for that extra duty but the team was hit the night before and the grunt Lieutenant released me. Thank God!

Did you know that you could nearly get blamed for losing the 90mm firing pin when the breech was disassembled while it was being cleaned. Yep, they didn't trust me as loader so I was not in the turret when it was cleaned at night (yep, after dark) and someone—not me—dropped the pin on the deck and it was lost for 30 minutes. This is all the downside of my A-51 summer!

The upside was Moose taught me how to >>





(L to R) Dennis Martin and Moose Williams comparing muscles with “Narps” in the background,

drive across paddies, how to be a decent loader, how to handle adversity, and to forget this “hearts and minds” crap. So I became the same snarky shit that I remain today. He taught me how to get along with people, how to ignore all the shit around you and do your job. I think I learned more from “Moose” Williams on A-51 (aka The “Mad Harlot”) that summer and early fall than I learned anywhere since then. I use some of these lessons to this very day. He was a great tank commander and I was in awe of him. He disciplined me when needed it and I was better for it.

Looking For...

1ST LT RONALD C KRAUS

My name is Josh Sternberg. I am trying to find information on my great uncle 1st Lt Ronald C. Kraus. He was the 3rd Tank Battalion S-1 during the summer of 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. Unfortunately, he died on August 12, 1965, from the wounds that he sustained. I am 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.

I am currently serving as a 1st Lt. in the US Army and just trying gain more insight into my great uncle’s time in Vietnam.

I truly appreciate the help.

Joshua Sternberg
Address: 2115 S 371st Street
Federal Way WA 98003
Phone: 253-431-9353
Email: jsternberg19@gmail.com



F13 and F12 near Red Beach

I left A-51 and Moose when I transferred to flames again. This time with Dennis Martin. I have to say that Dennis was not Moose!

Dennis, the flame section leader, allowed me to name two tanks: F-12 became “Napalm Sticks to Kids,” and F-13 was christened “Burn Babies Burn.” Those names were painted on the gun barrels. Shortly afterwards Dennis got a boot up his ass from the captain! Dennis is still my friend and I speak with him often. So, in the long run a win-win for the ex-shitbird who was never the shitbird again. ■

ADD: We went to The Virtual Wall website to see if perhaps another Marine officer (Maj. Frank Breath KIA April 1968) was killed in the same incident. We did not separate the two deadly events mainly because the major was KIA when a mortar round landed in the middle of his tent as well.

We do see that two other Marine enlisted men perished the same day and perhaps during the same incident.

Monday, August 9, 1965

PAUL A DEVERS, LCpl, Age 21, Jackson Heights, NY

LESLIE I HILDENBRAND, Cpl, Age 25, Circleville, PA

RONALD C KRAUS, 1stLt, Age 31, Grandview, IN

My First Day in Vietnam

BY: RICHARD CARMER

It started back in late 1965 and I finally touched down at Da Nang in Nov 67, slightly bewildered but ready for whatever fate had to dish out. You might wonder how it took the Marine Corps over two years to finally get me to Vietnam, so here is what happened. Like everyone else, I had 12 wonderful, relaxing, stress free weeks at boot camp followed by infantry training at Camp Pendleton. After my 20-day boot camp–ITR leave. I had orders to return to Camp Pendleton where I was to attend Tracked Vehicle School and learn how to repair M-48A3 tanks.

Initially, when I received my M.O.S. in boot camp, I was disappointed that they didn’t put me in the infantry. After all, every Marine is a riflemen and we are supposed to engage with and kill the enemy. I have an uncle who was in a Raider Bn. in WW-2, and he seemed OK to me. If it was good enough for Uncle Bill, then it would have been good enough for me. Of course, in all actuality I’m not too fond of humping and carrying heavy loads, so after further consideration...I was all right with tanks. Directly supporting the infantry was, in my mind, just as good as actually being a grunt, so being in a tank unit was OK with me.

After Tank Repair School at Del Mar, I received orders to my first real duty station and my orders were for Court House Bay, Camp Lejeune NC. Court House Bay is where the engineers and amtracs were located. I had no idea why I was being sent to an amtrac battalion, especially after graduating from Tank Repair School, but orders are orders.

The only similarity I could see between a tank and an amtrac is that they are both green and they are propelled by tracks. Amtracs also work in direct support with the grunts, so overall I was okay with my new assignment. It’s not like the Marine Corps wanted the personal opinion of a PFC anyway.

There must have been a big shortage of amtrac mechanics because they sent about a dozen of us freshly-minted tank mechanics to relieve a bunch of Marines who had just received a mandatory 4 to 6 month extension on their enlistment. These fellows were not the happiest bunch of Marines I had ever run into, but they were more than willing and able to train us so they could finally go home. They had done their time, and I’m not sure any of them were looking forward to whatever was going to happen in Vietnam and wisely they wanted no part of it.

Everything was going along just fine, but being a gung ho young Marine, I didn’t feel right about working in North Carolina. The action was obviously in Vietnam and I had a curiosity and a call to duty that I couldn’t quite come to terms with. Mind you, prior to boot camp, I had never heard of Vietnam, but now that I was a for-real Marine, I figured that I should be in the thick of things and where the action was.

One day while on a work detail, a sergeant came by asking for ten volunteers to go to Vietnam. I wasn’t feeling all that useful making all of those beach assaults on the shores of North Carolina and keeping

the “tracks” running like fine-tuned clocks, so I figured what the hell and I shot my hand up.

I had developed some mixed feelings about Vietnam, but being a Marine, I wanted to be where the action was. I was sent to Camp Hansen, Okinawa, where I think most of us Marines destined to RVN started out. Every day there was a formation where orders were read out and Marines were sent off to whatever fate had in store for them. After a few days they called my name and they informed me that they were assigning me duty right there at Camp Hansen, Okinawa with 3rd FSR. I >>



knew that wasn't exactly Vietnam, but I figured the Marine Corps knew what was best for me and the Corps, so off I went.

Our job at 3rd FSR was to take the engines and transmissions that we received from down south, rebuild them, and send them back so the Marines could continue to help free the world of the commies. It was certainly more fulfilling than assaulting beaches in North Carolina. Kin Village was kinda growing on me, so I stayed put and did my 13 months. After all, no one was shooting at me and I felt I was definitely an asset to the grunts and everyone else down south.

After I returned stateside I got a short leave. I was once again assigned to Camp Pendleton. At first I was kind of satisfied with how things were going. After all, I had volunteered to go to Vietnam and I definitely helped the grunts out fixing all of those tanks so they could do their jobs. Deep down, though, I wasn't quite fulfilled. I still had a sense of duty and an insatiable curiosity that was dragging me back, so one fine day I found myself standing in front of the old man requesting duty, once again, for Vietnam. The captain informed me that Marine Corps policy stated that, since I had just returned from southeast Asia, I wasn't eligible for overseas duty again for at least six months. He told me that I had to stay put at Camp Pendleton for those six months. He also told me that, since I was getting short on my enlistment, I would be too short to be sent overseas again and that I should just forget about Vietnam. That didn't sit quite right with me so I explained to the good captain that I didn't fully understand that logic. I reminded him of the guys who were sneaking off to Canada to avoid military service. I pointed out to him that there were other scumbags deliberately overdosing on drugs to avoid the draft, and "here I stand with a rifle, ready and willing to go and you are turning me down." He told me that he didn't actually make all of the rules but he definitely obeyed them and ordered me back to work post haste.

Of course being a good Marine and knowing full well that I could never win an argument with a captain, that is exactly what I did. I still felt a draw to Vietnam, so exactly six months to the day I found myself standing in front of him once again. This time he just shook his head, realizing I was determined, and cut new orders for me. I was to report back to Okinawa and try it all over again.

I remember that I had a short leave before I had to check back in so I went back to Las Vegas for a few days to say goodbye to everyone. I didn't know if it was a final good by or just a see ya later kind of thing. I know that my leave went by too fast and, as my older brother drove me the quick five hours drive down to Norton AFB, I had quite

a few conflicting thoughts running through my mind. I would be 20 years old in just a few short months and I was off to what was to be the biggest life changing event of my life, maybe the last.

It's hard now as I sit here writing this, contemplating that it's been over fifty years since that all happened. Some things are burned into my mind forever and are crystal clear; some things are just a wisp of a memory. I don't remember all of the details of my trip to Vietnam. I flew out of Norton AFB on what I was told was the very last military flight out, as the flights were to be done by civilian aircraft starting the following day. It was sometime in the middle or the end of November, 1967. We spent a few days on Camp Hansen Okinawa and this time during one of the daily formations my name was called and I was ordered to report immediately for transport to Vietnam.

Once again, I don't remember most of the details of this short flight down south. I do remember being at cruising altitude over Da Nang and immediately dropping down to an elevation where the pilot could touch down. We dropped out of the sky as if we had lost our wings. I was later told that was done to minimize the possibility of getting shot out of the sky. We deplaned and were told where to go to report in, and once again the details are fuzzy. I was told that I would be going somewhere up north to Quang Tri, wherever that was. I was told to stand "over there" and stick my thumb out and someone heading up north would be by shortly to pick me up. I still find it hard to believe that I was hitchhiking in a war zone to a place I had never heard of before, and I was unarmed. No one issued me a rifle or any kind of a weapon, so there I stood in Vietnam, unarmed, and quite a bit nervous and scared about what was going to happen next.

In late '67 I was told that Da Nang was the busiest airport in the world. It sure was noisy and it seemed busy enough to me. I could hear choppers coming and going, I heard afterburners as the jet fighters were going out on their sorties. I still couldn't get over the fact that I was unarmed and asked the corporal who told me where go when I would get a rifle. He told me not to worry, I would be issued my weapon when I reported into my new duty station. Not worrying wasn't in the cards as I stood there wondering what was going to happen next. Had I made the right decision? After all, I could have been safe and sound back at Camp Pendleton where the only thing I had to worry about was not pissing off the gunny. But, obviously, I had made it up to Quang Tri. So far so good and there I stood, awaiting whatever was in the cards for me for the next 13 months. ■

What Members Are Doing

Stolen Valor?



Bob Skeels writes: Great early May spring trout fishing trip to the central Adirondacks near Lake Clear, NY, at Pollywog Pond. This 20" Brook trout was caught yesterday by my younger brother who is a REAL Fisherman.....so, we all borrowed the fish for the bragging snap. Truth be told though, I had one that was bigger, but I bought it at the local grocery and it didn't fool them as they spotted a little ice on it. Good times in life for sure.

Road Trip



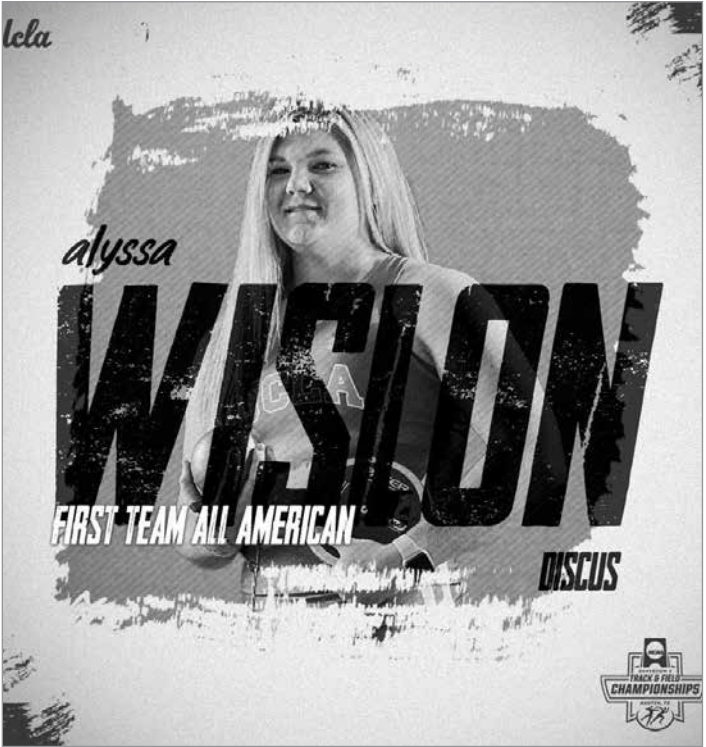
Bob Haller (in the back on the right) visited MCB Quantico with a bunch of his Marine veteran buddies from the Philadelphia area.

Road Trip II



Bob Haller (middle of the back row) went to the PA state capital in Harrisburg along with his rod and gun club to show their support for the 2nd Amendment.

Fred Goger's Granddaughter



Fred writes: This is my granddaughter who is the lead discus thrower on the UCLA Track & Field Team. What's really going to be impressive is watching her march into the main arena in Tokyo for the 2020 Olympics. And not for discus but for shotput. She still holds all the school records. >>

What does an old tanker do when they can't play with tanks anymore?

BY CLYDE HOCH



Many years ago, I bought a 6-wheeled vehicle that had 6-wheel drive. I also had motorcycles all my life; I had quads; and I had friends with boats and snow mobiles. The 6-wheeler was the most fun I ever had with a vehicle in my life ... except for tanks in the USMC. A tank would be too expensive for me to buy and to maintain.

I ran the 6-wheeler until it died and unfortunately the company that built them went out of business. Recently, I ran across an ad for a 6-wheeler. They are being made by another company and they are very expensive. I searched the internet for weeks until I talked to a dealer that was willing to work with me on cost.

The dealer, Gary at Argo North in New Jersey, seemed

more interested in making sure I got a good deal than he was in making a sale. He seemed like a down-home easy-going person and very likable. He told me that he had a used 8-wheeler, and it had tracks like a tank, but it was much cheaper and easier to maintain. We haggled back and forth on a price until we came to an agreement. He said he had some things he wanted to replace on it before I got it.

It has a 750 CC engine and a high and low speed transmission with forward and reverse. Each wheel is driven by a chain. Max speed is about 20 miles per hour, but in wooded terrain that's good enough for me. It has a winch on the front that can be mounted on the back.

I really don't have much room to run it at my house and I am guessing the tracks would tear up my lawn. But I know where there are 21 wooded acres for me to play in that is nearby.

Imagine a little tank. Because of the tracks, it is supposed to be great in the snow. It is also amphibious. The ribs on the track propel it through the water. If you take off the tracks, the ribs on the tires can propel it through water. While searching the internet for information on these vehicles, I saw where people also put boat motors on them.

I was anxious for Gary to deliver the little tank. I couldn't wait to play. So, after it was delivered, I only drove it for short distances and had some tight turns in my yard. The tracks make it a little jerkier than the old 6-wheeler I used to have and I'm not used to it yet. I think I liked the stick steering my old one had rather than the handlebar steering this one has. I can't wait to take it to the Pocono Mountains. I'm sure it will be fun in the snow. No matter what, it looks bad ass. ■

Photo from Vietnam



The USMC Tank School Announces the Top Tank Crewman Student Award

I am writing to inform you that we have received the package in the mail and will begin incorporating the newly named award into future armor crewmember course graduations. I have attached the award and look forward to seeing the first presentation. It has been an honor to be able to put this together and I thank you for your assistance and your years of service. If you would like to be in attendance during

a future graduation, please let me know and I will send you the FY2020 graduation dates.

Respectfully,

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

GUNNERY SERGEANT BRUCE R. WAHLSTEN
AWARD FOR EXCELLENCE

Presented this day ____ of ____ 2019 to
Private First Class _____

The Marine Detachment, Fort Benning, Georgia recognizes the M1A1 Tank Crewmember Student who has distinguished himself from his peers through academic excellence with the Gunnery Sergeant Bruce R. Wahlsten award for excellence. The award recipient has achieved the highest grade point average for class _____ and has passed all physical requirements.



Silver Star
AWARDED FOR ACTIONS DURING Vietnam War
Service: Marine Corps
Rank: Corporal
Battalion: 1st Tank Battalion
Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF
CITATION:

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to Corporal **Bruce R. Wahlsten** (MCSN: 2313619), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Tank Commander with Company B, First Tank Battalion, First Marine Division in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. In the late afternoon of 21 February 1969, during a search and destroy operation, Corporal Wahlsten's platoon was supporting Company D, First Battalion, Seventh Marines when it was hit by a heavy volume of automatic weapons, small arms, and rocket-propelled grenade fire from an estimated North Vietnamese Army battalion in well-concealed entrenched positions. When the tank commanded by Corporal Wahlsten was hit by a rocket round, the driver, killed instantly, depressed the accelerator causing the tank to hurl directly into the entrenched enemy positions. Realiz-



ing the seriousness of the situation, Corporal Wahlsten, with complete disregard for his own safety, left the turret, thereby exposing himself to the heavy volume of enemy fire and, although painfully wounded, moved to the front of the tank and removed the body of the driver from the compartment. Continuing to display exceptional courage, he returned to the tank commander's cupola and encouraged his wounded loader to drive the tank as he himself began to place accurate .50 caliber machine gun fire on the enemy positions. Covering the withdrawing infantry while simultaneously directing the tank's withdrawal from the fire-swept area, Corporal Wahlsten attended his wounded comrades until the corpsman arrived. His heroic and timely actions inspired all who observed him and contributed immeasurably to the accomplishment of his unit's mission. By his courage, aggressive fighting spirit and selfless devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger, Corporal Wahlsten upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. ■

Photo from Vietnam

1967 working with 1/9 along the DMZ

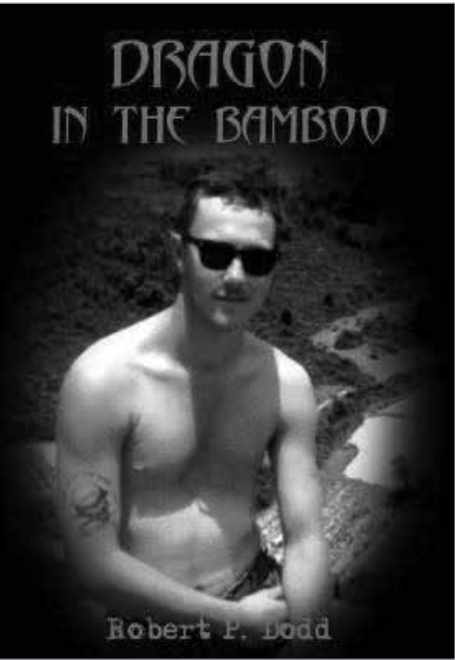


1968 - John Wear's tank on an operation with 2/9



Book Review

A Book Written by a VTA member!!!



About the Book

Dragon In The Bamboo is

not your typical Vietnam War book. It is about the “best and worst” of times a young Marine grunt experienced in 1968. Not written in the usual novel format, it tries to convey and capture the intensity of Vietnam for readers, both veterans and non-veterans. Many of the veterans of earlier and later conflicts will find some common experiences here. Civilians may find a better understanding and appreciation of men and women in uniform. It is not a story about heroes, it is a story about common experiences usually forgotten or not told by veterans.

About the Author

Robert Dodd was born in Buffalo, New York. He dropped out of High School at 17 and enlisted in the Marine Corps in 1965. Originally too young (17)

to go to Vietnam, he didn’t go overseas until 1967. 1968 found him in a line company with the 1st Marines. This is his story of the Vietnam experience as told in a much different format than your typical war novel. It is intense at times and also shows that even in war not all human feelings are stripped away. The author holds the Combat Action Ribbon, the Vietnam Service Medal and the Vietnam Campaign Medal. He currently works as a Nurse Anesthetist., CRNA, in California. The title *Dragon In The Bamboo* is from the Vietnam Service Medal, which shows a dragon in a field of bamboo. He is a member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association and the Vietnam Veterans of America.

Available on Amazon.com ■

USMC Vietnam Tankers Association
Fort Benning Mini-reunion
September 9-13, 2020
Tank Restoration Program

REPORT: The USMC VTA held its first mini-reunion on September 5 – 8, 2018, which was in-between our 2017 St Louis reunion and our 2019 Seattle reunion.

PROPOSAL: We propose to continue to conduct these mini-reunions on our “off” years that are between our normally scheduled biennial reunions.

In the fall of 2020 the USMC VTA will plan to conduct another mini-reunion in at Ft Benning in Columbus, GA. We will plan to gather to visit the USMC Tank School and to also form a

“working party” to assist the **Tank Restoration Program** in refurbishing any and all Vietnam-era armored combat vehicles such as:

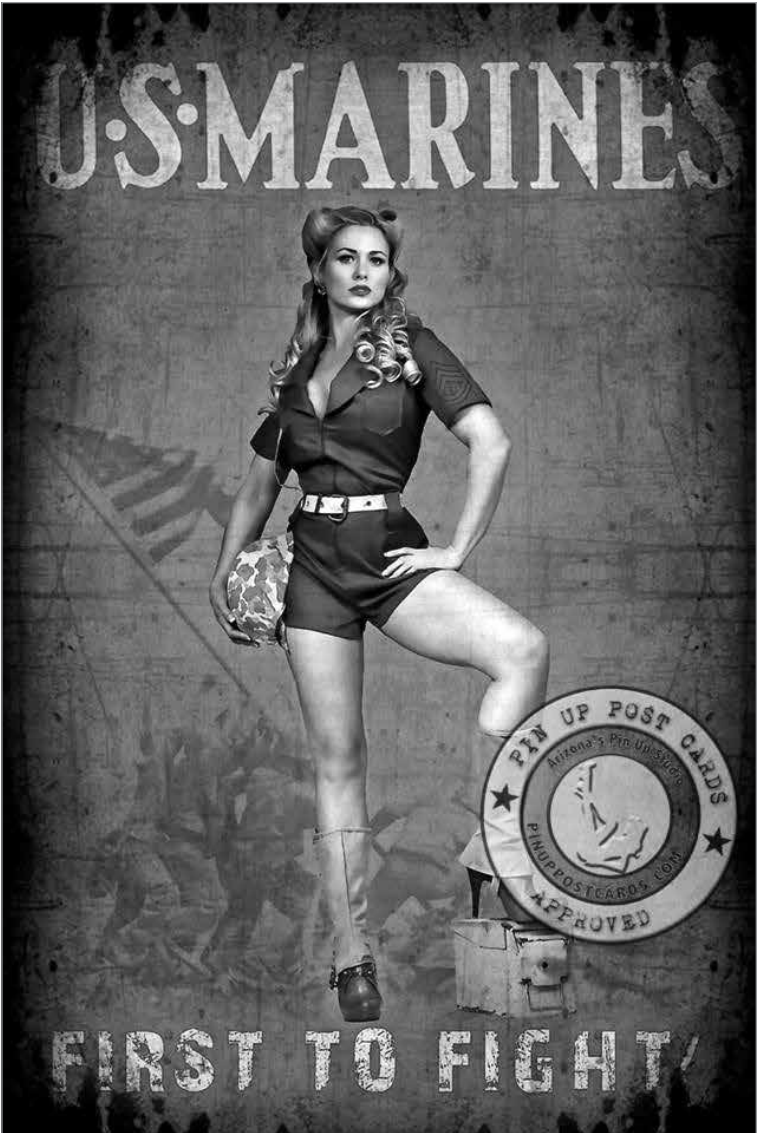
- M-48 Medium Gun Tank
- M-67 Flame-thrower Tank
- M-51 Armored Vehicle Recovery Vehicle (Retriever)
- M-50 Ontos

Note: The new dates are to accommodate the Tank School graduation on Sept 10th.

Further details and confirmation of the dates will be featured in future issues of the Sponson Box

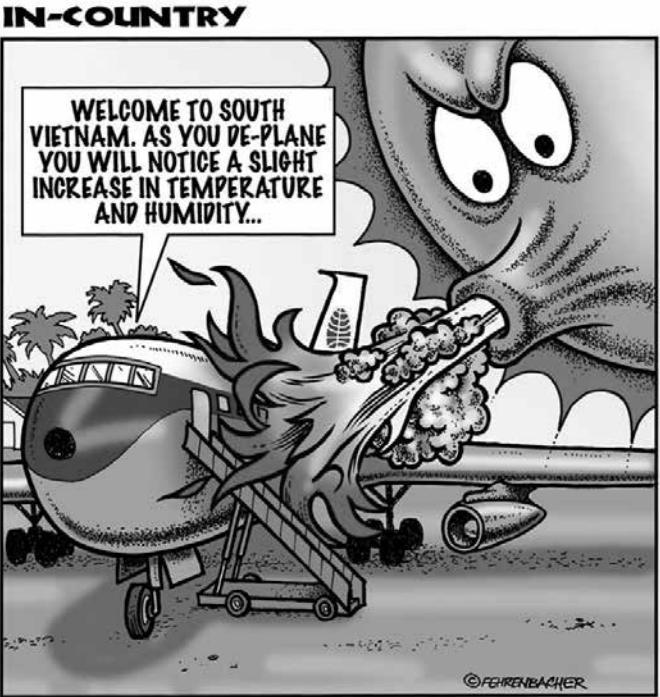


1975 Cost of Living	
New House:	\$48,000
Average Income:	\$12,686
New Car:	\$3,800
Minimum Wage:	\$2.10/hour
Movie Ticket:	\$2.03
Gasoline:	59 cents/gallon
Postage Stamp:	13 cents
Sugar:	\$2.20/5 gallons
Milk:	\$1.65/gallon
Coffee:	\$1.12/pound
Eggs:	84 cents/dozen
Bread:	28 cents

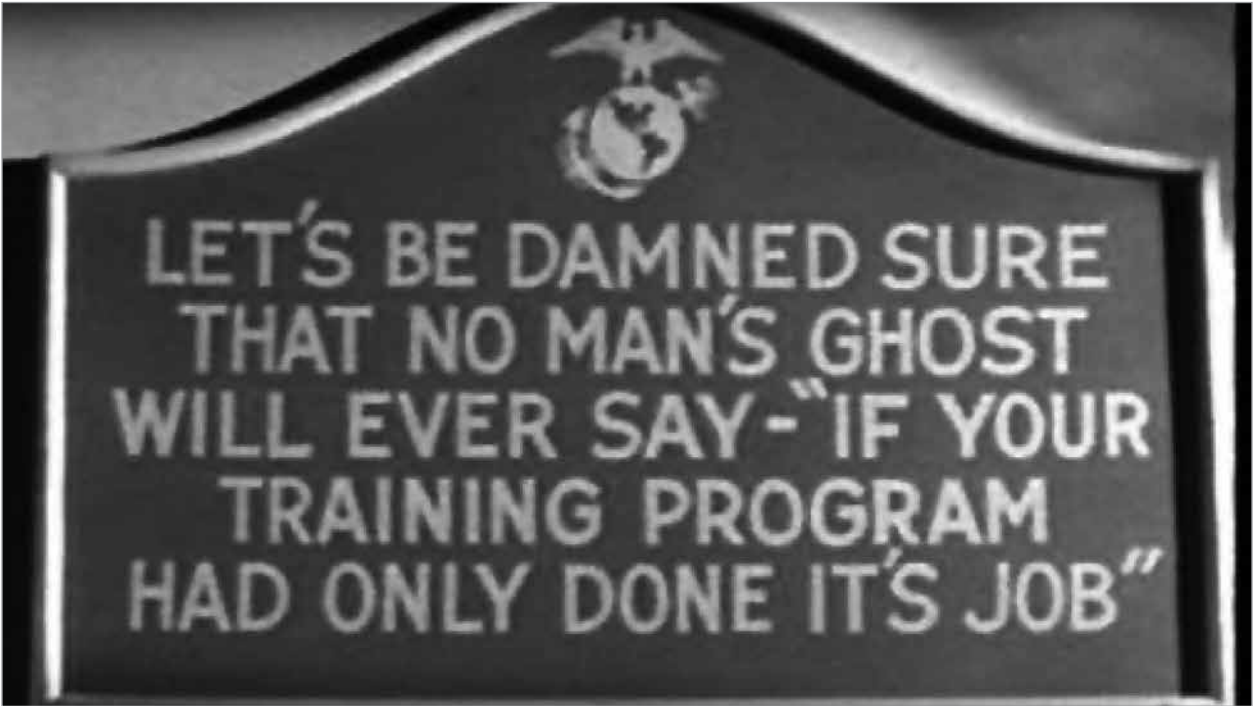


YOU KNOW YOU'RE A VETERAN IF...

1. You can't fathom how people don't understand "military time"
2. You have a strong distrust for anybody named "Jody"
3. You can't watch most military dramas because they're so corny and wrong
4. You walk fast and your first step is always with your left foot
5. You still use the basic training "knife hand" to get your point across
6. People are always impressed by how ridiculously fast you eat
7. You laugh when you see people on Survivor cry after not seeing their family in 2 weeks
8. You clean your equipment before yourself
9. You don't carry things in your right hand
10. You still refer to everyone around you by their last name



THE FIRST OF **MANY** UNDERSTATEMENTS!



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

Please note: If the last two digits of “EXPIRE” on your address label is “18” then your 2019 membership dues are a year past due.

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

***Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.**

