



# Sponson BOX

*Voice of  
the USMC  
Vietnam Tankers  
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



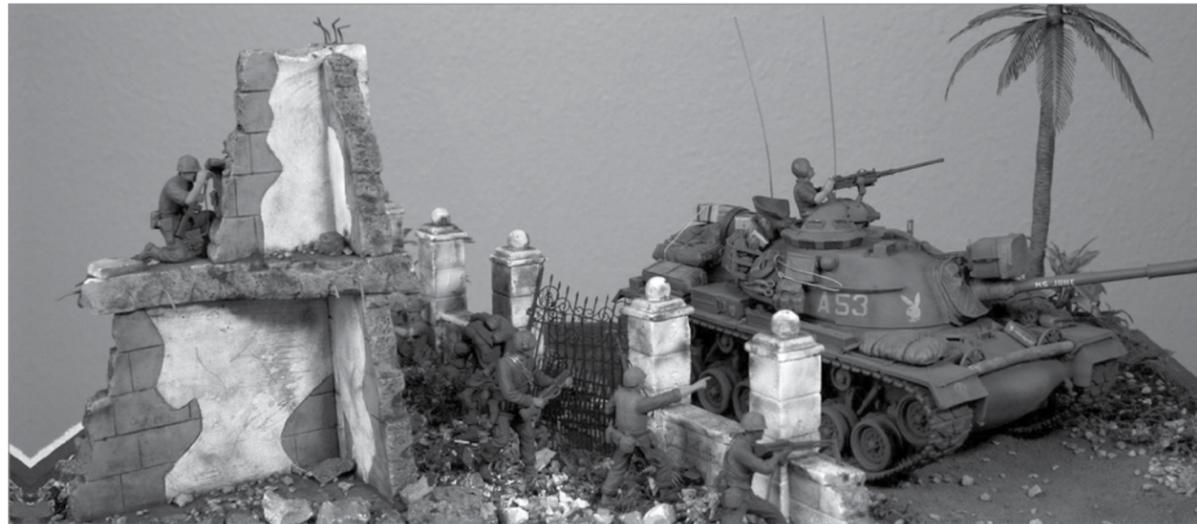
USMC Tankers from WW2 on Guadalcanal

*Featured Stories:*

A Letter From JFK..... Page 10  
 Remembering Mike Brandi..... Page 28  
 St Louis Reunion Section..... Page 40 – 46

**Reminder: The \$25 reunion registration savings ends July 31st**

This is just a small sampling of the  
**Items for the St. Louis Auction**



A Multiple-award Winning Tank Diorama



Two stunning handmade in America Sterling Silver belt buckles



Men's USMC Bolo Tie



Ladies Cowboy Boot  
Necklace w/ Gold nuggets



Rare Montana Yugo  
Sapphires Necklace



Genuine Stainless  
Steel Mess Kit



Assorted Ammo Cans



25 Volume History Books...



11 Video Tape History Series



We'll have some colorful USMC logo stoneware coffee mugs ...  
Hand-made by John Wear in his pottery studio



Woodlands-pattern poncho liner



USMC Stadium Blanket

**And so much more!!!**

Letter from the President

**HONOR THE PAST BY BEING PRESENT**

*Please join us in St Louis, Missouri in just a few weeks on Sept 21 – 25, 2017  
as we continue to ensure our legacy through reunion, renewal and remembrance.*

**ST LOUIS:** We'd like for any member who is attending to make sure that you (a) bring your old Vietnam photos put up in an album for the all of the attendees to share and enjoy, (b) bring many donations for the fundraising auction, and (c) bring your guests who may want to attend. Many of us have seen some amazing bonding going on between VTA members and their sons, daughters and grandchildren who attend together.

**DUES REMINDERS:** As some of you may be aware, it takes much effort and expense to send reminders and re-reminders to those of you who inadvertently forget and those who habitually forget to send in their dues at the beginning of each year. Membership dues are payable on January 1st of each year. In addition to postage expense, the stationery expense, and the sweat equity of our volunteer board members, there are several of you who move to a new address and, for whatever reason, you fail to alert us of your new address. When a dues reminder letter or a Sponson Box magazine is mailed to your old address and the forwarding process from the Post Office has lapsed, the VTA has to pay additional postage for it to be returned to our headquarters address. We could have had a color cover for this issue as an example if we did not have to spend so much money tracking people down. Please give us some consideration and alert us when you change your address, telephone number, and your email addresses. And more importantly, please pay your annual dues on time!

**HELPING BUDDIES:** Some of you may not be aware, but we are always looking for tankers who may, for various economic reasons, be less fortunate and cannot afford the annual membership dues. We can grant these men a temporary gift membership until they can get back on their feet. Please send their names and addresses to me or to any member of the Board of Directors. We want each and every eligible U.S. Marine Vietnam tanker to be a member in the association so they can share in the brotherhood. The more the merrier...and the stronger we will be.

**RECRUITING BUDDIES:** Just a reminder that if anyone has a qualified U.S. Marine Vietnam buddy or an acquaintance who is not a current member of the VTA, you should secure their mailing address and then contact any member of the Board of Directors ... or our National Recruiter, Greg Martin, so that we can mail a recruitment package (with a sample of the Sponson Box magazine and a membership application) to the prospective member.

**INTERVIEWS in ST. LOUIS:** We have had a very good response for volunteers to have a video recorded interview during the reunion. As most of us know, the past interviews are shared on our website and they are an important part of the USMC VTA History Project. As of now, there are a limited amount of slots open, so if you are interested, please give Pete Ritch a call right away at 850-734-0014, or you can e-mail Pete at goldendog@mchsi.com for more information and to sign up.

*John*

**"Nobody can go back and start a new beginning, but anyone can start today and make a new ending."**

**Maria Robinson**



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Recruited by: DAV magazine



Silver Star–Awarded for actions during the Vietnam War

# Tanks & Medals of Valor

## Ronald Craig Morrison

Home of record: Philadelphia Pennsylvania

### AWARDS AND CITATIONS



1st Lt. Ronald C. Morrison, Awarded S.S. – Alpha Co., 1st Tank Bn

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to First Lieutenant Ronald Craig Morrison (MCSN: 0-101324), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company A, First Tank Battalion, FIRST Marine Division (Rein.), FMF, in connection with combat operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 15 February 1968, First Lieutenant Morrison's platoon was supporting two Marine companies which were attacking a large North Vietnamese Army force that was occupying a section of the wall surrounding the Hue Citadel. As the units commenced their assault, the Marines were temporarily pinned down by a heavy volume of small arms, automatic weapons and anti-tank rocket fire. Upon being informed of the situation, First Lieutenant Morrison skillfully maneuvered his tank through the intense enemy fire and commenced delivering 90-mm. cannon fire upon the hostile positions. Realizing

the need for more accurate fire, he unhesitatingly opened his tank's hatch and, after positioning himself partially outside the vehicle, skillfully directed his gunner's fire upon the enemy emplacements. With complete disregard for his own safety, First Lieutenant Morrison fearlessly remained in his dangerously exposed location and began delivering .50 caliber machine gun fire upon the hostile positions. Ignoring the anti-tank rockets impacting near him, he continued his determined efforts until he succeeded in suppressing the enemy fire, thereby enabling the Marines to seize their objective. His aggressive fighting spirit and resolute determination were an inspiration to all who observed him and contributed immeasurably to the accomplishment of the mission. By his courage, bold initiative and steadfast devotion to duty in the face of great personal danger, First Lieutenant Morrison upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service.

Action Date: February 15, 1968

Service: Marine Corps

Rank: 1st LT

Company: Company A

Battalion: 1st Tank Battalion

Division: 1st Marine Division (Rein.), FMF



FRONT COVER PHOTO:  
WW 2 USMC Tankers on Guadalcanal

## Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

### Poking Fun at Marine Officers?

Jim Coan writes: Regarding the story in the last issue of our magazine that was making fun of lieutenants, my first reaction was to be a little irked. I had six years of enlisted service in the Arizona Army National Guard, 158th Infantry Brigade, and made sergeant. I then went for a commission in the Corps after college graduation. As a prior enlisted man, I know what it's like to be hassled by semi-literate NCOs or knuckle-headed officers.

I was 25 when I first got to Nam, and 26 when I left, the same age as some staff sergeants in the Corps. But, I have to admit there were some idiots in Marine Corps OCS with me. I always prayed they would get washed out, but no doubt a few slipped through. For example, my OCS squad at Quantico was getting prepped for a night ambush. The acting squad leader, a graduate of Yale or Princeton, I forget now, said his signal to kick off our ambush would be shooting up a red five-star cluster. Fortunately for the Marine Corps, this highly educated imbecile was washed out soon afterwards, never to stain the reputation of our beloved Corps.

And, regarding lieutenants and map reading, note that for several years back in the 80's I was the map and compass instructor for search and rescue units in the California Office of Emergency Services. So, there, John!

### More On "Lurch"

Ev Tunget had a "Catch Up" piece in the April - June 2017 Sponson Box which included some comments about Bill "Lurch" Lochridge's "Vietnam Vignettes 1966-67." Bill and I were platoon leaders in Bravo Co. 3d Tanks when then Capt. Ev Tunget was the skipper. Toward the conclusion of Ev's correspondence he indicates that he did not know how Bill picked up the nickname "Lurch." I am able to shed some light on that missing information.

Bill and I were in the same platoon at The Basic School graduating in December 1965. Bill, myself and two or three additional 2Lts from the TBS class rented an apartment in Alexandria, VA during the six months we spent at Quantico. It was our crash pad on weekends and allowed us to avoid driving back to Quantico after late nights on the town in DC. As an aside, one of the additional 2Lts who shared the apartment would one day become the USMC Assistant Commandant - General Richard Neal.

Tall and gangly, Bill had a very distinctive stride. He took long, jerky steps when he walked or marched. The Addams Family was a popular TV show between 1964 -66. One of the fictional characters was a manservant to the ghoulish clan named Lurch. Lurch was a 6'9" tall, shambling, gloomy butler who somewhat resembled a cross between Frankenstein's monster and a zombie (description from Wikipedia).

The Alexandria Marine Lt's decided Bill was a dead ringer for "Lurch" and hence the nickname!

Ev Tunget also commented on the weaponry that Lurch arrived with in Vietnam, e.g. ankle holster with .22 snub nosed pistol, 9mm Beretta pistol with shoulder holster, and there was more. I believe he managed to acquire a Thompson submachine gun in country as well. The members of our TBS platoon concluded that if Bill ever found himself in country about to be attacked, he would likely be overrun before he determined which weapon in his arsenal he would use to return fire. Bill was awarded a Silver Star and concluded his Vietnam tour working with Lt. Col William Corson, CO 3d Tanks. Lt. Col. Corson and Bill ultimately moved up to the 3d Division HQ working on implementation of the CAC program. Bill is a member of the VN Tankers Association and periodically contributes to our publication. He may choose to rebut some or all of what I have submitted.

Richard Nagle

"B" Company, 3d Tanks  
Platoon Leader & XO '66-'67

### Kevin Flynn's Mail Box



I don't think I've sent you this photo but a friend of mine, Jack Aungst of Aungst Iron Works, made this for my birthday. It weighs about 150 pounds. The front side does not have my name on it.

Kevin D. Flynn

### Howard Blum Writes

For 73 years never had a broken bone or operation. I had a 1st time gallbladder attack at end of February which caused a heart attack, and therefore had bypass surgery four weeks later. I'm doing well and feel better each day.

### Amtracs and Ontos

I arrived in K-Bay in January 1961, and after a month on mess duty, I reported to the "tractor park" for training in amtracs. Across the main road from the tractor park was an area used for our driver training, the brush was around 15 feet high with roads running through it. Coming rapidly around a corner one day I was stopped short by a strange vehicle that also came to a sudden stop about 20 feet away facing me. I was looking down the muzzles of six giant (106mm) recoilless rifles.

That was my first meeting with an "Ontos" and it was a memorable one. Up the beach from the tractor park was a large landing area complete with bleachers that were used for public viewings of practice wet landings. The amtracs

would bring the grunts onto the beach, then we'd drive down the beach, where we would climb on top of the tractors and watch the show. The grunts would assault a sand-bagged bunker built out in front of the stands. In one of these shows a "rocket man" came up to about 100 yards from the bunker and put the first round through the embrasure, blowing it into a smoking pile of debris. A "flame man" then came forward and would char what remained of the ruined bunker.

This "rocket man" was a friend of mine and the best rocketeer in the 4th Marine Regiment. The remarkable thing was that he wore Coke bottle glasses; he was blind as a bat without them! After this rather anticlimactic demonstration of firepower from the grunts, they brought an Ontos up the beach, it turned and aimed at a group of rocks about 500 yards off shore. They fired about three pops from the .50 cal. spotting rifle and, as the third round found the range, all six of the 106's went off with a loud crack, throwing an unbelievably large tongue of flame from the front and a billowing cloud of dust and sand from the back.

You could actually see the rounds flying through the air and they took a rather large chunk out of the rocks with a massive explosion. Impressive to say the least! I remembered those six rifles pointing directly at me from about 20 feet away and just shuddered.

Cpl. Selders

From the Sgt Grit Newsletter

### In 1994 Tanks Took On The Role as the Artificial Reefs



By JENNIFER WEITZMAN—Published: December 4, 1994 - for the New York Times

Manasquan, New Jersey is participating in a nationwide cooperative program between the Department of Defense, the National Guard and Federal and state environmental groups by taking outdated Army tanks and dumping them into coastal waters to form artificial reefs to create habitats for fish. The program of using old war materiel is called Reef-Ex (for Reef Exercise), and officials say it will improve and extend the life of artificial reefs and rebuild the environment and economy of coastal states. New Jersey's recreational fishing industry, with 125 miles of coast, is second only to that of Florida, with 1,100 miles of coast. On a recent morning, four miles off Manasquan Inlet, a group of Army officials and environmentalists watched in awe from a charter boat as six M-60 main battle tanks, which saw extensive service in Vietnam, were pushed one by one by a bulldozer off a barge. They plunged with a huge splash into the water and sank 65

feet, coming to rest on the Axel Carlson and Sea Girt reef sites. They were the first of about 100 tanks destined for New Jersey. Officials said that by the next day, small marine organisms like mussels and barnacles would find the tanks to be a good place to hide and would attach themselves to the steel plates inside and outside the open vehicles. These creatures will become food for the dozen species of fish the program hopes to attract, including sea bass, blackfish and lobsters.

The tanks are also expected to provide a safe breeding ground for juvenile fish to grow and survive, which in turn would attract more sports fisherman and divers to the area. Officials said they hoped that by this time next year, fishing boats would find the waters rich with fish.

The 40-ton tanks are certified to be environmentally safe by the Army Corps of Engineers and Federal and state environmental agencies. Army and Navy reservists, performing their two weeks of annual active-duty training, prepared the tanks by draining all fluids, removing transmissions, engines and hydraulic systems and steam-cleaning the tanks.

"We are pretty hopeful these will be good reefs for divers and will provide better access for people fishing," said Bruce Halgren, maritime fishery administrator of the New Jersey Division of Fish, Game and Wildlife. Mr. Halgren said that because the hulls of the tanks were so thick, about 12 inches of steel, they would last 50 to 100 years as reefs before dissolving in the salt water.

### A Fresh Crop of "Shitfisters"



Richard Carmer writes: Looking through some ancient stuff I came across this old photo. I don't know if it is of any use to you but here it is anyway. I'm the good looking young one in the great looking uniform. I'm not sure why the class is numbered 2-66, I was there at the end of 1965. I graduated from ITR sometime around 18 June and went to school right after my 20-day leave. I am standing right next to the gun barrel. If it was to fire, I would have taken it in the right cheek.

### Jim Johnson

A few month ago, after welcoming new member him, Jim wrote the following:

I got your email. Thank you for the welcome. Otis Martin was my gunner for a while on my second tour. We >>

became friends and he naturally moved up the ladder in rank and command. He wanted to become Catholic and he asked me to be his godfather, which I did. He was injured during a major operation while ground guiding a tank into a night position. The tank triggered a mine and injured his back severely. When asked, I mistakenly told him he would be paralyzed. Two months later he returned to the platoon walking just fine. As a godfather, one is supposed to watch over your son and guide him. After separation from Active Duty, I tried to find Marty and I understand he tried the same. Recently, I typed his name into the computer and his obituary showed up. I was in contact with a large bunch of great people over two Vietnam tours; Otis (Bud) Martin was one of them. We used to call him "Marty." Marty's obituary mentioned that he was a member of the VTA. I then talked to his wife and she said that Marty loved the organization. Up till that point I had not heard of the VTA. I had written a couple of chapters for Clyde Hoch in his book "A Tribute to Tanks". I mentioned Marty in those stories. I joined the VTA because I didn't want to lose the chance to contact these people once again. Maybe I'll be able to meet some at the reunion. This is why I joined.

#### From the Sgt Grit Newsletter

Wes Rudoi: South Vietnam—I was a radioman with the 7th Regiment, 1st Marine Division from September 1967 through October 1968 at Hill 55. One day we were walking back from a daily patrol and when we reached the main highway, we hitched a ride on an Army tank that was passing through. I never got inside it but looked down into it. A few days later I was heading out on an operation in a CH-46 helicopter and we got shot down. Luckily I survived with just a couple of sprained ribs but it made me realize that tanks and helicopters had the same problem – they're both fucking bullet magnets! To all of us and those just like us – Damn Few!!

DANIEL ZAWIEJSKI (SKI): I was with 7th Motors on Hill 55 with 2/5. Marine tanks were at the top of the highest position and 11th Artillery was at the bottom of the mountain while we were in the middle. One day the arty unit had a 100% firing mission on a certain position and fired for at least 15 minutes with ten 105's and 155's firing all at once. It was deafening for us. In order to hit their target they had to fire over the mountain...and you guessed it, we had a few short rounds exploding all around the tanks. The next think we knew, the tank's turrets were turning around and aiming at the 11th Marines position. We thought that it was going to be one huge cluster f\*ck and we were in the middle of it. Needless to say, we couldn't get the hell out of there fast enough! We all ran and hid in the Vietnamese cemetery knowing that it would be safe. But all that happened was a standoff. Those Marines in those tanks were all jacked up from chewing betel nut and smoking dope. You would hope the hatch and nothing but smoke would come out. The tanks were painted white inside and had all sorts of graffiti around

the turret. Also inside of the turrets were 108 rounds. They would carry less because if they got hit by a rocket at any time but the worse that happened was that they'd lost a track pin and the track would spit right out. If that happened they were dead in the water and the snipers would like to pick them off when they got out to fix the track. Tanks were useless in Vietnam. Getting stuck and blown out tracks all of the time in the monsoon season. Well thought I would let you know how it was in Nam.

James "Doc" Nealand: I was with 2/7 in '68. It was raining like hell and I fell asleep under a tank on Liberty Bridge. They had a fire mission in the middle of the night and when they cut loose I tried to sit up and rang my bell on the underside of the tank. Couldn't call the corpsman 'cause that was me.

Another reply: Much preferred being a crew chief/door gunner on a UH-34D ("Dog") than humping on the ground. Good thing is that the bad guys usually didn't lead us enough while we were flying so rounds hit the tail section without causing much harm. Bad thing if they had auto weapons or we were stationary on the ground or taking off. As for tanks... we came into a hot zone for a medevac and a guy was sitting on top the tank taking pictures of us, guess he thought the VC didn't have the balls to open up on him or us.

#### "Ben Hur" in Vietnam?



In the photo: "Ben Hur" and Bob Haller

Bob Haller writes: I was looking on Amazon for a book to read and I noticed a new book about the life of Charlton Heston so I thought to take a chance and contact the author, Marc Eliot, with a few pictures that were taken of Mr. Heston (and me) in Vietnam. I also sent a short note, not knowing the author would ever get them"

I am looking forward to the release of your book next month about Charlton Heston. When I was a U.S. Marine in Vietnam I was privileged to be chosen to meet Mr. Heston. The reason for my fortune I do not know, but that 40 minute meeting I had with him has been a highlight of my life, and the pictures that I have with him, I look at them often. I was a Marine tank commander and he was a more than an actor. He was and still is awesome to me. For several years afterward, I received a card and little handwritten notes on

the Marine Corps birthdays. The communication has faded away but my fond memory has not.

Robert Haller  
Vietnam 1965-66  
3rd Tank Bn, 3rd Marine Division

Bob adds—Within an hour I was pleasantly surprised and pleased to receive the below email note:

Dear Mr. Haller: My name is Fraser Heston and Charlton Heston was my dad. Marc Eliot forwarded me your gracious email about your experience with my father in Vietnam. Those trips meant a lot to him, and I know that meeting some of our men and women serving in that war, putting their lives on the line for our country, at a time when they did not get the credit they deserved back home, changed him fundamentally. In any event, I just wanted to say thanks for your kind email, and thank you for your gallant service to our great country. Hope you enjoy Marc's book, I know I did.

Best regards,

Fraser C. Heston

#### A Follow up to the Randy Browning Obit

Rick Walters adds: Randy actually was awarded the Medal of Honor when he left Vietnam in late 1967. His Ontos was disabled and hit by RPG fire, killing his driver. On the other Ontos, the commander was decapitated and his driver was in shock.

Randy, after he got bandaged and his wits about him, grabbed the loader out of the other Ontos, returned to his Ontos, and restarted it. He proceeded back to the other Ontos, from which he unloaded another 18 major rounds and more .30 caliber ammo.

Meanwhile, two of the Marines main battle tanks were disabled or burning, including an M67 Flame tank. Some of the tankers suffered a horrible death. Then Randy brought his Ontos to the front lines and started killing human wave attacks. Another factor was the round-the-clock air support which drove the NVA closer to the Marine lines.

After his major rounds were expended, he started firing his .30 caliber machine gun continuously. Randy said: "It was the same as mowing down a corn field." Then, he started firing the grease gun or sub-machine gun. Out of rounds again, he began firing his .45 pistol. At that point, the grunt commander came down and pulled him off the front lines.

There were 7 other Marines given the Medal of Honor for Ambush Valley in Vietnam. It was on his records when he left. It was later downgraded to the Navy Cross and awarded to him at a formation in Camp Lejeune, his next duty station.

Since 2012, Randy was having some setbacks: a bad VA operation, with internal bleeding. Then, a related stroke. Then walking problems. By May 2015, Randy was wheel chair bound, but still made it to Camp Pendleton, where he served 49 years earlier. Each time he fought his way back, very amiable, humble and articulate.

Toward the end, he sold his 1967 Plymouth GTX, 100% original from his discharge days, and another GTX. He then bought his wife a stunning, white 1957 Thunderbird. Again, it was investor grade or better than show room condition.

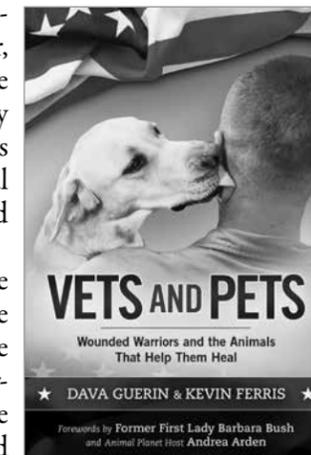
It was as if Randy had a premonition of what the future would behold. In addition, our World War II, .30 caliber machine gun on Marine Tanks and Ontos, had the same last name— Browning.

#### NEW BOOK RELEASE!

Jimmy Deidre sends this message: In September or October, this book should be available for purchase on Amazon. My own story is featured here as well as many other personal stories of wounded vets and their wonderful therapy pets.

The publisher will have two big events planned for the launch of the book so far. The first is at The Villages in Florida where the Barnes & Noble Store wants us to come and sign books and give a talk. We are hoping to have a date at the end of September or the beginning of October.

The next big event is on Veterans Day in Largo, Florida. The city hosts a huge event every year and this year we are the big attraction. They will be awarding their first annual "Barbara Bush Citizen Patriot Award."



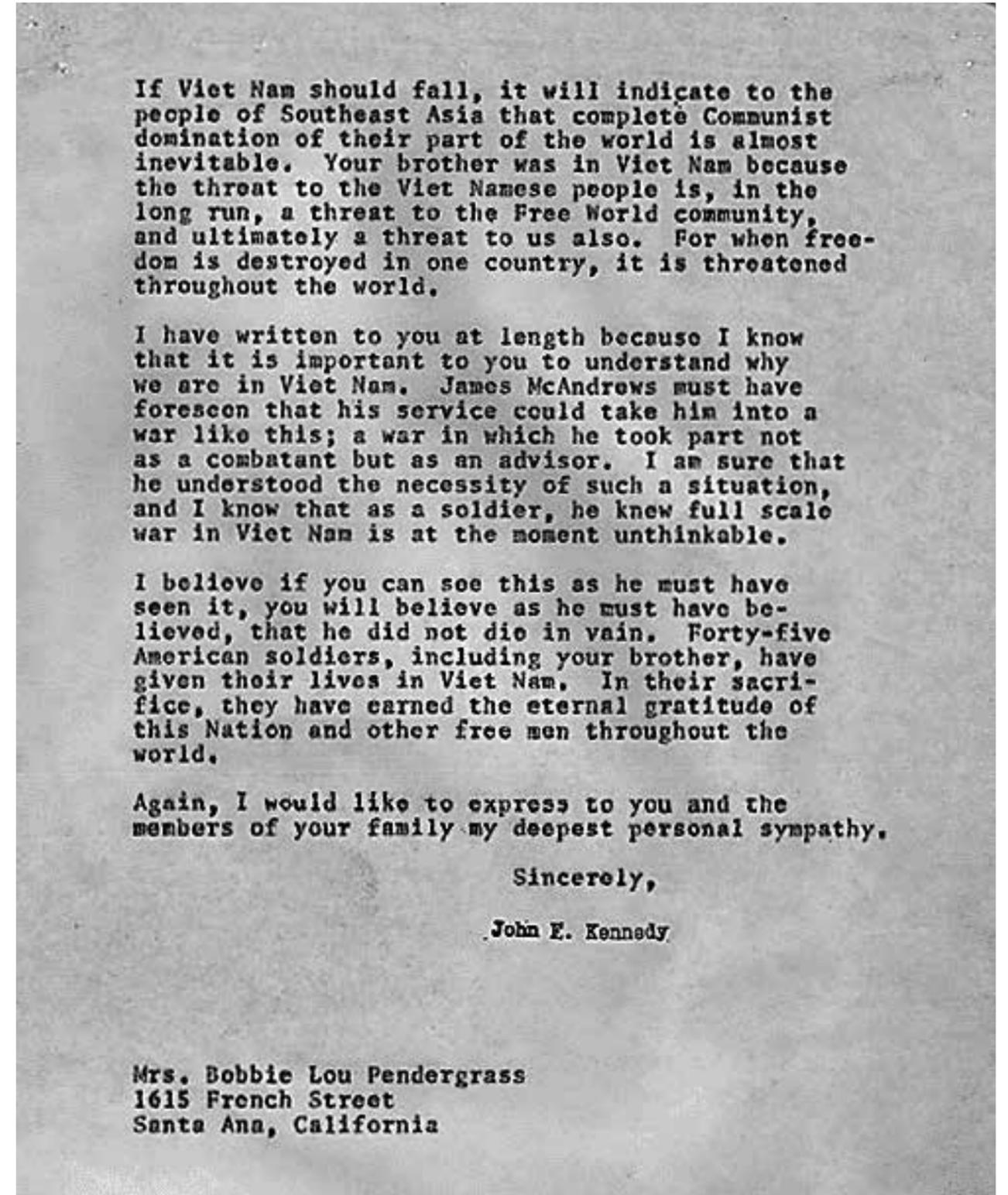
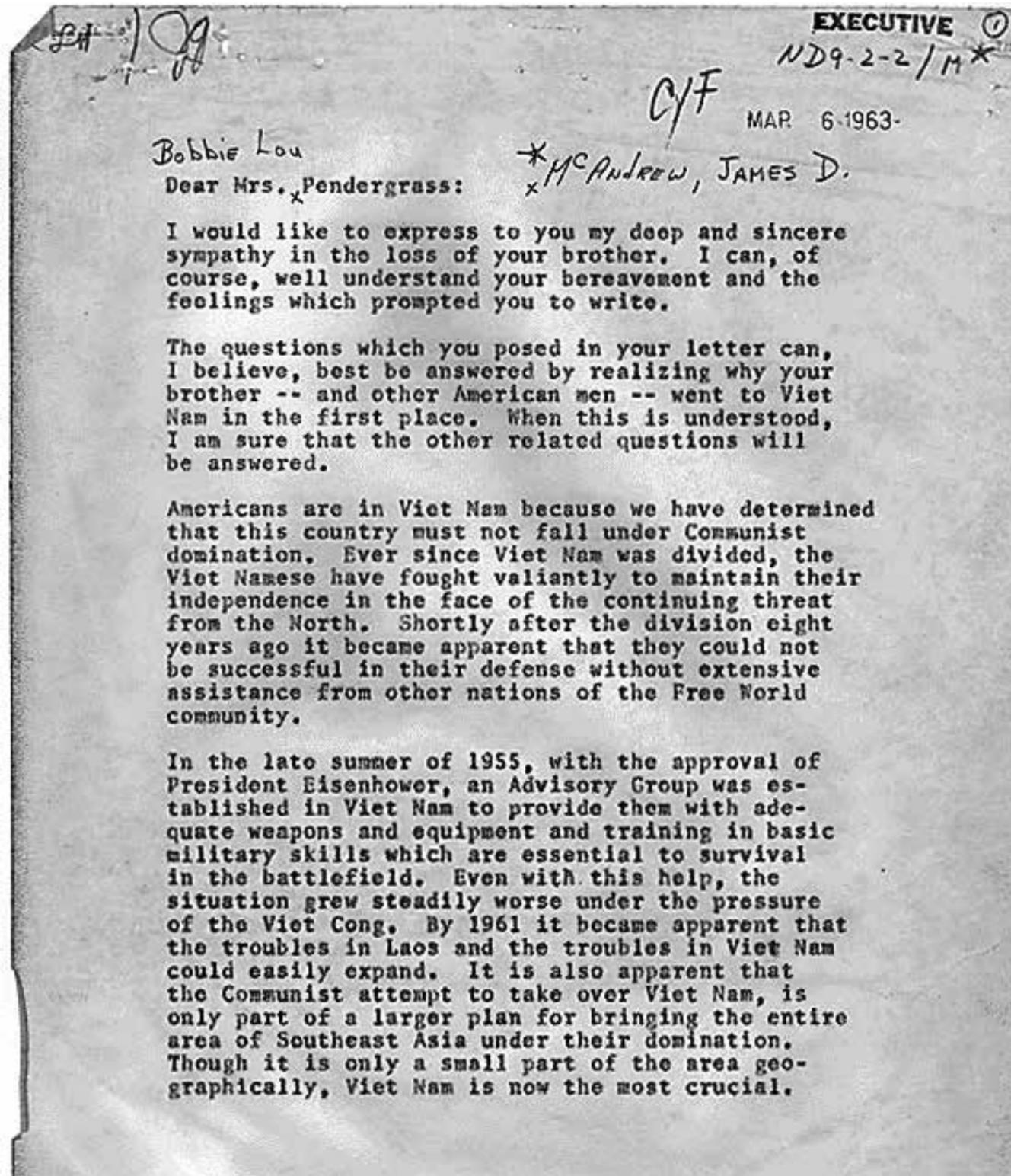
#### Gunsmoke's Gun Smoke



Fred Kellogg writes: On a misty day in early February 1968 I was at Camp Carroll listening to Armed Forces Radio when they began playing the classic western "Gunsmoke." At the exact instant where Marshall Matt Dillon fires his revolver at the beginning of the show, two nearby 175s fired. As the music played the "gun smoke" from the Army 175s enveloped my hooch. The beginning of a perfect day... ■

## Guest Opinion

The sister of an Army soldier killed in Vietnam in 1963 wrote to President JFK asking him, "If a war is worth fighting, then isn't it worth fighting to win?" Here is the president's reply:



# *To the Great Tank Park in the Sky*

“Nobody deserves your tears, but whoever deserves them will not make you cry.”  
— Gabriel García Márquez —

## **1st Sgt James Langford, USMC (ret)**

Karen Langford writes: It is with an ache in my heart to inform you that my father, James Langford, has passed. He died quietly in his sleep this morning (Feb 26, 2017) at 1:40 A.M. I do not have any other information at this time. Please pass this on to those that knew him.

John Wear adds: I don't know if you ever met 1st Sgt. James Langford (aka “Top Almighty”) who was from Carlsbad, CA. Back in 1969, Jim was the First Sergeant of Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks. He had been a career O3 “Mud Marine” and he admitted that he did not know the first thing about tanks, but when he was a gunny and the USMC needed a 1st Sgt. he went where he was needed. Later, he told me that, while his 1st Sgt. job did not require it, he spent a lot of time learning about tanks. I know for a fact that most of the men who served under Jim feel the same way that I do and that is Jim Langford was also probably the finest SNCO that I was ever exposed to during my short career in the USMC. In the fall of 1969, after Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks redeployed to Okinawa, Jim went back to the grunts and he ended up getting shot in the upper leg during an assault on a NVA held hill. After the wound got horribly infected with one of those nasty Vietnamese bugs, the doctors took off his leg below the knee. Jim retired in Carlsbad, California, and was living there in 2010 when we held the VTA reunion in San Diego. While getting ready to attend the first day of our reunion, Jim was stepping out of the shower when his artificial knee gave out and he fell back into the shower and was knocked out. He then spent the next week in the hospital ... and unfortunately he missed our reunion. His lovely wife, his son (a Marine tank officer veteran) and his beautiful daughter-in-law attended our Farewell Banquet and met some of us ... but we missed seeing Jim. I was so looking forward to

reuniting with him. As the years passed, he and I had a very nice email and telephone relationship. He wrote some really nice stories to share in the Sponson Box magazine. Yesterday, his daughter wrote me to say that Jim had passed away. I say again, “Top” Langford was probably the most decent, respectful, even-handed Marine leader I was ever blessed to meet during and after my career in the USMC.

## **Jodie Lewis**

October 12, 1938 – February 11, 2017

We got a call from Jodie Lewis' widow telling us that Jodie passed away in his home in Oceanside, CA. She said that his cancer had spread throughout his body and he fought a good fight up until the end. Early in his life, Jodie was a sculpture artist and a chef, and after high school he enlisted in the USMC where he served 27 years and eight months. He was proud to be a member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

Jodie's Wife Cynthia wrote a note: I just want to thank you for being so kind to Jodie and for the flowers that you sent for his memorial service.

## **Peter J. Frano, Jr.**



November 4, 1934–March 3, 2017

1st Sgt. Peter J. Frano Jr, USMC (retired) received his final set of orders on 3 March 2017. He will report to Saint Peter immediately and is looking forward to his next

operational assignment.

Pete was born in Queens, New York, 4 November 1934. He is survived by his wife of 62 years, Sonja, and their three children. Pete proudly and honorably served this nation and

the United States Marine Corps for 22 adventure filled years. He entered Marine Corps Recruit Depot at Parris Island, SC in 1952. After graduation, he received his initial training as a Tanker (1811) and deployed with the 1st Marine Division, “B” Company, to Korea and Japan (South Camp) until April, 1954. In February, 1965, He reported to 1st Marine Division, Camp Pendleton, CA and deployed with the 1st Tank battalion, Bravo Company, 3d Platoon (The Third Herd) to Chu Lai, Vietnam, returning in September 1966. One final deployment in 1971 was with the 1st Tank Battalion, Okinawa, Japan. 1st Sgt. Frano was ready to retire in 1973 after 22 years serving his beloved Marine Corps. He was a proud and long-standing member of the USMC VTA.

## **Jacques Lyman Miller**

His widow wrote: Lt. Col. Jacques Lyman Miller, (USMC – ret), 76, died November 22, 2013. A memorial service was held on Sunday, December 1, at 2 PM at St. Luke United Methodist Church in Sanford, VA. Interment was held at a later date at Arlington National Cemetery. We are sorry for the belated message but we just got the message from his widow. Colonel Miller was a USMC Vietnam Tanker Association Life member.

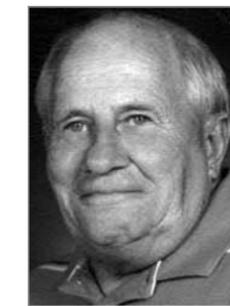
## **Robert R. “Bob” Timberg**

June 16, 1940–September 9, 2016

Robert R. “Bob” Timberg, a Marine Corps veteran who survived horrific injuries in Vietnam and became a Washington reporter for The Baltimore Sun, has died at a hospital in Annapolis. He was 76. Timberg graduated from the U.S. Naval Academy and was sent to Vietnam as a Marine. In 1967, the amphibious tractor he was riding hit a land mine, burning him with fuel. He underwent 35 operations to help

reconstruct his face. He joined the Evening Capital in Annapolis in 1970 and later went to work at the Evening Sun in Baltimore, covering the statehouse. He joined The Sun's Washington bureau in 1981. Timberg's 1995 book, “The Nightingale's Song,” told the story of five fellow Naval Academy graduates, including Sen. John McCain.

## **Karl R. Yohn**



Karl R. (Bob) Yohn, age 73, from State College, PA, died Wednesday, April 19, 2017, at home. He was born on September 30, 1943, in Lewistown, PA. He was the son of the late Clayton and Marian Houser Yohn. On August 21, 1964, he married Judi M. Deeg, who survives him.

Also surviving are two children, Michelle Yohn, of State College and Robert Yohn and his companion, Dory McGuire, of Mechanicsburg; and two grandchildren, Hannah and Alex Yohn, of Mechanicsburg. In addition to his parents, he was preceded in death by three siblings. Bob graduated from Lewistown High School in 1961. He joined the United States Marine Corps and served as a tank crewman from 1961-1965. Following his service he worked as a manager for the United Parcel Service for 30 years. He was a member of Mount Nittany United Methodist Church and the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

Joe Tyson called me to report Karl's death and to lament that it had taken him nearly 20 years to convince Karl to join the VTA and then just a year after Karl joined, he passed away. Joe added that Karl was Joe's first tank commander and that Karl taught him virtually everything to keep him alive while serving in-country. ■

# What Members Are Doing

## Doc Hackemack in Cozumel, Mexico



Doc writes: Last week while we were in Cozumel, I struck up a conversation with an obvious Marine veteran. After talking, he said, "Hey Doc, you ought to join the USMC VTA".

I told him, "I am a member!"

As it turns out, he is a fairly new member, Eli Duck (on the right of the photo).

## Young Tank Crewmen



Guy Everest's grand kids on top of an M-60 tank memorial at the Nat. Guard Armory in Flemington, NJ

## JOKE

### Understanding

There was this Chinese girl at a travel agency when I was in Shanghai. I asked her if she could escort me for a city tour and asked for her mobile number, so I could call her to make arrangements.

She got excited and said: "sex sex sex, wan free sex for tonight"

## Memorial service for U.S. Marine LtGen Lawrence Snowden



Detachment #472 attending the memorial service for LtGen Lawrence Snowden in Tallahassee. VTA member Dick Jugenheimer all dressed up in the coat and tie as he stands behind the seated man.

## Ron Dudek helps lead a tour back to Vietnam



Members of the MHT group posed for a photo in front of the Imperial Palace in Hue. The former military personnel in the group said that visiting Vietnam today is a valuable experience that provides new and much brighter memories of Vietnam.

In Photo: Ron is the 1st person on left in the front row. ■

## Letter Home

**Editor's note: Grace Moore is a dear friend of John Wear who served as a U.S Army orthopedic trauma nurse in a M.A.S.H. Hospital in Vietnam. Last year she gave a "What I Did in The War" talk during a local gathering of interested folks. During the talk she said that she thought that her letters home were humorous for her to read today. I asked her to share one or two of them with us.**



Dear Mom and Everyone – 21 May 1968

Well, here I am and it's not near as bad as I'd imagined. So far anyhow. I had a real good flight over on a 165 passenger Braniff jet. We stopped at Hawaii for about 30 minutes and then the Philippines for 2-1/2 hours. I called Dave Mueller while I was there and was he ever surprised. He came out to the airport and we visited until time for me to leave. He sure has grown up since high school, but doesn't look one bit different.

He hardly knew me though with my blonde hair and no glasses.

Altogether, our trip lasted about 20 or 21 hours and we arrived at Ben Ho Air Base in VN at 5:30 PM on the 19th. From there we came to the 90th Replacement unit in Long Binh where we are now. This place is really something else. We live in old wooden barracks with no doors. There's not much of a breeze here so they are hotter than you know what. The bathrooms are 3-hole outhouses and for showers we have one building with two shower heads in the middle – no privacy at all. If you ever had any modesty when you left home – you get rid of it quick or else you stay dirty!

Yesterday, we got our jungle fatigues and boots so we're now dressed in the highest style. They really are comfortable even if they look rather odd.

It is really, really hot here and humid too, but I'm already starting to get used to it. The only bad thing is that you feel dirty all of the time.

The food is nothing to get all excited about, but it's adequate. Yesterday we had powdered eggs for breakfast (scrambled) and I've never had anything so rotten in my life. Even liver beats that stuff! Other than that we've had regular food.

There were 44 nurses who came over together and it's a good bunch. The hospital we were supposed to go to isn't finished yet so we are all being sent to different places. Mary (from Ft. Sill) and I are going to the 12th Evac. Hosp. at Cu Chi which is about 30 – 40 miles from Saigon. The chief nurse there used to be the assistant chief nurse at Ft. Sill and she's a real doll. We should be going over there sometime today. It's supposed to be the busiest hospital in Viet Nam, so they say.

Before I forget – please send me about 12 pairs of those underpants that I got at Penny's. Nylon ones over her are completely out of the question. They just stick to you all of the time. I left a book on Vietnam up on my dresser. It has a map in it so you can see where I'm at. The only thing that I'm not going to be able to adjust to over here are the bugs. They are everywhere and some of them look about big enough to carry you away. My first night here I shared my shower with a frog. But I had my contacts out and all I could see was this big black "thing" moving across the

floor. I thought it was a big spider so I jumped up on a chair and finished my shower. I dried the necessary spots, threw on my robe and ran back to the barracks. I bet I shook for an hour and now I wear my glasses in the shower!!!

I'll quit now so I can get this in today's mail. Let me know how long it takes to get there.

Love

Grace

\*\*\*\*\*

Dear Mom – 29 May 1968

Boy, is it ever hot here! If I ever see 80 degree whether again, I'll probably freeze to death!

We are definitely into the rainy season now and it is pouring at least once a day for anywhere from 30 min. to several hours. It cools things off, but when the sun comes out you can see the steam rising up from the ground.

Our "favorite" (HA!) bugs have come with the rains and are known as the "nurse-eaters." They look something like a grasshopper only 10 times as big. Ugh!

I am working on the orthopedic ward right now. Then I will get to emergency room for a while and finally ICU. If I've told you this before, you'll have to forgive me as I've written so many letters today I can't remember what I've said to whom.

We also pull Evac. Call every so often. This is when we have a severe head case and have to transfer him to helicopter to Long Binh – about 20 min. away. It's up to the nurse to keep him alive during the flight. I was on call last Monday as took two cases out. Believe me, you pray all the way that they make it. The trip back is really nice because you can look around and see where you're at. Some of Vietnam is pretty from the air and riding in a helicopter is fun.

You wouldn't believe the wounds these guys have. We get them straight from the field and some of them are literally shot to hell. Yet there is very little bitterness among the patients. They are just glad to be alive because they've seen so many of their buddies killed.

Nursing over here is 100% different from the stateside hospital. You really get in there and take care of the patients. Sometimes it gets depressing but you feel like you're doing something worthwhile.

They serve us three hot meals a day in the mess hall and this combined with the heat and humidity, it does nothing for your appetite. Thank God the PX has small cans of pork and beans as you can eat them cold and they taste good.

I still have not received any mail yet, but I probably will sometime this week. Sure hope so as it seems like months since I've heard from anyone. Be sure when you send packages, that you send them airmail or otherwise they come over by boat.

That's about it for now.

Love,

Grace ■

# SHORT TIMER!!!



Editor's Comment: We all have a story or two about being a short timer. It could be a story about a buddy while you were together in-country or about your own return to the "World." Please consider jotting down your own short timer story and sending it to John Wear to share it with the membership!!!

## No Short Timer

BY JOHN HUNTER  
RVN 1965-66  
1ST AND 3RD TANK BATTALIONS

This is a little story about what happened to me when I came back from Vietnam. I flew back on a U.S. Air Force C-130 from Kadena AFB in Okinawa. The prop-driven plane was full. It had about 10-12 seats in each row with all of them facing backwards. I can remember ice cold water dripping off the overhead pipes. The second flight took 11-1/2 hours to MCAS El Toro. That was June 1966. By this time I was so used to being on a ship that I decided to buy a car that was as big as a ship. It was a 1962 Ford Galaxy 500. I drove this "boat" from Redondo Beach, CA to Camp LeJeune by myself. I was 19 years old at the time and I was so worried about having the proper military bearing when checking into 2nd Tank Battalion that I stopped in a little town in Alabama to get a haircut—a Marine haircut.

It was quite an adventure driving 2,700 miles. I had only taken \$120.00 with me, and naturally I ran out of money. I did not have enough sense to call my parents so I visited the Red Cross and borrowed \$20.00 to make it the rest of the way to Camp LeJeune.

When I found the A Company, 2nd Tanks office, I walked in and started the check-in process. There was a Lieutenant in the office. I don't remember if he was a 1st or 2nd Lieutenant but when he asked me a question, I failed to say, "Sir" so he chewed my ass out. Having just come back from a year in Vietnam, to say the least, I was shocked that he would be so petty. But you know how those "office commandos" are. They seem to like to show how macho they are. Office people are good for one thing, and that is usually delivering bad news. I don't remember seeing him again after that day, so I would not know. I wonder if this guy is currently a member of the VTA? And, by the way, I had a little more than two years to go in the Corps when I got to LeJeune. ■

# A Poem

BY ROBERT "JUNIOR" DONAT  
DRIVER, A CO, 1/69TH ARMOR  
US ARMY-VIETNAM

*Back in 1968 when I was young & strong,  
I was a person who never did wrong!*

*Then one fine day my Uncle Sam said son,  
I'm sending you to a place called Vietnam...*

*There you'll deal with your Uncle Ho,  
What to expect you will not know!*

*Just go there knowing though I've got your back,  
Even though the country back home, total respect for you will lack!*

*Just do your duty with honor & pride,  
When you come home you'll be no hero, your country will just push you aside...*

*You'll go there with many a stranger  
And encounter many a danger!*

*When you come home you'll be a stranger to your family friends & others,  
But not to all those strangers you went there with, they have become your brothers!*

*What you'll experience will forever be embedded in your mind...  
Family, friends & doctors will barrage you with ideas for a quick cure find.*

*You can be polite & listen to what they say,  
Or you can lash out & tell them it wasn't a game you went to play!*

*It's refreshing to converse with my Nam brothers, you see...  
Their acceptance and understanding truly sets me free!!!*



QUESTION: Does anyone recognize this tank and/or the crew?

**FRANK BLAKEMORE**

Jim Coan writes: I got a phone call this morning from Roger Unland, who was a member of 1st Platoon, Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks when I had the platoon. He's trying to locate Frank Blakemore, who took over 1st platoon after I left to become the XO of Alpha Co. in July, 1968. Frank retired as a full colonel. I've had no contact with him since Vietnam. Please put this info in the "Looking For" section of the S-Box.

**FOUND ON THE VTA WEBSITE!**

To Bruce VanApeldoorn: It was 50 years ago that we were sitting on top of a tank in a place called Vietnam. It was with Charlie Co, 1st Tank Battalion, 1st Mar Div. It could have been C-25, the tank I was assigned. In the picture I enclosed of 4 of us, I am on the left.

I was looking through Pinterest and I came across the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association and scanning through the website I found you and your e-mail address. I watched your video testimony about the Marine killed in Hoi An who deserves the Purple Heart. I was very moved. I remember spending a little time in Hoi An, but I don't recall the day that happened. I also recall spending a few months in a place called the Mud Flats with a company of Korean Marines and at Marble Mountain. One of the last operations I was on was Allan Brook and I remember that we were together through most, if not all of that.



I regret losing touch with the guys from Charlie Co. Some of the names I do remember: you, Sgt MacDonald, McKnight (who I went to Bangkok with on R&R), Mendes, Clemons, Potts, Clark, Fresh, Wilbanks and West. It was Wilbanks who carried me to a Huey the morning after I got wounded while we were in the Mud Flats.

I'm originally from New Jersey and now living in Illinois. I read that you teach at DeVry. I know there are campuses here and if you get to Illinois, it would be great to get together.

Well Bruce, hope all is well with you. I'd love to hear from you.

Richard J. Zayat

*P.S. Richard became a member of the VTA right after sending this note to Bruce.*

**LOOKING FOR LT. D.L. BROWN**

I am trying to locate former Lt. D. L. Brown. Lt. Brown had the 3rd platoon, Company C, 1st AT Battalion with BLT 3/1 in 1968. BLT 3/1 was the ground component of Special Landing Force Bravo. I was the company commander of Kilo 3/1 from Sept 1967 to April 1968. We owe much to the Ontos guys who bailed us out on many occasions. I have tried for years to locate Lt. Brown with no success. Any assistance would be greatly appreciated.

Our tank platoon commander was Lt. Bob Parrish. He and Gunny Steve Goddard were great, as well as all the tankers and Ontos Marines.



These pictures were taken on Operation Badger Tooth when I was commanding Kilo 3/1. Please note that the Marine on the TI phone (photo on left) was my 1st platoon commander, Judd Kinne.



again magnificent. Bob, Gunny Steve Goddard, and the entire tank platoon were great warriors... always ready to go.

**LT WAYNE HAYES**

John Wear writes: I am looking for members of Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks from 1967.

COMMENT: One of our members, Stan Olenjack, sent me a note telling me that he was going to be involved with a color guard that will be honoring Lt. Wayne Hayes, a U.S. Marine "Fallen Hero" who was KIA on July 3, 1967, while serving as a tank platoon leader of 3rd Platoon, Charlie Co., 3rd Tanks.

FOLLOW UP: Since writing the above, Olin "Spanky" Norman, the driver of Lt. Hayes' tank when he was KIA contacted me and said that he'd be happy and proud to speak to anyone about Lt. Hayes. And then Gene Whitehead called and said that he attended the memorial service that Stan was involved with, and that he also spent some time with "Spanky" Norman and with 30 members of the Hayes family.

AS A SIDE NOTE: We may plan to honor Lt. Hayes at a future VTA reunion.

QUESTION: Did you know of the good lieutenant and/or do you have any sort of a story that you can relay to me about the man or about the incident where he lost his life? Give John Wear a call at 215-896-0562 or email me at johnwear2@verizon.net ■

Semper Fi,  
John Regal  
LtCol, USMC(Ret)  
Email: jregalkilo@gmail.com  
Home Phone: 806-655-1421  
Cell Phone: 806-679-6659.

Rick Lewis replies: Kilo 3/1 was the company that got over run by a battalion of NVA/VC in Jan 67 and the 3 tanks from C Co., 1st Tanks, saved them. John was awarded a Silver Star, and two other crewmen were awarded Bronze Stars. It was one very long night. With regard to the Ontos, they would run with us every now and then, but I do not remember any officers being with them.

John Regal replies: I don't know where the company was in Jan 67... I think that they were up around Da Nang. We went north in Nov 67 as BLT 3/1, SLF Bravo. Kilo was never overrun. We did fight a battalion of NVA on the night of 1 Feb 68 but none of the NVA penetrated our perimeter. A few days prior to that we were fighting in My Loc along the Cua Viet River. That's when Bob Parrish's tanks came to our rescue. Bob was awarded the Silver Star. Tanks also were with Kilo on Op Badger Tooth on 27 Dec 67 and were

**JOKE**

**Real Guts**

Four flag officers are on a naval destroyer and arguing about how tough their service is.

The Army general says I will prove how tough we are. He yells "Private!" Instantly, 3 appear before him. He points at one and says, "I want you to jump in the water and stop the propellers with your bare hands." The private jumps in the water and gets torn to shreds. The general smiled at the other flag officers and said, "Men, that took guts."

The Air Force general, not to be outdone, yelled, "Lieutenant!" Instantly a pilot appears before him. The general says, "Pilot, I want you to take this aircraft to 50,000 and go into a dive. I don't want to see you pull out till you see me lower my arm." The general never lowers his arm and the pilot crashes and burns in

the ocean. He turns to his compatriots and says, "Men, that took guts."

Not to be outdone the Navy admiral yells "Seaman!" Instantly a petty officer shows up in front of him. The admiral says, "I want you to take this knife and go kill that school of sharks." The seaman dives in the water and is torn limb from limb. The admiral smiles and says, "Now, that takes guts!"

Well, the Marine general doesn't want to be outdone either and starts looking around for a Marine. He finally spots one up in the crow's nest of the ship. He yells up, "Hey, Marine!" The Marine looks down, salutes and says "Yes, sir." The general says, "I want you to jump out of that crow's nest and do a swan dive onto this deck." The Marine yells down, "With all due respect, sir. Go fuck yourself." The general smiles and says, "Gentlemen, that took real guts."

# V. A. News & Updates

For more VA information please go to our website  
[www.USMCVTA.org](http://www.USMCVTA.org)

Lejeune Vets to be Approved Faster for 8 Illnesses

The Marine Corps has begun outreach to hundreds of thousands of veterans who served at least 30 days at Camp Lejeune from August 1953 to December 1987, inviting them or their surviving spouses to file for VA compensation if the veterans suffered one of eight ailments linked to water contamination on base. Those veterans are eligible to file “fast-track” VA disability compensation claims for the following eight conditions: adult leukemia; aplastic anemia and other myelodysplastic syndromes; bladder cancer; kidney cancer; liver cancer; multiple myeloma; non-Hodgkin’s lymphoma; and Parkinson’s disease.

If Camp Lejeune veterans died from any of these eight ailments, their surviving spouses or children will also see claims for Dependency and Indemnity Compensation (DIC) fast tracked under the recently-approved accelerated process established for Lejeune victims.

Years ago, studies confirmed that Camp Lejeune water had been contaminated by benzene, vinyl chloride, and two volatile organic compounds: trichloroethylene (TCE), a metal degreaser, and perchloroethylene (PCE), a dry-cleaning agent. Initially, when Congress passed the Honoring America’s Veterans and Caring for Camp Lejeune Families Act in 2012, fifteen ailments were then possibly linked to the pollutants. Three years later, after an extensive review, the VA published an interim rule that found 8 of the original 15 conditions having a strong association to chemical exposures at Lejeune.

The VA’s final ruling on March 14 of this year allows for claims for the 8 presumptive conditions to begin. Presumptive ailment claims can be reviewed by any VA regional office. Camp Lejeune vets with medical evidence of a presumptive disease and documents showing Lejeune service during the period of contamination can file claims using VA Form 21-526-EZ, or electronically through eBenefits. The Marine Corps is urging any veterans who had earlier claims denied, particularly if they involved any of the newly presumptive ailments, to refile their claims. Veteran’s Service Organizations can help file for benefits. [Tom Philpott, Sierra Vista Herald, March 25, 2017, P. A5]

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Death Preparations What Beneficiaries Should Know in Advance

Sometimes the most difficult conversations to have are the most important, like helping your loved ones be prepared for when you die. Talking to your family about this topic beforehand is a way to show that you care, and it will help to ease the financial burdens they may face. Following are 6 things you should brief your beneficiaries on:

First. Make sure you understand what an (AOP) beneficiary is and the nature of the benefit to which they are entitled. Find more information on this benefit at <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/provide/aop.html>

Second. Tell your beneficiaries who they are! Hopefully, you’ve designated your beneficiaries for any (AOP) that may be due. When no beneficiary is named, the payment is made to the highest person in what is known as the “Order of Precedence.” The Order or Precedence is the federally mandated order of inheritance that applies to legacies without a designated beneficiary. Refer to <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/provide/aop/aop-order.html> for more information on “Order of Precedence”. Keep in mind that it can take many months to locate your survivors, identify who comes highest in the Order of Precedence and then make the payment. That’s why having a current, correct and complete beneficiary designation on file is important to prevent delays or errors in your arrears payments.

Designating a sole beneficiary in your will does not automatically make that person your AOP beneficiary. AOP determination is based exclusively on the AOP beneficiary election in your retired pay account. To review your current arrears of pay beneficiaries and to make changes, visit the Beneficiaries for Arrears link once you’ve signed in to your myPay account. For more detailed instructions on designating an Arrears of Pay beneficiary on myPay, review our article at <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/newsevents/newsletter/mngaopbenfy.html> on this subject.

Third. Let your beneficiary know that sometimes money that has already been

deposited into your checking account needs to be returned to DFAS. Military retired pay is only payable for as long as you are alive. Entitlement to your military retirement ends when you die. Most banks will automatically deduct any overpaid funds without warning, which can be troublesome if you share a joint account.

Fourth. Tell your beneficiaries what documents they will need to send in to make their claim. One copy of the death certificate that includes the manner of death needs to be sent to us. Also, each beneficiary should complete a Claim for Unpaid Compensation (SF 1174). It’s a great idea to go over this claim form with your beneficiaries to make sure they will have all of the information they need to fill it out. If you want a more detailed explanation of this process, check out the instructions on our website at <http://www.dfas.mil/retiredmilitary/survivors/Retiree-death.html>.

Fifth. Let your beneficiaries know that sometimes there is no money due. Each situation is different. It depends how up to date the account was kept. You can make sure your account is in good standing by performing a yearly audit.

Sixth. When an arrears payment is made, there is a statement on the check that reads, “Retired Pay Payable only during life of Payee.” Please do not let this statement alarm your beneficiaries. As long as the beneficiary’s name is accurate on the check, the check can be cashed.

DFAS wants to take the best care of your loved ones when you die. You can help them by having a conversation with them to know what to expect. We know talking about it might be difficult, but hopefully this checklist gives you an idea of the things to say. Don’t put it off. Have a conversation about it with your loved ones today. [Source: DFAS Retiree Newsletter | September 2016 ++]

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VA Guide & Service Dog Program Parameters & Access

Are you aware that the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) has a Guide and Service Dog program? What’s the difference between the two? A guide dog is trained to lead the blind or vision impaired, while the service dog is trained to do specific tasks for someone that can’t do them because of a disability. Guide dogs act as pilots for their owners; blind veterans get assessed and trained for orientation and mobility. If a veteran prefers a guide dog, the VA will provide information on contacting guide dog schools. A veteran’s partnership with the guide dog is provided by non-VA affiliated guide dog schools.

The VA will provide veterinary care (including prescribed medications, office visits for medical procedures, and dental procedures where the dog has been sedated, and follow up on vaccinations) and equipment (such as a harness, backpack or both) through the VA Prosthetics and Sensory Aids Department. The VA will not pay for boarding, grooming, food or other routine expenses of owning a dog. A service dog receives training to do specific tasks the veteran cannot do as a result of a disability. Service dogs can pick things up, guide someone with vision problems or help someone who falls or loses balance easily. Service dogs go through rigorous training, learning to:

- Do things different from natural dog behavior
- Do things the owner cannot do because of a disability
- Work with the new owner in ways to help manage the owner’s disability

As a result of this relationship, service dogs are allowed to enter most public places the owner goes, even if it’s somewhere dogs can’t usually go, like restaurants and airplanes. There are some exceptions, and service dogs can be asked to leave if they misbehave. In order for a veteran to receive a service dog, they are evaluated; the prescribing clinician must determine:

- Ability and means, including family or caregiver, to care for the dog currently and into the future
- Goals and tasks that the dog would help the veteran accomplish
- Goals and tasks that other assistive technology or therapy would help the veteran accomplish

The veteran will be notified of approval or disapproval. If approved, they will be referred to Assistance Dogs International-accredited agencies. There is no

charge for the dog or its associated training. Recently, the VA announced a pilot program to implement veterinary health benefits for veterans’ mobility service dogs with chronic impairments that substantially limits mobility associated with mental health disorders.

Service dogs are distinguished from pets and comfort animals because they have been specially trained to perform tasks for a specific individual with a disability who cannot perform the task independently. If you would like further information regarding this benefit, you need to start the process with your primary care doctor to get the referral to the VAMC Fresno Rehabilitation and Prosthetic Services Department. If you need assistance in enrolling into the VA Healthcare system, we can help you complete the enrollment form to take to them. [Source: The Californian | Ken Cruickshank | September 24, 2016 ++]

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VA Geriatrics & Extended Care Update 01 An Aging Society

In 1960, just over 500,000 American veterans were 65 years old or older — 2.3 percent of our veteran population. In 2020, over 9.4 million are projected to be 65 or older — almost 47 percent of veterans. Aging veterans are a harbinger of our nation’s aging population; between now and 2050, Americans aged 65 and over will grow from 15 percent to 22 percent of the population. Those 85 and older will grow from about 6 million to near 19 million. Longer lives and advances in medicine are accompanied by increased needs for the treatment for chronic diseases like diabetes, arthritis, hypertension and dementia. Three-fourths of U.S. health care expenditures are for chronic disease.

Fortunately, we have a health care system with unparalleled expertise in geriatric care; it’s called the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA). VA leads the nation in addressing the care of an aging society because one out of every two VA patients is a senior citizen. Of 22 million living American veterans, over 6 million seek VA care in a given year; over 52 percent of these are age 65 and over. Though most of these veterans are eligible for other care systems and insurance, most of them choose VA. VA has a visionary system of geriatric research, education and clinical centers (“GRECCs”) created by Congress in 1975 to guide VA in meeting its mandate to care for America’s surviving warriors as they aged into their 70s, 80s and beyond. There are now 20 GRECCs in the 150 VA medical centers in the U.S. devoted to training health care professionals in assessing and managing health needs of elderly clients. They perform pioneering work on the impacts of diet and exercise and investigate diseases of aging, rehabilitation of stroke victims, the genetics and neurobiology of Alzheimer’s disease and on the cellular mechanisms of Parkinson’s disease, among many other accomplishments.

VA pioneered and broadly implemented home-based primary care in which clinicians make house calls to veterans with serious, disabling diseases, and we established teams of clinicians in every medical center to provide end-of-life care that provide comfort and dignity for veterans and their families when it is most needed. Since the late 1940s, VA has maintained close working relationships with most U.S. medical schools. Over 70 percent of U.S. physicians receive some clinical instruction in VA settings. Though there is an acute shortage of health personnel with advanced training in geriatrics, VA has many initiatives to educate and train future clinical leaders in geriatrics. This country owes its freedom to veterans, men and women who have “borne the battle” for us all. VA is setting the bar in optimizing the well-being and independence of an increasingly elderly veteran-patient population. America would do well to follow VA’s lead as it prepares to address its looming geriatric challenges. [Source: Reno Gazette-Journal | Robert A. McDonald & Richard C. Veith | September 6, 2016 ++]

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New Illnesses Linked Agent Orange And Other Herbicides Used in The War

VA Secretary David J. Shulkin announced this week that his priorities for improving services to veterans include expanding their access to private sector health care in part by asking Congress to remove two irksome cost controls. Shulkin is said to be weeks away from deciding if hundreds of thousands more Vietnam War veterans will be eligible for VA compensation and health care for new illnesses linked Agent Orange and other herbicides used in the war.

Among ailments under final review is hypertension (high blood pressure) which

afflicts two-thirds of elderly American to include Vietnam War-era veterans.

Other conditions that might be added to the list of 17 ailments that VA presumes were caused by wartime herbicide exposure are bladder cancer, hypothyroidism and conditions with Parkinson’s-like symptoms.

A year ago the National Academy of Medicine, formerly known as the Institute of Medicine of the National Academy of Sciences, delivered to VA the last of a series of reviews of scientific studies on ailments possibly linked to chemicals used in Vietnam to defoliate jungles where the enemy could hide.

The National Academy concluded that recent research strengthens the association to herbicide exposure of bladder cancer and hypothyroidism, finding “limited or suggestive” evidence of a link. That was an upgrade from “inadequate or insufficient” evidence found earlier. The report also affirmed limited or suggestive evidence that herbicides could cause hypertension. And it found “no rational basis” not to add conditions that cause Parkinson’s-like symptoms from the limited or suggestive evidence category too.

Dr. Ralph Loren Erickson, chief consultant of post-deployment health services for the Veterans Health Administration, said the Academy findings were reviewed for months by a VA technical work group that included experts in disability compensation, environmental medicine, public health, toxicology, epidemiology and legal requirements of relevant statutes. That work then was reviewed by a strategic work group and finally a task force of senior VA leaders. Shulkin received their final packet of recommendations on Feb. 17, three days after he was sworn into office.

“It doesn’t take much imagination to realize how broad it would be and the costs involved” if Shulkin, backed by staff work, decides high blood pressure is a service-connected condition for Vietnam veterans, said Rep. Tim Walz (Minn.), ranking Democrat on the House Veterans Affairs Committee.

“I trust the secretary. I know he’ll do what’s best for veterans,” said Walz. “But I think we put him in a very difficult position” where a decision to add high blood pressure to the list of presumptive conditions would also force him to ask for billions of dollars more to process claims, award compensation and provide care for a condition common in any adult population, or else cut back on other VA services.

The Defense Department estimates that 3.4 million service members deployed to Southeast Asia from 1964 through 1975. If 75 percent are still alive and, based on age, two thirds have high blood pressure, that’s almost 1.7 million more veterans potentially filing new compensation claims.

Asked if VA takes cost into account for such decisions, Dr. Erickson said no.

“I suppose at some later date someone who is paid to count beans and to cost things out will probably come up with a number,” he said. “But as it relates to the decision for presumption, cost is not a factor. What we are guided by is if the scientific evidence in the peer review literature sufficient to support presumption.”

Erickson said the drafting of new rules following the Secretary’s decision on possible new presumptions would take several months because other federal agencies, including the Office of Management and Budget, would be involved. [Source: Military Update, P.O. Box 231111, Centreville, VA, 20120 or email [milupdate@aol.com](mailto:milupdate@aol.com)]

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Apply in Advance for Burial Eligibility in a VA National Cemetery

VA’s new pre-need eligibility determination program allows you to find out in advance if you are eligible for burial in a VA national cemetery. This allows families to plan ahead, and streamlines access to the burial benefits that Veterans have earned through military service for themselves and their eligible family members. Want more information about this new program? Visit the site link below to learn how to apply in advance for burial in a VA national cemetery. Here is the direct link:

[https://explore.va.gov/memorial-benefits?utm\\_source=govdelivery&utm\\_medium=email&utm\\_campaign=april-memorial-monthly\\_4.5&utm\\_term=body-button-page&utm\\_content=memorial-application-all-null](https://explore.va.gov/memorial-benefits?utm_source=govdelivery&utm_medium=email&utm_campaign=april-memorial-monthly_4.5&utm_term=body-button-page&utm_content=memorial-application-all-null)

## A Career in the United States Marine Corps?

BY JOHN WEAR

*John's Note: I recall several years ago a fairly large group of Marine veterans poured out our souls with an "I wish I had stayed in the Corps" conversation. I am sort of hoping to garner that sort of response from you-all of your own feelings about staying in or getting out. Please send me your comments to share with the brotherhood.*

Mid-1966: I had one year of college under my belt and, since the draft was a real threat to all non-student males, I decided to join the USMC for two years "to serve my time" and then to be able to get on with my life. Six months later and during the last few days in boot camp, the Sr. DI told all of us "two year pukers" that we'd most certainly be assigned to the grunts and be immediately shipped off to Vietnam ... as he phrased it "...so that Uncle Sam could get his money's worth for training you to be Marines." At that point in time, I "shipped over" for an additional year so I was able to attend USMC tank school.

Fast Forward a Year: It's April 1967, and I am a freshly minted U.S. Marine corporal who is garrisoned at Camp Pendleton. The 5th Tank Battalion Career SNCO had me take a bunch of tests and then announced that I was qualified for OCS ... so I applied to become an officer. About two weeks later, I had thought it over and I came to the realization that it would be better if I had some combat experience prior to OCS so I volunteered for deployment to the war.

Fast Forward Another Year: It's

March 1969, and I am just back from Vietnam and a freshly minted sergeant reporting in at 5th Tanks at Camp Pendleton. The 5th Tank Battalion Career SNCO asked me if I wanted to pursue my OCS aspirations from before I went to Vietnam. My reply was, "I thought about it, I laughed about it, and forgot about it." Four months later, I was a married college student, and then five months after that I am a brand new father of my son, John Francis Wear, III.

Early 1978: I am recently divorced and one miserable sumbitch with a miserable job in the miserable mid-western town of Kansas City. I make a phone call to the local USMC Recruiting Office. I have a ½ hour conversation with the OIC. At the end of our conversation he says, "Mr Wear, I would give my left nut to recruit you. You are a former NCO with combat experience, you have a college degree and a good ten years of working experience. Sir, I am sorry to say that you are just too old. If you had called me two years ago when you were 29, we'd be having a totally different conversation. I am truly sorry, sir."

Rats!!!

Fast Forward to Today: Regrets? Maybe I have a few but they are pretty minor ... and I am pretty happy with how my life has unfolded.

## Qualifying

BY KEN ZEBAL

As a newly assigned 1811 tank crewman, I was presented with several opportunities to excel. Fire watch is one example and Assistant Duty NCO another. I thought these, along with guard duty and mess duty, were nuisance assignments that did lit-

tle or nothing to enhance my skills as the Assistant Loader on C-23, an M-103 heavy tank. However, at the tank park everything was focused on tanker business. We checked oil (hot & cold), checked track, cleaned guns, cleaned OVM and heavens only knows we cleaned the tank and the turret. Boy, did we ever clean that turret, batteries, linkages, radios, ammo boxes and dropping the breach. All this was accomplished in accordance with the training schedule (conduct OJT) and under the direct and unforgiving supervision of our salty TCs; Sgt. Jimmy Dodgen, Sgt. Ralph Greenwood, Cpl. Harmon, Cpl. Red Brezinski, and Cpl. Morehead.

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

One fine day, the NCOs thought we, as a group of boots, needed some special OJT. By then we had gained a little experience with the 12 lb. sledge and tank bar, but the TCs felt we actually needed to qualify with the sledge as part of our OJT and to protect their tanks from our unskilled

hands. If memory serves, we were actually supposed to strike the end connector with a brass drift or 2x4, or something of the sort. As you might imagine, we hit the end connectors with a tank bar directly and the end connectors never seemed worse for it.

## Another Vietnam Vignette – 1966

BY BILL "LURCH" LOCHRIDGE

Recall, I was 3rd Tank BN's S-5, Civic Action Officer. Late in 1966, LtCol Corson was very pleased at all the civic action projects that we had created and that were still underway. Seemed like at least once a week, a number of senior division officers; Army officers, CORD officials, and Revolutionary Development people from Saigon; and, press people would show up for briefings on our program.

One morning, the Commander in Chief of the Pacific Fleet, Admiral Thomas M. Moore and his staff, flew in for briefings. Corson started, and then turned it over to me. I began, and I guess I went beyond my time limit because a Marine Colonel, who was sitting right behind the Admiral, raised his hand and pointed to his watch. I said, "Colonel, please give me a few more minutes." The Admiral turned to the Colonel and said, "Let him continue – this is good information." So, I continued my briefing. Later, after all the officials had left, LtCol Corson called me into his office and said, "Lurch, you got to have big balls, son, for what you told that Colonel this morning. Job well done."

A week or two later, we received a message that Ambassador Henry Cabot Lodge and General Westmoreland would be coming in for briefings. On the day of their arrival, Corson had all hands lined up at our helicopter pad. In they came, in two or three helicopters. I said to myself, "Oh, shit." They de-planed and were escorted to our briefing facility (the enlisted men's club that was constructed at the

top of our hill). Again, LtCol Corson began the brief, and then, turned it over to me. I kept saying to myself, "Holy shit, I can't believe this. I'm only a 2ndLt." The briefing went off well, and the Ambassador, who was dressed in civilian clothes with highly polished shoes (like ones that you would expect to see "suits" wearing in NY City) said, "Let's go see what you guys have done." So, out one of the gates we went with me leading and the Ambassador right behind me. He was followed up by General Westmoreland. Coming down from our hill we entered some rice paddies. Walking on the paddy dikes which were still wet from rains the night before, the Ambassador suddenly slipped and fell into the paddy. Before I could do anything, General Westmoreland jumped into the paddy and pulled the Ambassador out of the mud. "Holy shit," I said to myself. Ambassador Lodge was covered in mud, but he made a joke about it to Westmoreland and me. That said a lot to me about Lodge. He instantly became an okay man in my book.

## The Water Wheel

BY JIM COWMAN

The engineer group attached to Hotel Co, 2/5, had a fiddle day when we located a water wheel, and the engineers were told to blow it up. The water wheel was in the Arizona Area near Go Noi Island. This contraption was a huge device where the force of the river current made it turn. Hollow bamboo buckets filled with water and would empty into a bamboo trough. The trough was elevated on a bamboo tripod and carried the irrigation water someplace. It was a marvelous piece of ingenuity and I've always wondered how long it had been there.

It isn't there anymore. The engineers blew the entire rig sky high and into the river. It was quite a blast to observe and, as I recall, we all cheered.

Hotel Co. had a lite section of two M-48 tanks attached at this time.

Capt. Fable, 1st Tank Bn., and the tanks drove through and destroyed the irrigation trough for as far as we could see. The water wheel was so big that it seems that I recall the engineers were standing on it and it kept it tuning like a Ferris wheel.

## WHAT DID THEY THINK I WAS DOING?

## WHERE DID THEY THINK I WAS?

BY HANK FULLER

FRIDAY 25 JANUARY 2013

WOOLWICH, MAINE

From September, 1968, to mid-January, 1969, before I joined 2nd platoon, Alpha Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, I was the Weapon Platoon Commander, Lima Company, 3rd Battalion, 4th Marines. From mid-November, 1968, until Christmas, 1968, Lima Company was operating along Mutter's Ridge north of Cam Lo and the Rockpile / Razor Back. During that period, we made regular contact with NVA regulars who seemed to have the whole damned ridgeline zeroed in for their 82MMs.

A week or so before Christmas, we were dug in a click or so south of the DMZ. We had been having trouble getting resupplied with food, ammo, etc., because every time a chopper would try to touch down, the noise and debris/dust/dirt from the rotors would drown out the NVA 82MM tubes popping. When the men of Lima Company would run out to retrieve supplies, to load on wounded, etc., the rough-hewn LZ would start to blow up with the impact of 82MM rounds exploding. Consequently, we all took turns leaving the relative safety of our fighting holes to greet the choppers as they briefly touched down.

One morning around 0900, after a particularly miserable rainy night had turned the make piece LZ into a quagmire, we received >>

word that a CH-46 was going to try to touch down. Since it was my turn along with two men from my platoon to unload whatever cargo was on the chopper, we tightened our chin straps, zipped up our flak jackets, and prepared to sprint out in the mud, unload the supplies, and drag them back to our holes. A few minutes later when the chopper landed, two FNG's with clean utilities and new shiny boots jumped off lugging two large gray sacks of mail. We hustled these two wide-eyed replacements back to our holes to avoid the incoming 82MM incoming which was beginning to detonate, settled the two new Marines down, and eventually sent them running to their new platoon assignments.

Then we turned our attention to the two bulging mail sacks with great anticipation; for we had not had a mail delivery in several weeks, and because there were lots of Christmas packages from home in those sacks.

After we had sorted out all the mail and packages for distribution to the appropriate platoons, we began to open our own. Package contents drew the most attention from all my men who manned our 60MM mortar tubes. I open my packages last with the mortar teams watching. Previously, I had read several letters which had already made that Christmas memorable. But now it was time to open my two packages. The first, from my mother, was a two-pound box of individually hand-dipped chocolates from a country kitchen in the rural, New England farming community where my family had resided for five generations. Unfortunately, the candy had probably had been stored on an LZ in the hot sun for a period of time, for the chocolates had all melted into one large mass which had re-hardened into one huge candy bar... riddled with worms. Nonetheless, we all ate around the worms; and, though the various individual chocolates were not distinguishable, the taste was exquisite and savored with relish.

Finally, I began to open the last remaining and larger package from my buddy's wife. Since, as I said, this was the last package to be opened, both my men and I looked forward to discovering another epicurean delight not unlike the previous chocolate morass. The moment was like fishing on a remote lake in northern Maine when someone in the boat hooks the "big one". A long fight ensues, no one in the boat really cares whether the fish is landed or not... all any fisherman really wants is a chance to bring the fish close enough to the boat, to see, and admire. Have I mentioned that we were all caked in mud and had not bathed or changed clothes in several weeks? Anyway, as I tore the wrapping paper off, I was flabbergasted, as was my audience, to discover that the last package, the last vestige of Christmas, the last reminder of home and family contained a cordless, electric shoe shining kit complete with black polish and batteries. Silence was followed by snickers, then guffaws, and finally very humorous yet disparaging comments (which continued for days after) about how tough a Marine I would be in spit shined boots.

A bit later, to ensure that the NVA would not find the kit and booby trap it with its own batteries, this well-intentioned gift was destroyed by half a dozen chuckling Marines stomping it into smithereens with decidedly muddy boots.

## Improved .50-caliber machine gun hits fleet

BY TODD SOUTH, APRIL 27, 2017  
FOR THE MARINE CORPS TIMES

Marine units have received an upgraded .50-caliber machine gun that aims to make firing quicker, safer and less visible to the enemy. Marine Corps Systems Command officials in Quantico, Virginia, released information Thursday about the upgrades, which include a quick-change barrel, fixed headspace and timing, and a flash hider that reduces the machine

gun's signature by 95 percent at night.

"The improved M2A1 makes Marines more lethal because they're able to get rounds down range quicker," said Maj. Harry Thompson, team lead for General Purpose Weapons at the command.

The current machine gun requires Marines to manually set headspace and timing before firing and after the barrel heats from high fire volumes. Headspace is the distance between the face of the bolt and the base of the cartridge when chambered, while timing is the adjustment of the weapon so firing occurs when the recoiling parts are in the correct position. The quick-change barrel is now possible because the headspace and timing are now fixed, Thompson said.

The current version requires Marines to screw in the barrel and set the headspace, he said. Now the improved version allows Marines to "pop" the receiver and lock it in place similar to the M240B machine gun. The combination reduces the time Marines are exposed to enemy fire and shortens the time the weapon is out of operation for barrel changes, he said.

The third improvement is a flash hider at the end of the barrel that reduces muzzle flash to mask Marines' position and limits whiteout conditions, helping the use of night vision while firing, Thompson said. In total, the command will field 3,600 M2A1s to Marines, said Kelly Sullivan, a General Purpose Weapons program analyst. Phase one concluded in March and included infantry and most infantry-like units and infantry reserves. Phase two will run through May. The Army began its upgrades to the .50-caliber machine gun in 2011. ■

# THEN THERE WERE ROCKETS

BY LEE DILL

Not all days in Vietnam started out bad ... some just ended up that way.

Originally, I was on F-12. The TC was Markley, Goldstein was the gunner, and I drove. I hated the gunner position on a flame tank. There was no space to move around with only the huge 300 plus gallon bottle of napalm to lean on. I'd rather drive, it was safer, there was more air to breathe, and it was far more fun. It was only 4 AM and after spending two hours looking into the blackness that was Vietnam at night

I was bushed. I had really struggled to stay awake and alert the past two hours. All I knew was that I had at least two hours of sleep coming up and thankfully sleep would come quickly. In Vietnam, my experience was if the gooks didn't hit us by 2 AM, we were home free ... at least for this night. But before I could pull my poncho liner over myself, I had to wake Goldstein.

It seemed as if the next guy on watch always woke slowly then climbed behind the .50 caliber in the commander's cupola and began to monitor the radios. Vietnam was the land of long, sleepless nights followed by days of heat and humidity. I got comfortable on the armor plate and slept until dawn. Vietnam wasn't bad, if you didn't miss home too much, and if you didn't expect much in the way of creature comforts. The C-rats weren't all that bad and there were 12 selections to choose from – I liked at least eight of the meals. We all had also developed a taste for pound cake and peaches. They seemed to be a favorite for everyone. It required some discipline as the pound cake came in one meal and the peaches in another. The trick was to hoard the one and acquire the other, then, when you were on watch, you mixed them together and ate them with relish. If you were lucky enough to stash away a warm Pepsi, then life was good and you finished yet another day in Vietnam.

So that was life for me at that time at An Hoa, but this is not about me, it's about the last day of life for PFC Freder-



In the photo: On "Cheap Thrills" (left to right) Colucci, Jellerson, Schrecongost in April '69—An Hoa. Unfortunately, "Ghost" was hit in that open space to the right of the tank

ic Lee Schrecongost. His nickname was "Ghost." He was one of the most pleasant, easy-going, Marines that I ever knew in-country. He was a good driver and friend to all. In less than three months he was going home to his family and to Steph, his girl. Her name was even painted on the slope plate of B-44, the tank also known as "Cheap Thrills." Bravo 44 —"Cheap Thrills"— was the tank that Ghost drove

for Jellerson. It was a good tank and Jellerson was an outstanding tank commander. Ghost knew he'd been lucky to get on a good crew. His chances of surviving while Jellerson was in-country were good.

After breakfast of either C-rats or the greasy stuff in the mess hall, it was normally time for track tightening and general clean up, but not today. No, today was a special day. Battalion Maintenance had dropped off an entire tank platoon's worth of new track yesterday. Our old worn-out track needed constant care. It seemed as if we did nothing but tighten the center guides; hammer and tighten the end connectors every day. The worst thing that could happen to a crew (besides an RPG or MINE) was throwing a track. Since he was the driver, the track was mainly his responsibility. It took four men to maintain it but it was the driver's job to keep an eye on it. It seems as if all the drivers did this task with a vengeance. When you broke track, or threw one, you were in for some ball-bustin' work, and don't even ask him about torsion bars! A broken torsion bar would usually be replaced in Battalion and it could take a few days and involve pulling the engine and the fuel cells. The worse part about being back in Battalion was that the Lifers would pick your crew to stand guard and give the "pukes" in the rear a break. So, the plan was that we would put on the new track by nightfall and be able to rest easy at least for a while. The new track would need tightening and maybe >>

remove a block when the track stretched into place, but we could live with that. Along with the new track had come a case of steaks and a pallet each of beer and Pepsi. So, there would be a platoon party after the track was on.

We started all together: five tanks and 25 Marines working together (the maintenance crew jumped in, too) and just like it is written in the book, each tank was handled the same way. The new tank tread came in blocks of ten. A number of these 10 piece blocks would be hammered together to make up one track. The tank to have its new tread put on was driven over to the two long strips of black rubber and metal that lay in the dusty red dirt of An Hoa. The existing track would be broken and the old track allowed to run out the front. The tank would back up using the one track that was still mounted, and the other side of new tread would be placed over the sprocket using tank bars and muscle. The sprocket would then feed the new track forward until the track would come together to become a solid piece of new rubber. It was then bolted together, the other tread broken, and the procedure repeated.

And so it went with all the tanks. We worked steadily, no one slacking or complaining more than expected. The work was back breaking and the heat oppressive, but we were used to it. This was our job. In a sense, it reminded me of home; changing tires, working on engines with the guys. The main difference was we weren't home and this was real; nothing else we ever did would be as real as our tour of Vietnam. It seemed as if suddenly we were finished. It certainly wasn't sudden but the day had gone quickly. Finally it was chow time. The beer and sodas cold (cool) and the steaks burnt not too badly. We ate, talked of home and women (actually, since we were only 19–20–21 years of age, talked of girls) and all the love that they had experienced. Most of us lied about the girls and our experiences. In reality it was only the ones who had returned from R&R (with a certain warm glow) that had any experience at all.

After their meal, there was still some clean up to be done in the tank park. There was lots of packing material to be picked up and tools to be cleaned and stored. We drifted into our tasks with the lazy attitude of those that had put out a max effort all day and we were tired. Tonight would still involve taking the tank out on the berm and standing guard. On the positive side, at least it didn't look like it was going to rain. April 26, 1969, had been a clear, sunny (hot) day in Vietnam. That evening it would get cool around 1 a.m., but now it was still hot and sticky. We stood in the dust of the tank park and looked around with that certain smug look of one who had worked a good day.

I was standing next to Ghost and we shot the shit for a few minutes, talking about almost nothing. I turned and started back towards F-12, and I had gotten no more than 10 feet when the gook rockets came in. They came so close there was no warning sound like you hear in the movies. These mothers were right on top of the tank park. At the

time there were only 8 or 9 people in the tank park since the rest hadn't made it back from evening chow. The noise was a roar! My heart almost stopped and my mouth had the taste of fear that lies in the back of your throat. The taste of fear is immediate. I ran to F-12 and climbed behind the .50 in the cupola and turned on the radios. If we were under an enemy ground attack, the radio would tell us where to go and what to do. Our job was to man the tanks and help the wounded later. Someone was in front of our driver's hatch with a leg wound and a corpsman quickly showed up to help the guy. There was other wounded screaming for attention. The radios were silent. Thankfully there was no ground attack, just rockets.

I looked nervously around, afraid that the fear I felt would show on my face and be seen by everyone. That was no problem; everyone had the same look, a mixture of fear from the rockets, but satisfaction for still being alive. That's when Jellerson spotted Schrecongost. Ghost hadn't moved from the spot in the tank park where I had left him. He lay on his back, strangely quiet, his eyes open, and his face pale. Jellerson called for a battle bandage and one appeared. Jellerson tried to apply the bandage but there was this sucking noise which meant he was breathing from his chest. Jellerson put plastic on this hole then the battle bandage went in place.

We all began to feel a little bit better. We had gotten hit, taken a couple wounded, bandaged them up and called for a medevac. The 5th Marine Regiment hospital was close by. The medevac jeep arrived in no time. The plan was for us to place him on a stretcher, lift him up to the jeep and they would drive 100 meters, pump some blood in him, and then chopper him to Da Nang. He would then recover and make his way back to the World and live happily ever after. It didn't work that way at all. We picked him up to place him on the stretcher. It was then we saw that a rocket fragment had gone into his chest small but had come out as a large hole in his back. Those of us that were not wounded told each other that we had reacted in time, that the wound wasn't so bad, that the doctors were good, and that he would be back in the World in no time. What we didn't know was that he had lost a lot of blood, was in shock, and his chances for recovery were slim. He died on the chopper going to Da Nang.

The tank park was rocketed nearly every day until I went home for my 30-day six-month Extension leave in late May. Enemy rockets are supposed to be inaccurate, but they had us ranged in pretty good. It was safer to be in the bush or on a road sweep than to stay behind in the rear. When I returned to An Hoa in early-July, the rockets had gotten so consistently good at nailing the tank park, that finally all of the tanks were moved to the other side of the base.

*A disclaimer: I first put this day to paper in 1994 – Twenty-five years after it happened. This is how I remember it! ■*

# Kent S. Hughes

for USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn.

In February 1969, 9th MAB gave me orders to Vietnam to assume command of 2nd Platoon, Co. A, 5th Tank Battalion, which was the tank platoon of BLT 3/26 but which at that time was under operational control of the 5th Marines. The platoon was one of three tank platoons based at An Hoa Combat Base and was split for a period of time between that base and the position about seven miles north at Phu Lac (6), a fire support base overlooking Liberty Bridge from the south.

An Hoa was located in what was referred to as the An Hoa Basin or the Thuong Duc Corridor, which served as an enemy avenue of approach running from the Laotian border east onto a plain bordered by mountains and rivers.

My platoon consisted of five M48A3 (Mod B) tanks, one M151A1 radio jeep with trailer, one M54A2 5-ton truck with trailer, and 32 men. (That number varied from 22 to 39 Marines and one Navy Corpsman during the course of my tour.) We provided direct support of infantry in the assault, perimeter defense, mine sweep security, and security for the convoys run twice daily on the road between An Hoa and Liberty Bridge at Phu Lac (6), where the Navy Seabees operated a pontoon ferry while the bridge was reconstructed. In addition to my Platoon Sergeant, S/Sgt. Avery I. McCabe, and tank crewmen, the platoon consisted of two tank mechanics, two truck drivers, a communications technician, a radio operator, and a Navy corpsman. I was fortunate to lead a platoon of Marines who excelled in combat, as demonstrated in the following examples.

Two days after I took over the platoon, A-25, commanded by Cpl. Price and providing perimeter security at the end of the airstrip, was hit by three RPGs fired from the edge of a crater outside the wire which had been left by the explosion of the ammunition dump on 23 February, prior to my arrival at An Hoa. The first RPG round hit the right front of the hull, making a hole but causing no further damage. The second round, coming directly at the turret, was ignited by the track blocks attached to the right side of the turret and skimmed along the side of the turret, damaging the track blocks and making pock marks on the surface of the

turret. Fortunately, it was night, and the tank was parked at an angle to its normal position. Rather than hitting the front of the tank, the third rocket penetrated one of the final drives at the rear side of the tank, immobilizing the vehicle but not hitting any crewmen. Cpl. Price and his crew rocked the tank back and forth, broke the final drive loose, and hobbled back to their tent after sunrise.

Additionally, when a VC threw a Chicom onto the roof of A-25's turret, Cpl. Price pulled his TC hatch

closed. After the grenade exploded Cpl. Price emerged from his hatch and shot the VC with his .45. Also, in the course of the night, A-25 had fired several canister rounds as enemy sappers overran the tank's position during the night. The crew knew they had killed several sappers but were amazed when they returned to the area after sunrise that no bodies remained, as the VC had hauled off all of their dead.

Then, on 19 March, A-23 and A-24 under Sgt. Lynch were in perimeter positions at Phu Lac (6) south of Liberty Bridge along the Song Thu Bon in support of 1/5, when the position, which also included Delta Battery, 2/11, consisting of six 105mm howitzers, was attacked by an estimated NVA battalion in a night ground assault under cover of rocket and mortar attack at about 0200-0300. NVA columns led by VC guides breached the wire in seven places (principally in front of observation bunkers), marked the breaches with white tape, overran the position, brought in two flame throwers, and threw satchel charges under the "hooches" but were ultimately repelled. Sgt. Lynch's tank, A-24, initially fired canister rounds with the main gun onboard into the wire to repel NVA infantry and sappers and then, as the position was overrun, moved inboard through the compound firing at NVA with its .30 cal. coax. Illumination was provided only by parachute flares fired by 1/5's 81mm mortars.

Sgt. Lynch, using his ".45" from the cupola of his tank, killed an NVA officer, while tank driver L/Cpl. Bowen killed another NVA soldier with his ".45." The short maximum effective range of this pistol is testament to the proximity of the NVA to the tank. (Sgt. Lynch told me >>



In the photo: A-25 TC—Sgt Price, Driver—Hamilton with Hill and Martinez

later that he believed that he must have expended two magazines of ammunition to get the officer.)

After killing the entire gun crew of one of the howitzers, NVA troops placed a North Vietnamese flag down the tube of the howitzer. Sgt. Lynch's tank killed them all using its .30 caliber coax. His tank was credited with killing 13 NVA out of a total of more than 75 enemy KIA in this battle. My troops later described the NVA dead being stacked like cord wood the following morning. It was also believed that many bodies of NVA had been dragged away by the NVA. Delta Battery reportedly suffered 12 KIA, while 1/5 had 3 KIA.

March 19, 1969, after the fight at Phu Lac (6).

Sgt. Lynch kept as souvenirs the NVA rank insignia and belt buckle of the officer he killed, his money, his (Chinese Type 51 or Russian Tokarev TT-33) 7.62mm semiautomatic pistol, which had a communist star on the hand grip, and



In the photo: L/Cpl. G. Araujo, Sgt. RL Lynch and Cpl. PM Robinson from A-23 and A-24

his binoculars, which had a reticle for adjustment of artillery fire. Sgt. Lynch's crew took possession of the NVA flag which had been put into the howitzer, but the battery commander of Battery D/2/11 allowed one of his men to "borrow" it, then not return it despite Sgt. Lynch's protests, apparently because he thought that his artillerymen deserved it as a trophy. I was at An Hoa with my other tanks that night.

Also indicative of how close the NVA had gotten to A-24, I later had to "sign off" on gear which had been carried on the outside of the turret and which was destroyed by "Chicom" thrown up onto the tank. One of my slides shows Sgt. Lynch, Cpl. Robinson, who commanded A-23, and L/Cpl. Araujo with captured weapons and magazines, including an RPG-7, an AK-47 with fixed wooden stock, and two AK-47's with folding metal stocks, as well as the pistol previously mentioned. ■

In early 1964 I attended the track vehicle maintenance course at the 1st Marine Division, was shipped to Okinawa, and phased in the new diesel tanks.

The maintenance section at that time was under the guidance of Gunnery Sgt. Metz and Staff Sgt. Getz, who had been rigging and cannibalizing the battalion to keep the tanks in the field, and doing an excellent job of it. The problem arose when

we phased in the new M48-A3 diesel tank and had very few spare parts. The maintenance section had parts on back order for well over a year and the problem continued.

Upon my arrival in '64, the battalion had failed a CG inspection, and the Bn. CO was replaced. Q.V. Earl became the new CO. As I was the only senior 1st Lt. with grease under his nails, I became the maintenance officer. My first job was to barter with the Army

for a truck load of OD paint. Paint was the most important commodity when preparing for the CG inspection. At the next inspection, all missing parts were on order, the jeeps, trucks and all tracked vehicles were on line and looking like new money. We passed

## My Story

BY: KEVIN D. FLYNN

with flying colors, even though 20% of our vehicles were inoperable.

Months later, Col. States Rights Jones took over the battalion and our parts problem was still a disaster. I went to Col. Jones and said I thought the only way to solve our parts problem and get USMC help was to deadline the battalion. The gun companies were more than slightly angry, but we were getting no response from Barstow. Col. Jones deadlined the entire Battalion.

One day in the tank shed at Camp Hanson, someone yelled "Ten Hut," then someone said, "Who's Lt. Flynn." I replied, "Who wants to know?" There was no response, but around the corner came a general with a tank jacket on, a pearl handled pistol on his hip, and he said, "I do." It was General Masterson (Bat) from Headquarters Marine Corps. After giving me the evil eyeball, he wanted to know what our problems were. After about an hour meeting with all hands and another hour with Col. Jones, he left saying he would correct this problem PDQ. Two weeks later, all sorts of parts began arriving including turret motors, which we hadn't seen for several years. After three months, we had all the parts we rated, and a few extra. In 8/Mar/65 it all paid off.

Kevin D. Flynn

Editor's Note: In 2014, we got notification that VTA member Mike Brandi passed away. About a year later, Steve Arnone found the VTA and became a member. After finding out that Mike had passed away, Steve felt compelled to write the below story. We are very grateful that Steve made the effort to memorialize his buddy..

## I Remember Mike Brandi

BY STEVE ARNONE

I remember Mike real well, as I considered him my mentor. He was older and a seasoned vet but took the time to explain things to the younger new guys. Everyone called him Brandi and he didn't have a VN name. He was the tank



commander of the "Sweet Cream Lady" H-52 (or 54 not sure); he got the name from the song. Later in December he got a new tank and named it "Eli" as in the song "Eli's coming" by 3 Dog Night. Both tanks were from HQ Co, 1st Tank Bn.

I arrived in late July 1969 and Mike had already served 2 tours by then. I will outline some of the stories that he and his crew shared with me and others on Outpost



OP members minus the tank crew plus the Lt.'s driver.

Hawk. 1st Tank Bn H&S Outpost Hawk (AT975704) Hill 47 was located about 3000 meters SW of Hill 327 and overlooked the Song Cau Do. Hill 55 was SW about 3000 meters across the river. Hawk overlooked a favorite enemy rocket and mortar launch area.

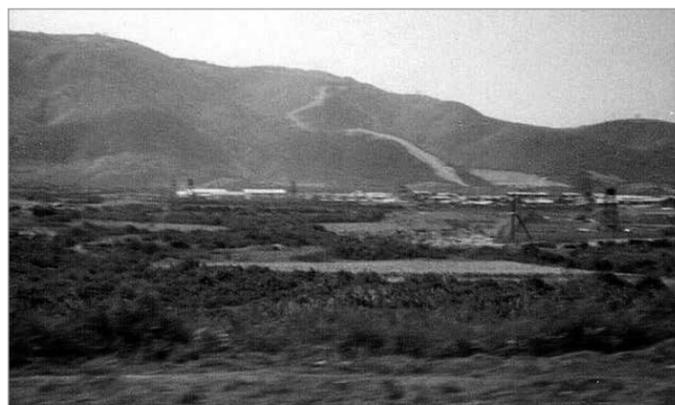
Mike Brandi served in the 1968 Tet battle of Hue City, one of the largest battles of the war. I was not there, but I recall the stories that were told. I did see a picture of Mike and the crew sitting on the throne of the emperor in the Citadel. There was an ex-NVA sitting next to it with a cigarette in his mouth. They recounted the battle as long and bloody from the Perfume River, street by street, for many days. They eventually attacked the Citadel and entered after the NVA were defeated. The battle for Hue is well documented. Perhaps Greg can help on this as it was a major battle. The Marines on Hawk had great respect for the tank crew.

When the April 27th, 1969, Da Nang ammo dump explosions occurred, Brandi and his crew helped to evacuate anyone they could find in the danger zone. The "Sweet Cream Lady" made a number of trips into the camps and villages near the dump as the massive explosions occurred. They did that until it was too dangerous to return. It started with smaller munitions and spread to the large bombs. H-52 was very lucky to survive. They apparently loaded



Corporal Mike Brandi on the right.

the "Sweet Cream Lady" with stranded American and Vietnamese on a number of trips and drove them to safety. There are videos available and you can see the huge explosions for yourself.



The Hoa Cam training center that is near the ammo dump behind it.



Not H-52 but a tank we met on the road to An Hoa.

Mike described Goi Noi Island as a place where they had pulled an operation. I remember him showing me the area as we stopped on the island near Liberty Bridge. He said it was a very bad place with tall grass and an NVA headquarters was there somewhere along with a black market. Later in 1970, he would be wounded by a B40 rocket on that same island. I had already moved on to An Hoa firebase and was not there at that time.

Brandi's crew included a Corpsman named Corporal



A picture from that island.

"Ski" and I do not know his name, but he treated my injured legs for many days during the monsoon. He would



The nearby water point for our drinking water.

pretty much growl every time he saw me, but saved my leg. He took good care of me. We could not get off the OP Hawk (Hill 47) because it was almost an island and surrounded by water and the roads were not passable. The driver was from Mississippi and one gunner, I cannot recall their names. He said the driver was the best he ever had. They were assigned to our sister OP-3 Fingers before being assigned to OP Hawk. They did the "open the road in the morning mine sweep" halfway to An Hoa on many mornings. It was very dangerous work. Here is a clip from records describing the monsoon. That whole area was flooded.

1. Weather. The first 10 days of October indicated that the monsoons had begun. The total rainfall for October was 39.97 inches, considerably higher than the 12.80 inches in September. The high temperature for October was 102 degrees with an average high of 85 degrees. The low temperature fell to 72 degrees with an average for the month of 75 degrees.



View from Hawk.

H-52 also did two operations with the ROK Marines from Hoi An about 20 miles to the south. Another was in the White Beach 1st Marines area of operation near Marble Mountains. That meant no tank on Hawk. When they returned, I recall him telling us about the VC and NVA heads on stakes that lined the road to the ROK >>

camp. He said the Korean Marines were very tough and used tactics that the USMC would not use.



Another view from Hawk.

The above was only a small amount of Mike Brandi's time because he did 2 or 3 tours of 13 months. I cannot add much detail on those; however, I did serve with him for 6 months on the outpost and will recount some of that.

With the monsoon season imminent, there was something that the "Sweet Cream Lady" crew wanted to do. The TC, Mike Brandi, said he wanted 4 Marines to go to White Beach as security. I went and rode to hill 10 where cases of C-rations were loaded. He told me it was not exactly an authorized mission and shrugged. I didn't care, so "Sweet Cream Lady" crossed the Cau Do Bridge and the security walked across. We entered between two Marble Mountains into a large crowded village, Lou Kim Son. The tank rumbled down the main dirt road and we walked, watching. A line of a half dozen monks dressed in yellow double timed across the dirt road, one arm on their leader while looking at the ground. They see no evil. "Just a distraction, watch the doors and windows", the TC yells! We passed thru and walked and rode another 5 miles or so through sandy roads with dense scrub woods on both sides until we came to a clearing with a long single story building. The tank stopped and kept the loud engine rumbling. The corpsman "Ski" and Jim Cusack unloaded the cases of C-rations, and there was a lot of movement in the trees. I see women dressed in a white nuns garb in the door. We leave and ride through a sandy area known for its booby traps, without incident, and arrive at White Beach. Eventually, I asked Mike what that was all about, and he explained that they had done med-caps there at the leprosarium and treated the kids. They knew the nuns. They wanted to deliver food before the rains came. Mike said there was a leper colony back in there and the French nuns do the best they can and the "sick bay, med caps" treated mostly kids. He said the VC get "up in there." I assume the nuns hid the food.

So the guys from H-52 actually went way out of their way on an unauthorized mission to feed the lepers that day. We made White Beach and later reversed our route back to Hawk, which was a long, dangerous trip around dark. You have to wonder how many guys would volunteer for a mission like that.

Below describes some of the August activity. Hawk was nearest Hoa Cam and our closest Marine position was a mile or more. The NVA were behind us and were after the training center and 3rd MP prison camp.

3. Past Activities. During the month of August the level of enemy activity increased sharply in the Southern Sector and throughout the 1st Division TACR. On the night of the 11th, 3rd MP Battalion, 44th ARVN Artillery, and Hoa Cam ARVN Training Center received mortar and ground attacks. They accounted for 4 NVA KIA and 4 POW's. They were later found to be from the 9th and 11th Battalions of the 31st NVA Regiment. On the 25th and 24th, 2nd Battalion, 7th Marines engaged elements of the 1st NVA Division in the southwest portion of their new TACR. Tanks of Second Platoon, Charlie Company were dispatched from Fire Support Base Ross, but became mired in the wet paddies and forced to return to ROSS.

4. Indication. As seen from the increased activity, the enemy still maintains the capability to make sapper attacks and attacks by fire. With the pending monsoons, tank operations are expected to be severely limited. Intelligence reports point to a new offensive (the third phase according to NVA documents) beginning between the 2nd and 5th of September. The 2nd of September is the most mentioned date, as it is the Anniversary of Ho Chi Minh's proclamation of Independence in 1945.

I recall Brandi telling some of us that we could lose this war. I, for one, couldn't believe it. Aside from being an 18-year-old just getting to VN, I could not understand what he was saying. He talked about huge protests back in the world and even more important, the 3rd Marine Division was leaving VN. It was depressing all right. He told us that we needed to take care of each other. That was our mission.

Kids would bring dud artillery rounds to the front gate and we would give them C-rations. M79 grenades that failed to detonate were common. Brandi explained, for example, that the grenades would fail because they hadn't gone far enough. One more revolution might set it off. He said that one of the kids had mishandled one near the gate and blew himself up. So don't get near and that was an important lesson.

The rocket site was just the other side of the river at the bend and behind that island. Below are some of the reports. The NVA were announcing that they were moving into the AO. Azimuth 250 at 600 meters. Below is the entry and it was the tank firing and the searchlight also.

130405H August 1969: OP Hawk observed rocket site at (975685) fired 100 rounds .50 caliber MG with unknown results.  
Ref: S-3 Journal 13 August 1969 Entry 2  
150040H August 1969: OP Hawk at (AT974706) fired small arms at movement in wire searched area with Xenon searchlight. Unknown results.

Hoa Cam was a "Chu Hoi" retraining boot camp located less than a mile to our rear. Some VC and NVA would surrender and join the ARVN and the NVA did not like that. The report said 70 or 80 NVA were involved. Some had to pass near Hawk. Below is an entry.

The above reference to the 140mm rocket was significant for two reasons. First it was me that detected the >>

180215H August 1969: Hoa Cam received 30 rounds 82mm mortar rounds, called flareship from DASC. Results unknown.  
 Ref: S-3 Journal 18 August 1969 Entry 1

181000H August 1969: OP Hawk at (AT975704) found 1-140mm rocket. EOD removed rocket.  
 Ref: S-3 Journal 18 August 1969 Entry 6

*Op of Hoa Cam spotted enemy unit moving East toward training center. Personnel wearing camouflage uniforms. Estimated to be 70-80.*

enemy in the dark. So it was important to me. Second it was located up hill to our rear, maybe 100 meters just over the hilltop, a very dangerous position. More important, the 140mm rocket was to be inserted in a crack in the only available tank path in good position to avoid detection (according to Brandi). "H-52 Sweet Cream Lady must leave the OP via that path," he said. The corpsman Ski said maybe they were going to roll it down the hill into our position. Also, we did not find the rocket. We detected the movement and interlocked fire with M79 from four positions to drive the enemy away. Apparently, there were many more sappers nearby considering Hoa Cam was within 1000 meters and took 30 rounds of 82mm mortar fire. We were at 975704 downhill from the "prisoners turned friendly" boot camp. They had lots of defections at the training center after they were well fed and had new weapons. I got to guard the Katyusha rocket for hours, and when the other Marines left, Mike stayed with me. He said, "you shouldn't be up here alone and the enemy could be watching." That is where we actually met and I appreciated his support. We had no idea there were so many NVA so close.

He took the pictures below of me and the rocket with Hawk in the background. I do not have his picture and only a few pic's survived. Below the pictures are intel reports.

The end of September was the start of the Monsoons with 13 inches of rain. October began with the real Mon-



soon with 40 inches of rain and high winds. I remember waking one morning to sunshine and most of us came out of our bunkers thankful the rain stopped and were amazed



One unidentified enemy battalion is located at AT885787. They are moving toward AT900785. Mission is to attack small outposts, collect food, and kidnap young men. Three meetings took place to mourn death of Ho Chi Minh: Hoa Koung (AT938757), Phuoc Thuan (AT938751), Bo Ban 2 (AT959699). (Eval F-5)

a) NVA/VC Company (approx. 120 men) located at (AT,885785). Armed with 122mm Rockets. Mission to shell HOA CAM and DANANG Air Base.

at the sight of the endless lake that surrounded us on 3 sides. The sky was full of dragon flies over the hill, then we see the dozens of foot-long bright green snakes all around the perimeter and hilltop. Staff Sergeant Carr yelled to Doc "Ski" to confirm that they were Bamboo Vipers and deadly poison. "Two-steppers, but don't worry. They have small mouths and can't get a good bite," he said. So, we killed a lot of snakes and night time was a concern because they were still there and would be until the flood receded.

The air burst described in the below SSDC report only mentions one air burst but two others followed later. A dangerously close 175mm air burst in the monsoon sky takes the breath out of you. The ARVN battery was on Hill 34 and was firing nearly overhead, and they were not quick learners.

SSDC  
 052345  
 982720  
 (44 ARVN ARTY)  
 One ARVN KIA at 982720 at 052345 H on ARVN Check Point  
 175 guns report 30 men running & shooting on road near CP  
 175 guns took few incoming S/A rds. no casualties  
 175 report air burst at 982720 at 961697  
 premature burst due to rain setting off fuzes  
 Hoa Cam investigating ARVN KIA

We heard and saw the cloud from the first explosion on Hawk and a 6x6 truck transported 10 of us as the reaction force. Each Marine was stationed about 100 yards >>

apart on the jungle road and I was one of them. It was very spooky and there were more mines found. H-52 drove down the road to OP-3 Fingers for support. A flame tank arrived and set off a whole bunch of booby traps nearby.

During the month of November there were two mining incidents within the Southern Sector which resulted in one USN KIA, one USN MIA and one USMC MIA. These incidents brought about a daily scheduled road sweep, Monday through Friday, of the roads leading to the CP's. USMC personnel are now stationed at regular intervals along these roads during the day to insure they remain cleared after the road sweep.



Hill 34 - Tower - looking NW toward OP 3 Fingers & ARVN camp



There was an incident that I could not find any record of, but I recall clearly. H-52 (or 54) was the newer version

2. Period covered: 030800H to 040800H November 1969

3. Summary of enemy activity:

a) 050750H- 1st Tank Battalion truck enroute to SSDC OP hit an estimated 45lb mine located at (AT955717). The truck was destroyed.

b) 050855H- 1st Tank Battalion jeep enroute to 1st Tank Bn CP, hit an estimated 45lb mine. Damages were 2nd Lt USMC KIA, One NVA MIA, one jeep destroyed, (AT955715)

c) 051900H- 1st Tank Battalion truck enroute to 1st Tank Battalion CP took small arms fire at (AT946717). Return fire with unknown results.

4-14. N/A

15. Others:

a) 31st Sgt. location vicinity (AT955725) on 20 Oct. Mission is to launch rocket attacks at U.S. positions (AT956734), (AT959774), (AT958775), and Danang Air Base. F40m 05 to 06 November, if no rain. Bad weather will delay attack.

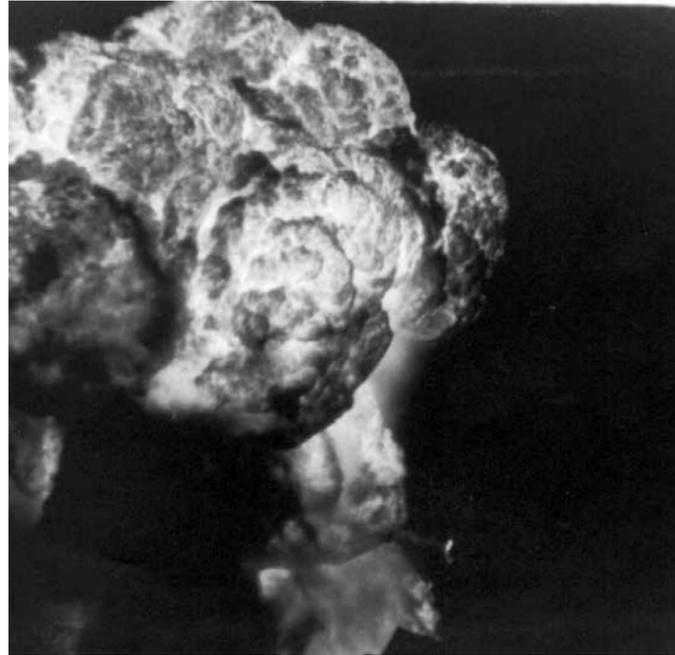
M48 tank replacing "Sweet Cream Lady" and was called "Eli." The new tank had a tread problem that kept us from returning to OP Hawk, now called Marlin, until dark. We needed to return because 4 or 5 of the OP were riding from Battalion Hill 10 back to Marlin. The tank commander moved me to the right rear to stand with a good hand hold. I was backup radioman, he said, and we were going to run the gauntlet after dusk. This meant past the VC village and tree line that was a recent ambush area. The plan was to go fast down the dirt road, gaining speed in that area, then slowing when past. My M-16 was stored on the turret so I could hold with both hands.

We were going fast, then faster down the dirt road, when the right side tread broke and smashed hard on the fender. We started rotating clockwise in what seemed like slow motion as the tank rotated 360 degrees and over and down the embankment 50 yards into the rice paddy, where the tank stopped. We jumped down into the water and set up a perimeter and determined that it was a mechanical failure, and not a mine or RPG. However, we were in the open paddy in front of the tree line with the disabled tank. No Marines were hurt, but the corpsman ran to treat injured civilians who went over the edge in a 3-wheeled bus. One older man was killed on a bike. We were relieved by 1st Tankers and we double-timed in the dark to OP Marlin, stepping in the leaders footsteps, where we entered without incident. Brandi and crew stayed with the tank and waited for rescue.

In December, another incident occurred with no record. The S/Sgt's father had passed on in California and the S/Sgt. took it hard. He revered his father. He didn't return from Battalion for a day or two. But when he did, it was in a jeep after dark, and he was very lucky. The sentry, Richie Ireland, was on the gate bunker and shot above the jeep before he recognized the S/Sgt. But the S/Sgt had been drinking and was very upset about the shooting. The night escalated when he wanted to talk with Richie, but he was too angry. Then he ordered the tank to fire on an unidentified target and got hostile when Corporal >>

Brandi refused. The target was clearly not real and Brandi said so.

There was a heated discussion about the target when some of the bunkers set off popup flares (on parachutes) to see the wire better. Maybe the S/Sgt got the idea for his



S/Sgt's father's Send-off!



Christmas party for the locals.

father's funeral from the flares, because he ordered everyone on the bunkers to fire all their flares in unison. Then he set off the two large aircraft flares in the wire, followed by claymores and grenades. But the napalm was the final touch. Maybe he just wanted to give his father a proper send off. He also knew we would close Hawk soon and turn it over to the ARVN and maybe he wanted to ex-

pend the explosives. A jeep from Battalion with an officer came the next day and took the S/Sgt. away. He was one fine Marine.

The 2nd picture below is from a Christmas party that 1st Tanks provided in Di Loc (near Liberty Bridge) for the locals. We brought trucks loaded with food for the villagers and ice cream! There was chaos when we distributed the food by tossing cans into the crowd. But when we unloaded the melted containers of ice cream the kids had a brawl and made a mess. It was nuts.

The action below occurred in Jan 1970. The NVA wanted the outpost radio cipher unit and they got it. Those 3 outposts down the jungle road including 3 Fingers saw a lot of action. The NVA got in between them, so the friendly fire was a problem. The outposts were abandoned on Jan 11 and I believe Brandi was wounded on Goi Noi Island around that time.

2. Mine and RPG Incidents. There were no mine incidents within the battalion during January. RPG's were used against elements of the battalion on three occasions. On the night of 3-4 January SSDC OP Pirenha (AT 950727) received approximately 30 RPG rounds, destroying one bunker and damaging three others. There were four USMC WIA (Evac) and four USMC WIA (Non-Evac) as a result of this attack. At about the same time one of two tanks with an SSDC reaction force moving against an enemy mortar position was hit by two RPG rounds resulting in minor turret damage and two USMC WIA (Non-Evac). The third incident occurred during a large scale sepper attack on FSB Ross on the morning of 6 January. One tank was hit by an RPG round, resulting in minor damage and one USMC WIA (Non-Evac).

4. Southern Sector OP's Barracuda (AT 944719) and and Manta (AT 944722) were abandoned effective 11 January and returned to their natural state. OP Pirenha (AT 950727) was closed on 20 January and returned to its natural state. On that date 26th Marines assumed responsibility for the westernmost portion of the Southern Sector and the 1st Tank Battalion augmentation personnel who formerly manned the OP's commenced mobile security operations within the new smaller TAOR. In conjunction with the boundary change the CP of Company C, 7th Engineer Battalion was re-located from its former location near Cobb Bridge (AT 948708) to the Hill 34 complex (AT 989713).



God bless Mike Brandi. May he rest in eternal peace. ■

We were high up on a ridge line in the mountainous area out west and the flat ground was maybe 20 yards wide. Beyond that, the slope was a 60 degree angle on both sides. This is where we set in for the night of September 12, 1968. Almost everyone was on the sloped terrain in a circular perimeter on both sides of the ridge. My feet were wedged against the base of a small tree to keep from sliding down the hill while I tried to sleep.

In the morning, the squad leaders were to meet with the Lieutenant (Knight?) to receive our orders for the day.

I was already awake and, when I arose, I picked up my helmet (pillow?) and pushed it down on my head.

On the way up the slope to the meeting, I felt something slipping down on the side of my face. Before I could react, a 6-inch centipede had stung me on the cheek. I reached up and grabbed it, threw it to the ground and noticed how large and colorful it was—then I squashed it.

For many months now, I had carried two silk panels in my helmet for use when a helicopter was in route to our LZ. One was red, and the other yellow, and depending which one I put on the ground, the chopper pilot would make his identification, and I, as a security precaution, would confirm his visual.

Evidently, this centipede found warm and cozy sleeping quarters between those two panels, and when I disturbed his slumber, I paid the price. My whole head quickly became numb.

At the squad leaders meeting I received no sympathy; only the news that my squad would be out in front for today's patrol. We would be the 'point' of the platoon; moving single file along a trail that looked well-worn in a place where it shouldn't. It looked like the trail in a park—too well traveled.

The patrol was the usual fits and starts, spread out in single file like a human slinky as we walked the crest of the ridgelines, down one slope and cautiously up another.

We were expecting contact and senses were on alert; eyes and ears scanning and listening for the unusual sound; a twig snapping, or a subtle movement.

Larry Edwards was the lead man. Billy Cotton was 6th man in column behind me with the radio. After an uneventful 30 minutes, we came out of a wooded area into a slightly wider stretch of flat open ground when a gook popped up on the right and started running away from us. Edwards opened fire with his M-16. Instead of a well-aimed shot, his weapon was on automatic and he emptied his magazine without hitting the enemy. He should have shot him.

Many times, an enemy soldier would expose himself to fire in order to draw friendly troops forward, only to be ambushed. This was on my mind and, before moving out, I cautioned my men to move slowly and stay spread out. I also switched fire teams which put Gary Smith at the point. Edwards was shook up after seeing and missing the gook and I thought he'd be ineffective, so the switch was made.

The straight stretch of the trail narrowed and started uphill although it was still well worn. We were moving slowly through

some vegetation still going up when Smitty stopped, crouched, and turned to those behind him, including me, and said, "I see him." I said, "stay off the trail," and Smitty quickly moved left then right just to the edge of the trail. It was then that the explosion from the claymore mine (ours) blew Smitty backward, killing him instantly.

Gary Smith had a thing for grenades and carried more than anyone in the squad. He carried his 'extras' in canteen pouches on his belt. The blast from the claymore must have also set off the frags and Gary Lee Smith was now in two pieces.

In the chaos that ensued immediately after the explosion, the rest of my 12 men were still in single file heads down. I radioed the "news" to the Lt. that I had one KIA; and now was even more concerned about an ambush. I started shouting orders to get off the trail and move forward on-line attempting to position everyone with a chance to return fire and move beyond Smitty's body. I was scared, but for some reason was able to take charge and position all my men except for Joe C.

Joe was frozen in one spot and I could see the fear in his eyes. He refused to move. I shouted to him, "Joe, if you don't move out I'll shoot you myself." I don't know where that came from, but he moved into position with the others. (Joe would later smash his hand with a pop-up flare to get out of the bush).

[As an aside, some years later while sitting at the dining room table in Joe's family home, I was confronted by his Mom about that "command."]

We advanced past the body and waited for what was to happen next. Nothing did, I set a team up to protect our immediate front and began the task of putting together a makeshift litter out of ponchos.

We placed Smitty in the ponchos and he looked like he was swimming in a pool of red and pink.

For some reason, I insisted that I carry one section of the litter even though others were willing to spell me on the long return trip to an LZ for the evacuation of our dead Marine. It wasn't just my head that was numb now.

The next day, another Marine from another squad would die on the same trail from machine gun fire. The following day we found a cave full of ammunition, mortars, AK-47 rifles, and food. That's what they were trying to keep us from finding. Was it worth it? Of course, objective accomplished.

It is difficult to describe the feeling of losing a squad member. My guy, I lost one of my men. I wanted to write a letter to his family, but never found the words... or the courage. Years later, the best I could do was take a 'rubbing' off the 'Wall' in DC as a keepsake.

Some 40 years later, I found a link to a web site (footnotes.com, I think). It was a virtual tour of the 'Wall'. I looked up Smith's name. There was a picture posted and a comment written only two days earlier by his sister. I was able to also post a comment and send an email to his sister, Cindy.

Karma?

After all these years of never having written a letter to his family, I was given the opportunity to offer some closure (for >>

both). Cindy and I have exchanged emails and she told me that this is the first time anyone has made contact with the family. I can't imagine the emptiness.

Steve Poundstone, also in my squad, and an Ohio resident, lives only an hour away and offered to meet Cindy and visit Gary Lee Smith at his final resting place.

God has smiled down on me.

Rest in peace, Smitty.

Tom adds: I wrote this story. It's one of those movie clips that continues to play in my head. And around the 13th of September each year, it seems to get 'louder'. Sharing this with those who understand does help... ■



*Editor's Note: In our efforts to bring lapsed memberships back into the fold we send dues reminder letters out. Here is one response that I got.*

*First, let me say thanks for writing. I was wondering what I might have done wrong. You see, in mid-October 2005, I filled out the form for joining and enclosed check No. 631 in the amount of \$42.00.*

*That exact amount was the bounty placed by the VC on the men who protected the schoolhouse in Phong Bac in 1966. I spent a few nights in the schoolyard. I thought it fitting that I pay the dues with that amount.*

*I was a "push to talk" man (MOS 2531) on Hill 34 for most of 1966. I did an extended tour with 3rd Tanks and made the move north to Hue - Phu Bai. I spent Easter Sunday 1967 laying barbed wire with the forward liaison group. I left country in the fall of 1967.*

Semper Fi, Fred Goger

*NOTE: Fred included with his letter the following article from the Stars & Stripes newspaper:*

## WANTED: DEAD – Any Member of 3d Tank Bn. CA team

BY CPL. W.I. CHRISTOLFERSON

**Da Nang** – Wanted – Any members of the Civic Action team of the 3rd Tank Battalion, 1st Marine Division. The Viet Cong haven't tacked up any "wanted" posters yet, but the word is out that there is a price on the head of each member of the team.

**The bounty:** 3,000 piasters (about \$42).

**The reason:** The unqualified success the tank unit's civil affairs team had had in working with the people of Phong Bac hamlet, three miles south of Da Nang. The team, headed by First Lieutenant Fred Lockridge, has tried a new approach to civic action, turning the hamlet into a laboratory for capitalism and encouraging the villagers to becoming economically self-sufficient. It has been a long struggle. It is not finished yet. But the unit has shown marked progress since it began with what Lockridge calls the "soup and candy" stage.

The expressed bounty is just another example of how the program worries the Cong. "What happened" Lockridge said, "is that we have forced the Viet Cong to take their main effort away from the Vietnamese people and concentrate their attention on the Marines. Needless to say, this is one of our main goals. Before," he continues, "a villager from Phong Bac had nothing but his life. He was quick to change sides when the VC came along." "Now, since we've given him a chance to advance himself, he has something to hang on to and is not so quick in jumping from one side of the fence to the other," Lockridge said.

"Frankly, we're more flattered than frightened by the reward," says Staff Sergeant J.J. Biedrzycki, the noncommissioned officer in charge. "The reward is like getting a tribute from our enemies." Staff Sergeant F.J. Lambert

agrees. "This indicated that we are taking the right approach," he said. Lambert pointed to the one tangible display of unity in the hamlet. During a previous national holiday, four Republic of Vietnam flags flew in Phong Bac. For the first day of Tet, some 300 flags were in evidence.

If anything, the team has intensified its efforts since learning of the bounty from intelligence sources. One precaution taken, however, is that the team moves tactically when in the village. Otherwise, it's business as usual when working with local fishermen, assisting merchants to set up a shopping center, building pens for hogs to be purchased from the proceeds from the sale of the fish. And, as far as the Viet Cong are concerned, business as usual can be anything but bad news. ■

## SHOOTING FISH

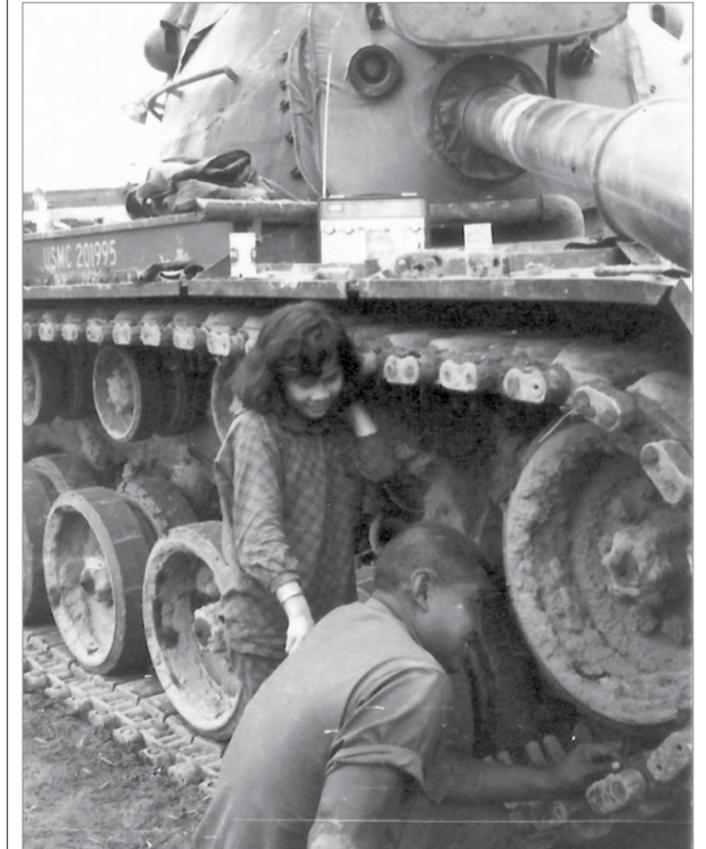
BY: RIC LANGLEY

The convoy from Dong Ha finished dropping off supplies and new personnel. Sgt. Jones and members of 1st Plt. who were rotating climbed onto the trucks and waved goodbye to those of us not heading back to the World. Rodriguez and I shuffled back to our tank to have some breakfast and contemplate who our new crew mates might be. Sgt. Jones said he had talked to our new TC (tank commander) but didn't tell us who it was going to be. We knew it had to be a member of the platoon. As I was firing up a heat tab under my morning coffee, I noticed Sgt. Siva and Cpl. Sellers coming across the compound. They had their Willy Peter (water proof) bags over their shoulders and Sgt. Siva carried his trusty M1 carbine. Siva and Sellers had been with the platoon for some time and both were known not to be the best barracks Marines, but were good field Marines. Sgt. Siva was a decorated Korean War vet who loved to fight and drink. Sgt. Siva had been up and down the rank ladder so many times, you didn't know what rank he was from day to day.

The pair came straight for our tank, so I knew that they were our new crew mates. They walked up, dropped their gear, and Sgt. Siva asked if this was "Charley One Deuce?" It would be Charley 1 Deuce from then on. I replied yes and we began introductions. Sgt Siva said to call him either TJ or Siva, that way you didn't have to worry about what rank he happened to be that day. We all kind of laughed. I offered them some breakfast and coffee, but they said they had already eaten. They pulled up some ammo boxes and Siva started laying out how he wanted the tank organized.

Things were going to stay about the same with only a few small changes. I would stay as driver, Rodriguez as loader, and Sellers as gunner. Siva thought we had done a good job in the field on the operation so he didn't see any reason to change anything. We were going to change the number and types of ammunition that we would be carrying. We would get rid of most of the anti-tank rounds and add more canister, HE (high explosive) and carry extra rounds. .30 cal. (caliber) machine gun ammo would be stuffed into every nook and cranny. We didn't worry about the .50 cal. ammo, because it wouldn't fire half the time. On any operations from now on we would be lead tank; no ifs, ands or buts because Siva hated to eat someone else's dust. We would always carry at least two water cans full of beer and at least one bottle of hard liquor. As Siva once told a major, the hard liquor was in case of snake bite. We sure got bit by snakes a lot. Siva wanted the tank kept spotless; if you didn't have something to do, clean something. Nobody, and Siva meant nobody, was allowed on the tank without one of the crew giving them permission to come aboard, kind of like a ship. This would cause us some problems on several occasions down the road, but it was some-

thing we all came to feel strongly about. This was our home and you don't walk into someone's home without knocking.



T. J. Siva

Last but by no means not least, Siva wanted to know if we knew how to play Back Alley Bridge. If not, we had to learn. We would play literally hundreds of hands of this card game in the months to come.

By this time operation Hastings had started to wind down. After our first encounter with Charley, we had been relegated to perimeter guard, convoy escort, guarding the Navy CBs (Navy Construction Bn.) as they tried to rebuild the bridges along Highway 9, and sometimes being called to bail out a unit that got in over their head with the NVA. We stayed busy most days with these duties, and on the days that we stayed at the compound there was always work to be done on the tank. Nobody seemed to have a handle on how to use tanks up in I Corps. We had only been a burden to the grunts on most of our trips into the field. We were thought of as large, noisy, break-down prone targets. Our next trip out to help a grunt unit would change all the misconceptions and prove our worth to the grunts.

Early one morning as we were pulling out of the gate at Cam Lo on a convoy escort to Dong Ha, we noticed a >>

large number of grunts heading west on Highway 9. Grunts moved in and out of the area all the time but this seemed to be an unusually large group. We made our way to Dong Ha and back before noon and, after a few hands of our new favorite card game, lunch and a short nap, we set about our afternoon routine.

About 3:30 PM, Siva was called to the CP, returning just a few minutes later with word to mount up. It seems the grunts we saw leaving that morning had gotten themselves between a rock and a hard place up the road a ways. Our tank and two others were to go up there and see if we could help out. We moved down the highway a few miles to the west of Cam Lo where the road starts to wind through some low hills. As we started up a hill, we spotted the grunts spread out on each side of the road. The grunt commander flagged us down just before the crest of the hill. Siva jumped down to talk to the major who had stopped us. We could hear heavy machine gun fire along with occasional AK 47 and M14 rifle fire coming from the other side of the hill. This indeed was the battalion we had seen leaving Cam Lo that morning. Their mission had been to sweep Highway 9 west from Cam Lo to the Rock Pile. The Rock Pile was just that, a pile of rocks several hundred feet tall about seventeen miles west of Cam Lo. There was some kind of recon team on top and the only way up there was by helicopter, but they had a great view of the whole valley. They had reported greatly increased NVA activity in the area over the last few weeks.

Up to this point there had been no large American forces this far west so it was decided to send this Marine Battalion in there and establish a small base. Things had gone well for the grunts until they reached this point on the road. On the other side of the hill from where we were stopped, the road curves slightly to the right as it moves about a half mile to the bottom of the hill and then turns left and crosses a small bridge over a creek. The left side of the road drops off sharply



Rock Pile

to the creek below and then rises about two hundred yards away to a vertical cliff face towering over the road. The grunts had moved almost to the bottom of the hill when the cliff face opened up with heavy machine gun and rifle fire. Because the road had a very shallow ditch and sloped slightly to the right, the grunts were able to obtain a small amount of cover. If they raised their heads to fire, they were immediately fired upon. Being unable to move forward or back and with no way of attacking the cliff with the rest of the battalion, they were stuck. The major had called in artillery from Cam Lo that pounded the cliff to no avail, but the enemy kept firing. His second option was to call in air support. This too had no effect on the bunkers dug into that cliff face. They needed to pin point each bunker and take it out.

Call in the tanks. We talked over the situation and decided the best way to go about blasting Charley off that cliff. We rolled over the top of the hill and instantly received a heavy volume of fire from the bunkers which we returned with our .30 cal. machine guns. I could see the green tracers coming directly at us and hear the rounds bouncing off the tank. These were heavy anti-aircraft machine guns so they made quite a racket bouncing off the side of the tank. There had been no report of recoilless rifle fire so we were not concerned that we would take much damage. We pulled to a stop about two thirds of the way down the hill. Within seconds, we were lighting up that cliff like the fourth of July with our 90mm (millimeter) gun. The more they fired, the more targets we had. Soon they realized that they were just giving away their positions and their guns fell silent. Anything that looked like a bunker or hiding place we fired on.

After about forty-five minutes, the grunts at the bottom of the hill reported that they could see NVA trying to escape along the creek bed. The grunts, now able to move to the left side of the road, had reversed roles with the enemy. We ceased fire and watched as the grunts pounded the retreating NVA—Like shooting fish in a barrel. We backed up the road to the cheers of the grunts that had been trapped on the side of the road and stopped to confer with the major one more time before we headed back to Cam Lo. The major was so impressed with what had just taken place that he was calling Cam Lo to have them send the remainder of our tank platoon out to his position to take part in the rest of the battalion's operation. Lucky us!

It was late in the afternoon and everybody was beat up after the ambush. They had dead and wounded to evacuate, so the major made the decision to set up a perimeter, regroup, and wait for morning to continue the operation. The other two tanks arrived just before dark and we bedded down for the night. At first light, a small patrol of grunts was sent to sweep the ridge line above the cliff. They met up with the battalion as we crossed the creek at the bottom of the hill, reporting that they had found several bodies and blood trails, but no sign that the enemy was trying to move back into the bunkers.

Even in the early morning hours it was hot and humid, and the grunts who were spread out on either side of the road fighting the tall grass and brush were really feeling it. By mid-morning they were starting to drop like flies. They would bring the really bad ones and put them up on the tanks so they could cool off and get some water in them. We were also hauling any extra gear like mortar tubes, base plates, mortar ammo, radios and batteries—anything the grunts didn't need on the march in.

After traveling some distance at a very slow pace we reached a point where we would leave the road and move up onto a hill a few hundred yards to our right. With a creek between us and the hill, the grunts were skeptical that we could make it down the embankment across the creek and up the other side. Siva climbs down on the fender with his carbine and tells me to grab a shotgun lying next to one of the grunts suffering heat exhaustion. We are going to check out the creek for a place to cross. Before I could ask, Siva says I have to go because I am the one driving, so if I don't think we can make it through something, he wants to know about it. It made sense, but I still did not like leaving the safety of my tank. This was only the first time of many that the two of us would be out beating the brush with the grunts. With the shotgun and a belt of shells, I follow Siva and a squad of grunts through the tall grass the quarter mile to the creek bank.

The bank drops straight down about ten or twelve feet to the creek bed below and about the same up the other side. There was no way we could make it across the creek at this point. After moving about half a mile east on the creek, we finally found a spot that looked promising. The bank on both sides had caved in making for a gentler approach and exit from the creek. Siva asked me what I thought? "Looks doable to me," I replied. We made our way back to the tank. I am sweating like a pig and hotter than hell. I can see why these guys want to be in tanks.

The grunts saddled up and we headed for the section in the creek we had picked as our crossing point. I eased the tank over the bank and down into the creek bed and then nailed the throttle. The tank responded and climbed the far bank with very little effort. One tank down, four to go. The rest of the platoon followed, with the creek becoming harder to navigate with each vehicle. The last tank struggled to pull itself up from the creek bed, spinning one track and then the other, eventually clawing its way out of the creek. We were not going to be able to use this crossing in the near future; we would have to find another fording spot which would mean at least one more recon, great! The grunt column was already on top of the hill and setting about organizing the perimeter. As the tanks reached the crest of the hill the heat victims were unloaded and taken to a make-shift helicopter LZ (landing zone). The medevac choppers had already been called and were on their way. After the choppers had lifted off and headed for Dong Ha with the disabled grunts, we inventoried the gear they had left behind on our tank. Besides

the shotgun I had acquired, we had two M14 rifles, three .45 cal. pistols, a .357 magnum pistol, numerous hand grenades, a ton of 782 gear and all kinds of ammunition. We turned most of the stuff over to the grunts, keeping only the things we thought might be useful to us in the future. This turned out to be good thinking.

With that out of the way, we turned our attention to finding out where we were to be placed on the perimeter. The hill top was shaped like a fat hot dog and was overlooked on one side by the Rock Pile and on the other side by what we called Razor Back Ridge. The ridge seemed to pose the most threat, so the tanks were spaced along that side of the perimeter facing the ridge. Not having to dig fighting holes and bunkers was one of the advantages of being a tanker. We just parked and strung our tarp from the side of the tank for shade and we were home. Home is where you park it.

Since the fight at the cliff, we had not seen any NVA or any sign along the way between the cliff and our new position that they were in the area. The recon team on the Rock Pile had reported very little activity since the ambush, spotting no groups larger than two or three individuals. At day break the next morning, Siva woke me and told me to round up my new shotgun and scrounge up a helmet and a flak jacket. We were going out with a couple squads of grunts to find a better way across the creek. This is two days in a row I get to play soldier, and it is not the top thing on my list of things I wanted to be doing. We humped down to the creek and began our search for the best place to cross. We had been advised to look for a spot where the CBs could build a crossing that could accommodate trucks used to resupply the outpost. About three hours passed before we came across what we thought was the ideal crossing. The terrain sloped gently down to the creek which had a good solid gravel bottom and the water only ran about knee deep. In the middle of the afternoon we returned to the perimeter successfully. We had found a great place to cross the creek but both of us were totally exhausted. There was no contact with Charley, but we did come across some areas where it looked like large groups had spent quite some time.

Not more than three or four days later, we got the word that another tank platoon would be moving up to relieve us and we were to return to Dong Ha to take care of some maintenance issues. Our move to the Rock Pile had been an eye opener for the grunts. They finally realized that tanks had a place in this war. It had also been good for us in that we finally got the chance to show the massive direct fire-power tanks had. Also, we got to be heroes, at least for a short time. Was this good for us or bad for us? Our replacement tank platoon arrived mid-morning, and after briefing them and mounting up our grunt escort, we moved out for Dong Ha, but we would be back!!! ■

## A Curve Ball is Thrown at Jeff

A LETTER FROM MARY BETH GRIFFITH

Unfortunately, Jeff and I won't be able to make it to St. Louis. Jeff was recently diagnosed with "Lewy Body Dementia" which is very aggressive that has Parkinson-like effects. He also had a mild heart attack over the Easter week. Our son and I are stunned at the rate of how quickly Jeff's dementia is taking over. Sadly, I've had to take his car keys as well as all of the ammo for his beloved gun collection —20 rifles and 5 pistols. I feel very unsafe now that he's unable to protect us at home. He had an Oncology appointment last Monday; however, I could not get him prepared to go. His ambulation was poor at best, even with me and his sister assisting him. When in this state his eyes are closed and he barely verbalizes. His disorientation leaves him unable to follow instructions. I have actually had to feed him! He's been

hospitalized twice in the past two months and because the V.A. Hospital is 65 mi. away, he was rushed to our local E.R. I am hoping that the V.A. does not give me a hard time covering the bills! Awaiting the influx of bills! I know about the "Veteran's Choice" program which is a joke because they have to refer you to a MD that they have a contract with! Jeff has good days & bad. The V.A. will provide a home health aide for 3 hours daily, 7 days a week. I haven't had anyone here yet, but do realize after a particularly trying three days all alone that I need some help, even if it's just to keep my sanity by giving me a break to run errands or lunch with a friend. My heart is broken. I was a Charge Nurse on an Alzheimer's Unit, and I am very familiar with this disease. Even though I took care of every patient as if they

were my family member, and I took care of my Mom until I had to place her in a nursing home. I am completely overwhelmed now that my beloved partner of 40 years is disappearing before my eyes.

I am VERY thankful that we attended the last reunion in D.C. I want to make sure that it is impressed upon all Tankers that going to a reunion is an absolute must! We never know what curve balls life can throw at us to prevent us from ever seeing your buddies again! I hope my letter will encourage all of the tankers who are thinking, "Oh, I'll skip St Louis and just go to the next reunion!" by proving to them that they will not always have control over what they are able to do. They just can't wait until it's too late because all they'll have is regrets instead of treasured memories. ■

## You Can't Shoot Our Tank Commander and Get Away With It!!

BY RICK LEWIS, 1ST SGT., USMC (RET.)

In November of 1966, I was with 2nd Platoon, Charlie Company, 1st Tanks. We were in operational support of 3/1, in the Da Nang TAOR, north of Marble Mountain. On November 1st we headed out of 3/1 CP with a company of Marine grunts and a bunch of Navy doctors and corpsmen. We were to be the security for what was called a "Civil Action Country Fair" where we win over the hearts and minds of the people by providing medical care and supplies, treating all the locals. I am sure some of the Viet Cong were included that day. Those damn VC held fear over the village. Our orders were to take up positions facing a heavy hedgerow with a tree line behind it. The grunts set up in between the tanks and they finished out the 360 degree line of defense surrounding the village. Also, the order came down: "Do not shoot even if shot at." Request per-

mission to fire from the tank platoon commander.

After 30 minutes of just sitting and doing our oil checks and house cleaning inside of the tank, Sgt. Jerry Maddox said that we could get off the tank and stretch. For me, being the gunner, this order was welcome news. We also had to keep two men on the tank at all times. As L/Cpl. Greg Auclair, our driver, and I walked behind the tank, we heard gun fire.

Sgt. Maddox hollered, "Get up here now!"

I got back in my gunner's seat and Sgt. Maddox ordered, "Start checking out the hedge row and tree line."

Auclair started the tank's engine and, as soon as I began to traverse the turret, we were told to shut down. Sgt. Maddox told Sgt. McDonald that the lieutenant told them to shut it down. So, with the power shut off, I traversed

the turret the old way, manually, which does have its advantages. After about 15 minutes of searching and traversing, and after at least another 5-7 enemy sniper rounds had been fired at us with a few hitting the tank, I found the sniper. To my surprise, he had on a bright blue shirt and the VC next to him was in the typical old black PJs and was using a pair of binoculars as the spotter. I was taken aback, as this was the first live enemy that I had actually seen. For me, with almost a year in country, the enemy had all been dead ones. So, I saw the two live ones and they did not know I had them in my sights. To me this was pretty exciting.

I announced to Sgt. Maddox that I had them. He dropped down to the range finder to confirm my sighting. He said, "S.O.B. you do got them!"

I asked to fire the coax .50 cal. He replied that he was going to ask the

lieutenant first. He got off the tank to find the lieutenant while I kept my eyes glued to my target. The three of us remaining on the tank kept saying, "What the hell? We need to shoot the gooks!"

Sgt Maddox got back on board and said that the lieutenant told him not to fire, and if we did shoot that he would have us courts-martialed. Of course, we are all calling this a big pile of bull-shit.

About that time, Sgt. Maddox falls down on top of me in the gunner's seat. He cries out that he's been shot. Now I can't move because all his weight is on me. Auclair and the loader pull Sgt. Maddox out of the turret and call for a Doc. They placed Sgt. Maddox on the tank's armor plate. He was shot in the back. The round had hit the TC hatch and then splattered all over his upper back side. Doc arrived to help and we put Sgt. Maddox in a jeep that took off for the CP. We got back on the tank and we kept saying, "You can't shoot our TC and get away with it."

We said, "Screw it! Let's fire back!"

However, the loader was not happy with us. He reminded us of what the lieutenant had said. After double checking the sniper position and finding that the enemy hadn't moved, I asked, "Do we fire or not?"

Auclair said, "Yes."

The loader said, "No."

And I said, "Yes!" So I cut loose with the .50 cal. and watched as the rounds hit their mark. The sniper and the spotter were pink mist. I remember screaming out, "We got them!!!"

Auclair and I were whooping it up. It felt so good to smoke these VC after shooting our TC. Then it got a little ugly. Sgt. McDonald came over and got on board. He back-handed me, screaming. What a dumb fuck! Didn't you understand the order not to fire?"

I said, "Yes. But the gooks shot Sgt. Maddox and we can't let them get away with it."

He just stayed in our cases and took over control of the tank. As we sat thinking about what the brig must look like in Viet Nam ... and did they eat C-rats there too?

The grunts asked us where did we see the gooks.

I told them, "If you get up here, I can show you."

After glassing the area, they could see where the .50 cal. had done damage to the hedgerow. It took about an hour before the grunts returned carrying a rifle and other equipment taken off the bodies of the VC. They told us that we had really torn them up big time with that fifty. Auclair and I felt good that we got the gooks that shot Sgt. Maddox. We asked each other, "Do you think that they would really lock us up for doing what we did?"

Some Sgt. from the grunts came over a little later and said that our lieutenant was over at the grunt CP bragging to the grunt commander about how well his tank crews could shoot. When we moved out a few hours later, and returned to the CP, we never heard another word about any courts martial. Also we could not find out about Sgt. Maddox, but then a few days later, we were told he was sent stateside.

Fast forward to the 2015 VTA reunion in Washington, DC some 49 years later and Sgt. Maddox shows up. It was really good to see him after all this time. We talked and he asked about Auclair. I told him he wanted to come to the reunion but two weeks before, playing baseball, he tore his knee up and had a knee replacement operation. During the reunion at our Farewell Banquet, I got to meet Sgt. Maddox' son. The first question his son asked me was, "Did you get the guy who shot my dad?" That caught me by surprise, but I told him, "Yes, we did." And just like that the whole day came rushing back.

After I returned to my home and a bit later, I talked to Sgt. Maddox and Auclair about that day and we put the pieces together; so, for his son, here's the rest of the story. Sgt. Maddox and his son will attend the VTA St. Louis reunion in September and Auclair will be there too. ■

### PLEASE HELP!

We would really appreciate it if you would scour your attics, your garages, and your basements to see if you have any treasures that we could use for our fund raising auction. We have had simple items like canteens, steel piss pots, tank comm. helmets, books about the Vietnam War, t-shirts, covers, and jungle utilities all the way up to hand-built scale models of tanks, demilled-90 mm shells, and beautiful antique plaques and commemorative K-Bar knives. We even had a tank's ballistic computer one year!!! Some members find items on E-Bay or other Marine-related websites and they obtain items for our auction which they donate to us. As most of you know, all donations to the USMC VTA ... [which is an IRS sanctioned 501 (c) 19 non-profit] ... are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

If you have a great item or two, please contact any of our VTA Board of Directors and let them know that they will be available for the auction. You can find your board members' contact information on Page 3 of this issue. If the items are too heavy or bulky to carry on the airplane and if we think it is a viable auction item, we may be able to help you with the shipping to the reunion; but we need to hear from you at least a month before the reunion...that's by August 15th.

# HONOR THE PAST BY BEING PRESENT...



## USMC Vietnam Tankers Association Reunion

Thursday, September 21 – Monday, September 25, 2017

Sheraton Westport Lakeside Chalet Hotel  
191 Westport Plaza, St Louis, MO 63146

Reunion room rate: \$119 per night.

If you want to come early or stay later, this room rate is good for three days before and three days after the reunion dates.

Call 1-888-627-7066 to make your room reservations.

Be sure to mention both:

“Sheraton Westport Chalet” ... and ... “USMC Vietnam Tankers

Reunion” when making your room reservations.

All room reservations must be made by Aug 30, 2017.

Hotel has a free shuttle bus to and from the St Louis Airport.

The bus runs every ½ hour from 6:30 AM to 11:00 PM

If you do drive, there is plenty of free indoor and outdoor parking ... including parking for RVs ... but there are no RV hookups.

Besides two hotel restaurants there are also over 20 dining and entertainment venues within a block or two of the hotel.  
**Backstreet Jazz & Blues**  
**Bradford's Pub**  
**Dino's Deli**

**Drunken Fish**  
**Edward Jones**  
**Family Nuts**  
**Fernando's Hair Studio**  
**Funny Bone Comedy Club**  
**Fuzzy's Taco Shop**  
**Imo's Pizza**

**Jive & Wail**  
**Kobe Japanese Grill**  
**McDonald's**  
**O'Fallon's Brewery**  
**Patrick's Restaurant & Sports Bar**  
**Paul Mineo's Trattoria**

**PNC Bank**  
**St. Louis Bread Co.**  
**Starbuck's**  
**Smoothie King**  
**The Sports Bar**  
**The Playhouse**  
**Train Wreck Saloon**

### Your Story Is Vital to The Vietnam Tankers Association

BY FRANCIS (FRANK - TREE) REMKIEWICZ

The Sponson Box is a vital part of our communication with everyone in the Vietnam Tankers Association, especially during the time our convention is not in session. The story you tell in the Sponson Box has the same effect on the rest of our group as if you were talking face to face with us. Truly, we need your stories, serious, funny, odd, in the rear, on R&R, what has happened to you since our time in country, your story is very important. Could very well change a life.

So serious is this endeavor, the Vietnam Tankers Association will provide two writing seminars for your help. These seminars are not grammar, spelling, proper paragraphs, or any other English type of seminar. These seminars will help you write your story. We will provide you time and resources for you to accomplish writing your story. I think you will find that it is not as hard as you might think. You should also feel very good once your story is done that you have helped so many in the VTA.

The timing of these two seminars will also occur during the same time that the “Torsion Bar” hospitality room is open so that there will be break time for drinks and you are welcome to bring drinks and snacks into the seminar. Our seminar coordinator will be Frank “Tree” Remkiewicz. We will have sign-up sheets at the door at the time of check-in so that we can get a rough idea of the numbers but rest assured you do not need to sign-up in order to attend. Drop-ins are welcome and encouraged.



## 2017 St Louis Reunion Schedule

Thursday, September 21 – Monday, September 25

<b>Thursday (Sept. 21)</b>	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	<b>Arrival Day</b> – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside The Torsion Bar hospitality room (in the Alpine Foyer). <b>Sign up for VTA History Interviews Sat and Sun</b>
	<b>0900 – 2330</b>	The Torsion Bar is Open <b>Lunch &amp; Dinner on your own</b>
<b>Friday (Sept. 22)</b>	<b>0800 – 1000</b>	<b>Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!!</b> <b>Breakfast on your own</b> Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (The Matterhorn Room) <b>Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion! Rles on entry ticket</b>
	<b>0800 – 1000</b>	Ladies Coffee (in _____ Room)
	<b>1000</b>	2 buses depart for Boeing Tour (2 more buses depart 30 min later)
	<b>1030</b>	Tour Boeing in staggered tours
	<b>1130</b>	ETD Boeing
	<b>1145</b>	ETA St Charles for lunch and browsing
	<b>Noon</b>	Bus starts shuttle runs to Casino & returns St. Chas.
	<b>Every 15 min:</b>	Buses shuttle to casino/RT or Hotel/RT
	<b>1330</b>	Start Hotel Bus Shuttle Runs (about 30 min round trip)
	<b>1430</b>	Last bus from St Charles to Casino and to hotel
	<b>1445</b>	Last bus from Casino to hotel
	<b>1500</b>	End Day at Hotel
<b>1730 – 1830</b>	<b>BID &amp; BITE Italian Buffet Dinner – Cash Bar</b> (Versailles Ballroom)	
<b>1830 – 2030</b>	<b>Live Auction!</b> (Versailles Ballroom)	
<b>2030 – 2300</b>	The Torsion Bar Open	

<b>Saturday (Sept 23)</b>	<b>0800 – 0930</b>	<b>Breakfast on your own</b>
	<b>1000</b>	Bus departs for St. Louis Gateway Arch
	<b>1030</b>	Group Photo to be taken
	<b>1045</b>	Buses start round-trip shuttle runs to the Casino, Bud & History Museum
	<b>1100</b>	First Exclusive Tram to Top of Arch (40 people per tram ride and ride takes 4 min–return tram when ready)
	<b>1140</b>	Second Exclusive Tram
	<b>1150</b>	Third Exclusive Tram
	<b>1200</b>	Fourth Exclusive Tram
	<b>1210</b>	Fifth Exclusive Tram
	<b>1430-ish</b>	Last shuttle bus returns to Riverboat Dock from wherever
	<b>1500</b>	Riverboat Sightseeing Tour (1 hour)
	<b>1630</b>	Bus departs for hotel
	<b>1700</b>	ETA at hotel <b>Interview Schedule Posted in Torsion Bar</b>
<b>1700 – 2300</b>	The Torsion Bar Open <b>Dinner on your own</b>	
<b>Sunday (Sept. 24)</b>	<b>1700 – 2130</b>	<b>FAREWELL BANQUET</b> (Versailles Ballroom) NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat & tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket is highly encouraged.
	<b>1700 – 1745</b>	Cocktails – Cash Bar
	<b>1800 – 1815</b>	Presentation of Colors and remarks
	<b>1815 – 1900</b>	Dinner Served
	<b>1900 – 1905</b>	05–minutes–Head Call
	<b>1905 – 2130</b>	30 minutes – Guest Speaker 45 minutes – Fallen Heroes 05 minutes – 2019 Reunion
	<b>2130 – 2400</b>	The Torsion Bar Open – Last Call.
<b>Monday (Sept. 25)</b>	<b>Departure Day</b>	



**OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM  
2017 St Louis Reunion**

Sheraton Westport Chalet  
September 21 – September 25

**Want to save \$25?  
Mail your registration before July 31**

Please Print all information

Member's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Guest's Name (s): \_\_\_\_\_  
and relationship \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Town: \_\_\_\_\_ State \_\_\_\_\_ Zip Code \_\_\_\_\_

Cell Phone: \_\_\_\_\_ Home Phone: \_\_\_\_\_

E-mail Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Vietnam Tank or AT Bn: \_\_\_\_\_ Co: \_\_\_\_\_ Years in-country: \_\_\_\_\_ to \_\_\_\_\_  
(Circle "Tank" or "AT" above)

**Are you a first time attendee?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_ MOS \_\_\_\_\_

**Would you like to participate in our personal interview program?** YES \_\_\_\_\_ NO \_\_\_\_\_

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

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the St Louis reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to July 31, 2017. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

NAME (S) as you want them to appear on your reunion name tag \_\_\_\_\_ Men's T-Shirt Sizes S – XL = \$15 each (\$5.00 extra for XXL & XXXL)

○ \_\_\_\_\_ ○ SHIRT SIZE \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL REUNION FEES**

**My Registration Fee:** ..... \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
*(After July 31<sup>st</sup> the late registration fee is \$185 per person)*

My T-Shirt ..... \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

Number of guests \_\_\_\_\_ X \$160 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_  
*(Early registration fee for each guest is \$160.00)*

Guest T-shirt \_\_\_\_\_ X \$15/\$20 = \$ \_\_\_\_\_

SUB TOTAL = ..... \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**Optional:** Would you like to donate a few dollars to help with the beer fund? \$ \_\_\_\_\_

**TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED:** \$ \_\_\_\_\_

You must make your own hotel room reservations by August 30<sup>th</sup> to get the low room rate! Call: **1-888-627-7066** and be sure to mention both the “**Sheraton Westport Chalet**” and “**USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion**” for the special room rate of \$119.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$180 per night.

**CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has a July 31<sup>st</sup> deadline.**  
**HOTEL REGISTRATION MUST BE MADE SEPARATELY BY YOU BY AUGUST 30, 2017**

**HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$25.00**

Submit this form along with your payment by July 31st to purchase a reunion t-shirt and save \$25 off of the Reunion Registration Fee.

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

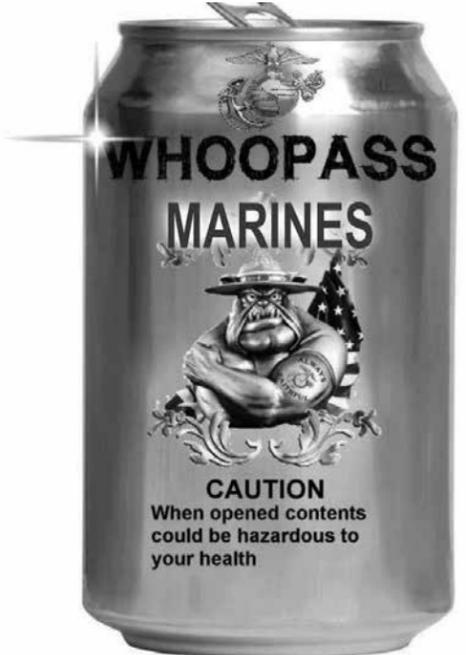
USMC VTA  
 c/o Ron Knight  
 6665 Burnt Hickory Drive  
 Hoschtou, GA 30548-8280

**How To Win A Free Hotel Room!**

You can win a free hotel stay for this year's reunion when you fill out and submit the entry coupon that will be provided in your reunion Welcome Bag and then bring and deposit it when you arrive at the Thursday's Opening Meeting no later than 07:59 CST

Rules: The coupon will be your raffle ticket to be surrendered at the door of the meeting room before 07:59 CST for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic room rate (\$119) plus taxes. Prize value: \$476.00+.

The drawing will be held at the conclusion of the same meeting. Tickets will be selected from the people who are in the meeting room prior to 07:59 CST. No latecomers will be permitted to enter in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President's watch set to atomic clock standards.



**WHEN LOGIC AND REASON JUST WON'T CUT IT!**



**FAMOUS LAST WORDS:**

“The idea that cavalry will be replaced by these iron coaches is absurd. It is little short of treasonous.” — Comment of Aide-de-camp to Field Marshal Haig, at tank demonstration, 1916



1970 COST OF LIVING	
New House:	\$23,450
Average Income:	\$9,400
New Car:	\$3,450
Minimum Wage:	\$2.10/hour
Movie Ticket:	\$1.55
Gasoline:	36 cents/gallon
Postage Stamp:	6 cents
Sugar:	39 cents/5 lbs
Milk:	62 cents/gallon
Coffee:	\$1.90/pound
Eggs:	59 cents/dozen
Bread:	25 cents

C-Ration Ciggies



**USMC Vietnam Tankers Association**  
16606 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 90106

**Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRE" on your address label is "16" then your 2017 membership dues are now payable.**

**Make your check out to: USMC VTA for \$30\* and mail to:**

**USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611**

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

