



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™

Sponson Box 2016 Bonus Issue

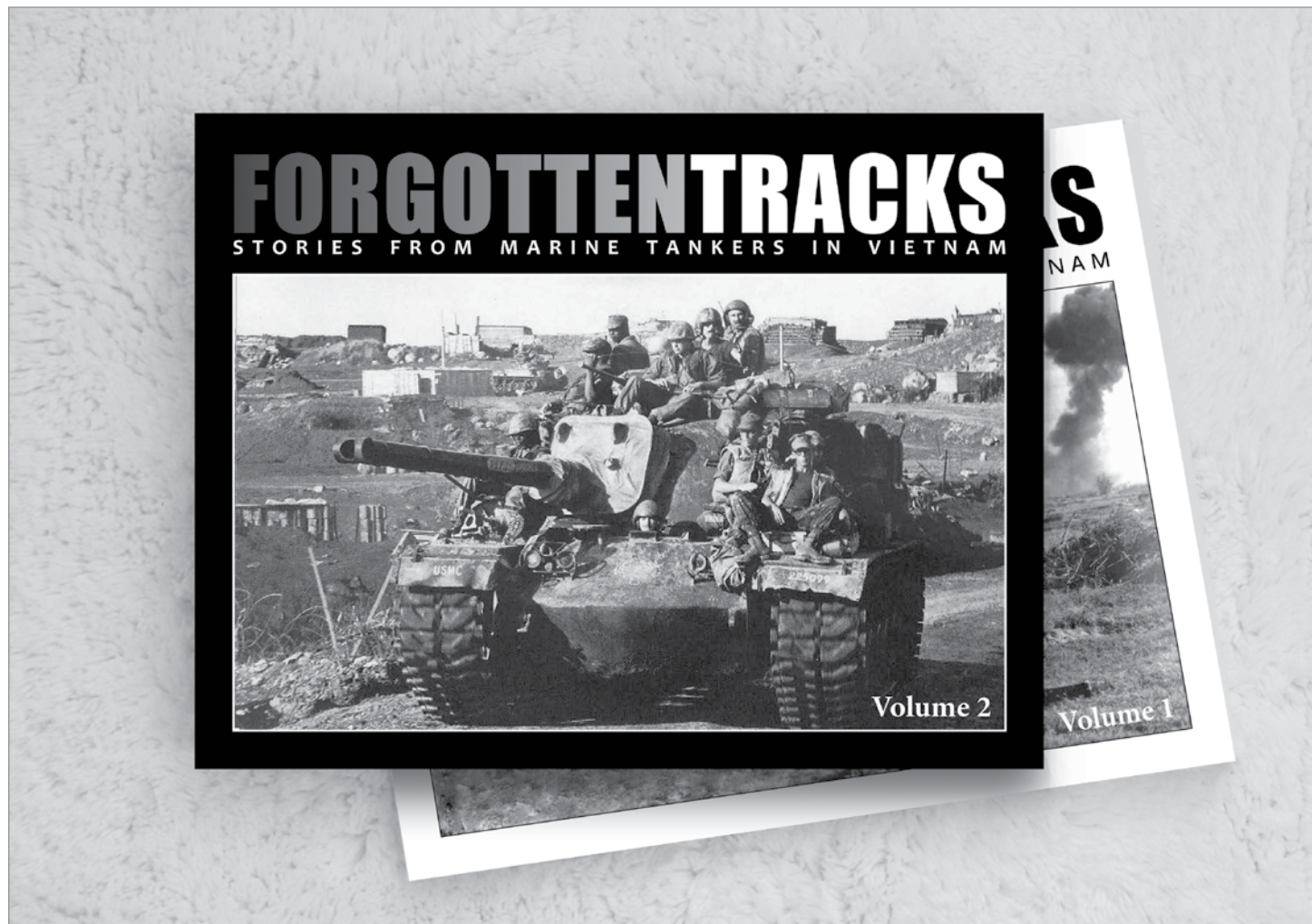
We are receiving stories from the members at such a rate that we have decided to produce a “bonus” issue of our magazine!

Please keep the stories coming in!!!



Featured Stories:

- Operation Starlite..... Page 22
- When Push Comes To Shove..... Page 30
- My Longest Day Page 39



The VTA History Project publishes *Forgotten Tracks Volume 2!!!*

\$40.00 per book Includes shipping

The second large collection of our Vietnam stories is now available in limited quantities. Our *Forgotten Tracks Volume One* was such a **great** success that your Board of Directors approved the printing of **Forgotten Tracks, Volume 2**. The format and layout of Volume 2 is similar to Volume One and it contains over thirty-five stories and over 95 images from articles previously published in our award-winning magazine, The Sponson Box. **We have also added an entire section of never-before-published personal diary pages from three of our former platoon leaders.**

Look for the **reply card** in this magazine or order on-line on the VTA website at <http://www.USMCVTA.org> using a major credit card or PayPal.

There are only 150 copies of Vol. 2 available—Order now!

And as a reminder we still have a limited quantity of Vol. 1 for \$35 (including shipping)

Letter from the President

Please make plans for the 2017 VTA REUNION that will be in St Louis on September 21 – 25.

DUES REIMINDER: On the back cover of the last issue, we added a red WARNING on 79 copies of the magazine for those forgetful members who had not paid their 2016 dues. Please keep in mind that annual dues are payable on January 1st of each year. That means that in three months your 2017 membership dues will be payable. All of the Life members: How about breaking out your check books and making a tax-deductible donation this year?

FOUR ISSUES THIS YEAR: As most of you know, each year we plan to publish three issues of the Sponson Box. Well, this is the 4th issue for 2016. If the reason for this special issue is not obvious to you, let me explain the fact that more of you are realizing that you do in fact have a story or two to share with the membership. I don't want to impart a general absolution on those of you who either think that you cannot write well enough to have your story published and/or the few of you who think that the story is not worthy of appearing in print. Neither suppositions are true. Even if your command of written English language is less than perfect, you can submit your story to the Editorial Board, we can "fluff & buff" it, send it back to you for your approval and we end up with a genuine gem to share here and almost as importantly, to share with your family. I know that your kids would be thrilled.

LOOKING FOR OLD MARINE BUDDIES: I had an email discussion with a VTA member who was hesitant to seek out and locate some of his old Vietnam Marine buddies. He thought that these guys may not want to be found. My reply was that the USMC VTA has over 500 members and virtually to the man, at one time during their lives, they too did not want to be reminded about their time in-country. I know for me, after my release from active duty and for many years afterward, when a civilian asked me about my time in Vietnam, the first idiotic question that they'd asked was, "Did you kill anyone?" And you know what? They really did not care.

For the vast majority of us the "silent time" was between our discharge and up to 30 years afterward. Most of us simply wanted to forget the pain & suffering that we experienced and to simply start making babies and have a career. We were certainly not willing to put our emotions on trial. Then later in time, most of us realize that we would never be the President of the U.S., that we'd never play in a rock band and that we'll never have a million dollars in a bank account, so then we looked back and realized that our time in the USMC was probably the most exciting, the most responsible and the most awesome time of our lives. And then we may have realized that it is OK to think about our past lives and we might think about some of our friends back in the day, and then we long to find out how they are doing. And that is how the VTA filled our membership. Many of us realized that we needed a "safe place" to make an attempt to take out our memories, dust them off and maybe share them with others who are far from judgmental and who seem to understand. Many of us also realize that we will never heal ... but we can either learn to deal with the past and/or find a place to store it away. The VTA started in 1999, which was roughly 30 years after most of the time we were in-country. For several times each succeeding year, a new potential member is found and for the most part they are thrilled that we found them. As you know, every-other-year we conduct a reunion. Lucky for us there are always a few first-time attendees at our reunions. And after their first reunion, they say, "I am so sorry that I waited so long to attend. God willing I will never miss another reunion." So, I will be willing to bet "payday stakes" that those old buddies of yours will be thrilled to have you find them. Please don't get stuck in neutral; go out and find them. The worst that can happen is that they realize that you care about them. The best thing would be that they join the VTA and show up in St Louis next year?



**"You have enemies? Good!
That means you've stood up for something, sometime in your life."
Winston Churchill, U.K. prime minister**

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FRONT COVER PHOTO:

Cover Photo: Alpha Co, 3rd Tank Bn, A-32 guarding an LZ during "Operation Starlite."
More details for the photo inside.

Meet your Board of Directors

A feature that provides some history about one of your board members



James Philip Coan

James Philip Coan was born in San Antonio, Texas on July 15, 1942. Jim was raised in Tucson, Arizona, and attended public schools there. He graduated from Tucson High School where he lettered in three sports and was elected Letterman's Club President his senior year. He was selected for the Arizona All State Track Team (discus) in 1960.

To avoid having to take mandatory ROTC at the University of Arizona, Jim joined the Arizona Army National Guard, 158th Infantry, after high school graduation. Jim later enrolled at the University of Arizona and was a Guardsman while attending college, attaining the rank of sergeant. After he obtained his Bachelor's Degree, he signed up for Marine Corps Officer Candidate School and received a commission as an Officer of Marines in 1966. Jim commanded a tank platoon in Vietnam with Alpha Company, 3rd Tank Bn., from 1967-68. His platoon received a Meritorious Unit Citation for sustained superior combat performance. He was awarded a Purple Heart, Navy Commendation Medal with Combat "V", Presidential Unit Citation (2), and several

other decorations for his Vietnam War service.

Returning home from Vietnam, Jim was assigned to 2nd Tank Bn. at Camp Lejeune where he was given command of Company "C", the only M-103A2 "heavy" tank unit on the East Coast. He fondly remembers he and another lieutenant renting a little house in Surf City, a beach community located 20 miles north of Jacksonville. Co-eds from Mary Washington College were frequent visitors.

After attaining the rank of Captain, USMCR, Jim left active duty in 1970 to pursue a career in city government. He subsequently earned a Master's Degree in Public Administration from San Diego State. After a stint as assistant to the City Manager of Tucson, Jim decided that local government politics was not his cup of tea. He then took a position at the Arizona Youth Correctional Center north of Tucson as a cottage supervisor, and he decided this was the right career choice for him.

Jim moved to Stockton, California to commence a 30-year career with the

California Youth Authority. In 1976, Jim attended a dance where he met his future bride, Sandra Sue Klatt. She was a psychiatric technician at Stockton State Hospital. On September 4, 1976, Jim and Sandra were married in Morris Chapel on the University of the Pacific campus in Stockton. Jim and wife Sandra presently reside in Sierra Vista, Arizona, with their Miniature Schnauzer named "Schnitzel." They raised three children—two daughters and a son. They currently have two grandsons and will celebrate 40 years of marriage in 2016.

Jim is a life member of the Military Order of the Purple Heart, VFW, and USMC Vietnam Tankers Assn. He is the author of Con Thien: The Hill of Angels, a non-fiction Vietnam War history book published by the University of Alabama Press in 2004. Jim was the Commandant of the local Marine Corps League Detachment in Sierra Vista from 2014-16. He then joined the Honor Flight Organization which recruits World War II and Korean War veterans to be flown from Tucson back to Washington, D. C. to visit the memorials there ■.

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

CORRECTIONS

John Heffernan writes: Just a small correction to Pete Ritch's excellent story about our adventures as 90-day grunts on the way to becoming tankers in RVN. Just so no one gets the idea that the entire battalion didn't lose its collective mind and turn operations over to a brown bar. When I came back from the hospital, I went to Con Thien and took over 3rd platoon A Co from the platoon commander who was rotating (Art _____, I can't place his last name) so I was Alpha-3 Actual, not the S-3 Actual. I really enjoyed the DC reunion immensely.

The Saga of Liberty Bridge



Ron Dudek writes: As a follow up to the photo that Lee Dill sent of Liberty Bridge burning, I have been back to Liberty Bridge several times in the recent past. It was built by the MCB-4 in April to September 1967. It was destroyed several times and rebuilt. It was built out of creosote treated wood and a corpsman heating his C rations burned it down the last time. It underwent several more changes but it was finally destroyed when the North Vietnamese were victorious over the South. Liberty Bridge was located at coordinates AT 923532, in the Dai Loc district, Quang Nam province. All during the Vietnam War the bridge was constantly under attack. Once you cross the river, you are in Arizona Territory, which was one of the few "free fire zones" in the Da Nang TAOR. The bridge was part of the MSR to supply An Hoa combat base. Every morning Marine engineers did their mine sweeps from An Hoa to the bridge. The road sweep convoys consisted of tanks and six-by trucks. That's about all I know. Today it is just a couple of pylons that are left in the water and a lot of memories.

Video Available on the History of Tanks

USMC VTA member and international award winning author Clyde Hoch produced and directed a historical tank documentary, "Tanks, a Century of Dominating the Battlefield." He knows of no other documentary that follows American tanks from WWI until today, and that no other film that was produced by people who served in tanks. This very informative story was meant to educate people about tanks and armor warfare. People who served 20 years in tanks said they even learned from it. The DVD can be purchased by sending a check or money order for \$22.95 ... (which is \$19.95 plus \$3.00 shipping within continental U.S.) to:

HOCH Productions LLC.
313 4th St.
Pennsburg, PA. 18073

For each DVD purchased \$3.00 will be donated to the USMC VTA. Please mention the "USMC VTA" when ordering.

Pete Ritch writes: I just finished reading the latest Sponson Box from cover to cover... excellent job. I especially liked the scanned command chronology and newspaper documents... they added real time feel to the stories.

Eternally Grateful

Dave Ralston writes: I am eternally grateful for the opportunity fate and history gave me. I had the experience of serving with people who collectively made a bad situation bearable. While time tends to cloud our memories, it doesn't diminish the facts that a diverse group of people were thrust into a situation where we were told to >>

fight a war in some faraway land and we tried to the best of our ability. The recent (USMC VTA) reunion in Washington, DC, reinforced something in me. When I walked into Arlington National Cemetery, I broke down and cried. I realized that these cemeteries around the world, dead Americans in their final resting places, are why we live in this great country. —From *Forgotten Tracks*, Volume 2.

STOLEN VALOR? I Was In Artillery, I Drove A Tank

Last summer I was sitting in the waiting room of my local VA Clinic awaiting my scheduled appointment when a middle aged lady sat down beside me. I didn't notice if she came alone or was with someone. I was wearing my usual red 3rd MARINE DIVISION – VIETNAM VETERAN cap. After a few minutes she turned to me and said "I was in the Marines." I politely said "That's good, Semper Fi" ... or something like that. A few minutes later she turned to me again and said "I was in Vietnam too." I replied, "You were?" She said, "Yes, I was in artillery, I drove a tank." I'll leave it to the readers to decide. As for me, I was just thankful that, at that point, my Primary Care Provider opened the door and called me back.

Bob Mauney

From the Sgt Grit Newsletter

Editor's Note: I belong to an online forum where current events are discussed. I thought that since it dealt with the Lore of the Corps that I'd share it with you. It is a letter from a Marine who is among the "Chosen Few" from the Korean War:

Can China Copy the U.S. Marine Corps?

In the late 1990's I taught at Universities in China for about 5 years. The picture above is from a University in Nanchang with students in the class. I spent about 10 days there teaching. At that time, they had very few native American teachers, so I got a royal welcome!

The [subject] link deals with the development of the Chinese Marine Corps. However, my little story predates this by more than 15 years. During my stay I was billeted in a very comfortable Chinese Guest House (Bed and Breakfast?) and each morning I had an American Breakfast ... eggs as ordered, etc. The first day, I was served a small loaf of white bread that just came out of the oven. I can truthfully say it was the best bread I had ever tasted. I made known my pleasure, so each day was served this bread with my breakfast. I still remember how good it was as I now type!

When it was time to leave, the Chinese custom is for the guest to say goodbye to all those who served him during his stay. The entire group of employees were in line as I went to the car taking me to the airport. I talked to each person and thanked them in Chinese (the extent of my language capability). I noticed one man had only one leg and the other, from the knee down, was supported by a rudimentary prosthetic. I asked my translator to ask him how he lost his leg.

He told her that he lost it in the Korean war. She then told him that I was in the Korean War (I had told my students this in class). He said: "I know. He is one of the brave Americans who fought us at Changin (Chosin Reservoir). He went on to say that he was wounded in a battle with the American Marines and was fortunate to survive. He also said that the Chinese soldiers were amazed how hard and tenaciously the Marines fought. The Chinese soldiers were told that we would run. He then said that he hoped his country would have a military force like the American Marines. At the time I thought that he was just being kind as Chinese often do with their guests. However, when I read what the Chinese government has done with the American Marine Corps model, I know that it was not only this man, but many men who understood what motivated American Marines. After all "Gung Ho" was invented in China!!

As I shook his hand, I asked his name and what he did at the Guest House: He said "I am the Baker. I am so happy that you liked my bread."

Bob Dalton
LtCol USMC (Ret)

SNOW TANK

Submitted by Sgt Grit



Never Got The Squirts

Most Vietnam Vets already know this, but C-rations contained anti-diarrhea medicine—tins of peanut butter. I usually consumed 1 can a day with a spoon. It worked. Summer 1967, while on an operation west of Hoi-An, we set in for the night and found a couple of banana trees. We had been out for several days, and fresh fruit looked good. Some bananas were green on the outside but fairly ripe inside. As I was chowing down on them a FNG butter bar came by and started reading me the riot act about getting the "Hershey Squirts" from eating un-ripe bananas. He was going to see me court-martialed (as I was a 2531), he was concerned I would have to be medevaced. I just smiled at him and >>

pulled out a tin of C-ration peanut butter and started eating it. He shook his head and walked away. Next day, he walked by me again as we were saddling up to move out, again shook his head and walked away.

Never got the squirts during my tour till I got medevaced to 1st Med and ate "Real Food" for 10 days, but that's a story for another time.

Bill Guntor
RVN '67-'68
1/1 MORTARS FO/RO

Turtle Tank



Graves Registration Da Nang

A couple of other Marines and I had to go to Graves Registration to ID a couple of our KIA Marines. We were not looking forward to this as we rode to Da Nang in the back of a Mighty Mite jeep. When we got to the place, the daytime temp was HOT; the area was full of choking dust. We had to unload our rifles and insert the magazines upside down back inside of the chambers. We were taken to a side door on this big building that had no windows. All it had were only truck bays. Sgt. Mac opened the door and all of us really not wanting to, we stepped into this big, dark COLD room.

We can't see due to the condition of our eyes from the sun outside and we are shocked by the cold. Then we hear the 60's tunes blaring from inside that drew our attention to the far corner to our right front. Laughing and carrying on were some guys dressed in white "T"s carrying white plastic bowl brushes and green garden hoses in their hands.

They were jacking around, scrubbing on these pale dead naked bodies on the stainless steel tables. We went fucking nuts! I can't really tell you exactly what happened next but we were trying to get our weapons loaded since we were going to smoke their fucking asses. We were on them. Sgt. Mac is trying to control us. Of course we think these dead guys on the table were our dead Marine brothers that we were there to ID ... and these fuckin' clowns were being unacceptably disrespectful to our brothers ... and this would NOT be tolerated! We were so bent out of shape!

Somehow Sgt. Mac got us and our rifles out of there. They took us in another door after a bit with Sgt. Mac making excuses for the guys doing the body prep. There was a lot of cussing and swearing and maybe some tears but Sgt. Mac got us in control of our emotions. After sitting us in an office for a while they had some Navy kids playing nice to us and offering us soda pop and trying to chat with us. I can't tell you how "social" we were. The squids were shaking and we were highly pissed off! We still wanted redemption or something, for them to pay for their disrespectful treatment of "combat men who just died for them." I can't put it into words how MAD we were. We didn't touch the soda pop and had nothing to say.

Finally, one of our guys told them to "SHUT THE FUCK UP!" About that time Sgt. Mac came out with some Navy dude who guaranteed that this behavior wasn't the norm and that it would be corrected etc. etc. He shuts up shortly as the words are bouncing off us right back on him, and he is starting to shake and stumble with his words. If we didn't have sweat streaks down our faces, then it may have been tear paths. Sgt. Mac was aware of the problem and it really ain't getting better listening to these mealy-mouthed REMF's. So Sgt. Mac announced that, as it turned out, Graves Registration had been able to make positive ID as we were traveling into Da Nang, so our help was not needed. I seriously doubt if that that really was the case. So we could go back to Hill 10 since the IDs were made.

A strange addition to this event: For years afterwards this event had bothered me, even for me to see the stainless steel tables with the two-inch rounded edge around a kitchen restaurant table. I would flash back to that day at Graves Registration. The pile of bodies grew and grew in my mind without me even questioning or realizing this was happening to what I was visualizing. I wasn't aware of this until I had some people suggest that I talk to the VA. None of these people knew of this incident. Finally, I thought maybe I needed to talk to someone. So I stopped in the local Vet Center for a cup of coffee once in a while, and then I'd migrate out without really talking to anyone. I couldn't stand to talk to most of the "wannabe's" who were hanging out at the center. If we had a squad of them boys the war would have been over in a couple months. At least according to them.

Finally, a new head of the Vet Center showed up. He was a bit aggressive and started in on me one day. He said to me "You fucking Marines!" And with a big grin on his face he continued, "I always gotta' take care of you guys." I don't know how he discovered I was a Marine since I don't wear caps or T-shirts with anything on them referencing The Corps. Suddenly, I realized this was "DOC"!!! He was a Corpsman and someone I could trust! So I loosened up. Next thing I know he has me all messed up and pulling all kinds of memories (over a period of time) and "stuff" out of me. During this, I realized this pile of dead Marines really was a figment of my imagination. This scared me. How could my mind do this without me knowing this. John, the pile of dead Marines in my mind would have taken an end loader to pile on that table. In actuality it was just maybe three; I really cannot recall for sure.

I am glad I finally went to talk, and it has certainly helped me. This guy is long gone. But he certainly was a big help to my life. I recommend any Marine to visit with the psy section at the VA, just to talk. You can walk or talk; it will only help you, won't hurt you. They are on your side.

By the way, the Navy guy that came out with Sgt. Mac, I don't know his rank but probably officer. I know he still carries scars from our eyes burning holes in his. I know I was pissed and nothing he had to say was gonna help at that time. I was starring right in his eyes not blinking. I and the other two didn't want any words, we wanted retribution for what we felt was despicable treatment of two American Hero's. Best thing was to get back to the hill and maybe kill some gooks, that would help ... or it seemed at the time.

Brian Gage
3rd Squad, 3rd Plt, Mike Co, 3/7 ('68 - '69)

A Boot Camp Story:

John Wear writes: In the fall of 1966, one Sunday morning late in the boot camp training cycle, when most of the real "Christians" were attending services at the base chapel, the rest of us "heathens" were back on the "Company Street", sitting on our footlockers polishing boots and brass. The DI office (Quonset hut) was right next to my footlocker and the DI had a radio softly playing some popular songs. I began humming to the music. The DI must have heard my humming and called me into the DI shed. After I pounded on the frame of the door and asked permission to enter, he yelled, "Private Wear, do you like hanging around listening to music?"

Of course, I replied, "Yes, Sir!" Thinking that he would allow me to sit in his office and sit close to the radio.

Instead, he screamed at me, "Get your fucking rifle and report back to me at once!"

I did and then he said, "Private Wear, grab hold of the top of my door and hang there with your legs bent at the knee and sticking out."

I did what he told me to do and then he took my M-14 rifle and laid it on the backs of my legs.

Man! It was heavy! My hands gripped the top edge of the door and the rifle added a ton of weight to my discomfort. It seemed like forever and he finally yelled, "Private Wear, do you still want to hang around listening to music?"

I blurted out, "No Sir!" And not too much time later, he let me go back to my footlocker and polishing brass ... in silence.

Another Boot Camp Story

One particular morning Sgt. Black and I, both DIs at MCRD San Diego, were standing outside on the platoon street drinking coffee as daylight broke through. Sgt. Black sighted something out of the corner of his eye (he, the recon Marine). I heard him bellow, "Come here, turd!" at this short, sulking figure in utilities buttoned at the top (as required of recruits).

The figure rushed over to us and stood at rigid attention. Only then did Black and I recognize the figure as Lt Gen Victor "Brute" Krulak, Commanding Officer of the Recruit Depot ... (and the father of the future 31st Commandant).

Apparently, the General's wandering was his covert observation of conditions to ensure his dictates were being followed. One of these policies was that recruits be addressed as "Private" and not by derogatory terms (a policy generally ignored by DIs, tradition not so easily dispensed with). Sgt. Black and I immediately knew we were in deep do-do.

"How do you address recruits, Sergeants?"

Without missing a beat, Sgt. Black, now at attention, answered, "Sir, 'Turd' is the acronym that stands for Trainee Undergoing Rigid Discipline."

A moment of silence...then the General cracked a smile and ordered, "Very well, carry on."

He then strolled off to another area.

A Letter to The Ontos Crewmen Association

I want to address three items regarding your future as Ontos crewmen:

First, as I put the agenda together for our reunion in San Diego this past May, we announced though many different military magazines the reunion. I received over sixty calls from crewmen for the first time. Most of them were unable to attend, however every crewmen was seeking information to find crewmen in their old units. It became quite evident we need to make available a directory so any of our Ontos brothers can find other Ontos crewmen in their Ontos units. Therefore, Chris Browning has agreed to collect and collate a directory of Ontos crewmen by the sequence of data that will allow another crewman to reach you (e.g. the year, the division, battalion, company, and unit along with a method to contact you). As for me: Lou Najfus, 1966-67, 3rd Mar Div., 3rd AT BN, >>

Charlie Co, Email: najfus@hotmail.com. You can replace the email with your address or phone number. We need such a directory of Ontos crewmen that can be used to put brothers together. Therefore, please give Chris your information for future reference Email: achris.browning@gmail.com or Phone: 513-503-3842.

Next, it is quite obvious to all of us that there are less and less Ontos crewmen each and every year. Nevertheless, there is always a desire to get together and share stories, look at our photos and reminisce. Allow me to propose the following actions to ensure we have as many opportunities as possible to get together. Based on my last six years of either planning or hosting our Ontos reunions, we need a bigger community of Marines that can relate to our legacy. Therefore, in order to meet this objective, I strongly recommend we join the Vietnam Tankers Association (VTA). They have extended a warm welcome to all of us Ontos crewmen. They can offer some perks that should be of interest to all of us, such as quarterly publications, which will include Ontos articles, and they host biennial gatherings.

What's the upside?? You will remain in the loop, aware of what is going on. This does not stop us from hosting our own reunions. There are rumors of possible Ontos' reunions in Texas and Parris Island. I am not involved, but other crewmen have shared their thoughts with me. But why limit your options? As for me, I'm joining the VTA as so many of my Ontos brothers have already done. It is in our best interest!! What is the down side? \$30/year. Invest the money. I don't want to leave you behind.

If you agree with me and want to become a VTA member, you will need to send a VTA membership application and membership dues to:

USMCVTA
c/o John Wear
5537 Lower Mountain Road
New Hope, PA 18938

The final item I want to cover. Many of the crewmen took pictures during our reunion in San Diego in May. A number of them promised to forward those photos to me. In a couple of months I plan to assemble those photos and make them available to the rest of you guys. You missed a great reunion. The photos will include all of us on OPERATING ONTOS. It was a blast!!

If you ever need to chat with me, I can be reached at 678-546-1444. Please reach out and forward this correspondence to any crewmen I may have missed.

Your Ontos Brother,
LOUIS NAJFUS

Joe Liu writes: Man, does this one have meaning for me. A few years ago I took a trip to California and went to San Diego just to go to MCRD again. When I got back and described my trip to MCRD I was asked why I wanted to go

back there. My reply was that I wanted to go look for that little boy that I left there.



OOPS!!



Car Tank?



This is a response to the recent sad event where 5 US Army soldiers were killed and 4 went missing after a truck overturned in a rain swollen creek at Fort Hood, Texas.

Smedley Butler, Haiti, 1915, On how to handle the rain:

Marine action began during rainy season, so they had to fight as hard against the swollen rivers and mountain ranges as they had to fight the Cacos bandits. By the time the Marines returned to Fort Liberete, they had marched a total of 120 miles in 5 days and 10 1/2 hours, on 10 meals of coffee, corned beef, and hard tack. They fought one continuous fight with 400 devilish Cacos for 21 hours, crossed four mountain ranges, [and] passed through a flood that made [them] sit in trees all night... [all] without losing a man.'

"Smedley D. Butler" by Mark Strecker Pg. 64

TRIPOD



John Kelly writes: When Gene Duncan left us, he also left behind a faithful companion, "Tripod." Some of you don't know that story of Tripod, so here it is: Gene's previous dog, "Panzer," passed away at a ripe old age and Gene went to the local dog pound to search for and find a replacement. Looking over the recruits, he spotted a mixed breed sheep dog that was missing a rear leg. Gene asked what had happened to her and the keeper replied, "She got shot." Our old friend Dunc then said, "I'll take her. We have something in common." And, as only Gene could do, he named her "Tripod."

Last week, Mi Mujer and I traveled to Gettysburg for a long overdue tour of the battlefield and we met up with Lt. Col. Gregg Lyon, USMC (ret), who lives close by on a farm that he inherited from his grandfather. Greg elected to care for "Tripod" and I include a photo of Greg and one of the best dogs I have ever encountered. Tripod is getting a little long in tooth (like we all are) but she appears to be enjoying the farm life. GOD BLESS GENE DUNCAN.

WIA Tank Loader IDENTIFIED

On July 17th, I got a phone call from Andy Anderson who, after reading the story in the last issue of our magazine, "Out on the Trace and All Alone," he remembered being the loader on a gun tank that was two behind "Crispy Crit-

ters" when we hit the mine. He saw our front road wheels fly into the air and, five minutes later, his old boot camp and Tank School buddy, John Drakes, passed by on his way to be medevaced as he sported a large field dressing over his eye. Drakes was the loader on the tank that caught the shrapnel from our mine.

Russia Fished a Sherman Tank out of the Sea

The U.S.-made tank was in surprisingly good shape.

During the Second World War, the United States sent thousands of tanks and armored vehicles to the Soviet



Union as military aid. The flow of arms and equipment was vital in keeping the Soviet Union in the fight, and ultimately 4,102 M4 Sherman medium tanks were sent to the Eastern Front—where they were known as Emchas.

One tank that didn't make it was traveling on the Liberty Ship SS Thomas Donaldson. Liberty Ships were military cargo ships designed for mass production, hauling cargo from the Pacific to the Persian Gulf. The Thomas Donaldson left Scotland on March 11th, 1945, bound for a port on Russia's Kola peninsula. Just twenty miles from port, the ship was sunk by a German U-boat.

Several Emchas were on board, and in 2014 one of them was recovered and brought to the surface. The tank is an M4A2 Sherman, equipped with a 76-millimeter gun. Although both gasoline and diesel versions of the Sherman were produced, most sent to Russia were diesel and indeed the angled slope of the back of the hull indicates a diesel engine hides underneath.

The M4A2 is in surprisingly good shape for having been immersed in salt water for the last 70 years. That's not surprising—aid recipients from the UK to the USSR reported that American-delivered equipment was always immaculately packed and secured for travel, especially against salt-water corrosion. As a bonus treat, Soviet tankers reported that Emchas often arrived with a special gift stuffed in the main gun's breech: souvenirs from America and sometimes even a bottle of whiskey. ■

What Members Are Doing

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“Surely the righteous will never be shaken; they will be remembered forever.”

— Psalm 112:6 —

Philip S. Weigand

November 14, 1937–July 3, 2016



Philip S. Weigand, 78, died Sunday, July 3, 2016 at Providence St. Peter Hospital. Phil was born November 14, 1937 in San Pedro, California, the oldest child of John and Margaret Weigand. Phil was proud to

be a “Navy brat” and one of his earliest memories was of low-flying Japanese aircraft over his home on King Street in Honolulu on December 7, 1941. Following his graduation from Stanford University, Phil was commissioned in the United States Marine Corps, and his 20 years of active duty were a source of great pride and achievement. In May 1967, while serving as Commanding Officer of C Co, 1st Tank Battalion in Viet Nam, he was awarded The Silver Star for “conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action.”

and AG. He received his diploma as a GED through the military and is recognized with the Loveland class of 1965. Dar served as a tank crewman in the United States Marines from 1964-1968. For his service in Vietnam and on a Mediterranean Cruise, he received numerous Medals and was honorably discharged as a Sergeant E-5.

Paul E. Doherty, Sr.

TEWKSBURY: Paul Edward Doherty, Sr., age 71, a 47-year Tewksbury resident and retired Tewksbury Police Officer, passed away on Sunday, August 23, 2009 at home, with his family by his side. In 1955, he enlisted in the U.S. Marine Corps and served during the Vietnam War as a tank crewman with Company B, 3rd Tank Battalion.

David N Prindle

Tom Snyder sends: David N. Prindle, age 72 of Apple Valley passed away suddenly on October 3, 2015. Preceded in death by wife Karen; survived by children Amy Prindle and Chris (Traci) Prindle; grandchildren Alex and Kyle; siblings Pete (Katie) Prindle, Sandy (Chris) Ackerman and Lanny (Shirley) Prindle. Memorial Service 7 PM, Thursday, October 8, 2015 at White Funeral Home, 14560 Pennock Ave. Apple Valley, MN. Gathering of family and friends one hour prior to service. Interment, Fort Snelling National Cemetery. White Funeral Home Apple Valley, MN.

Tom Adds: Cpl. David N. Prindle was our H&S Co, 1st. Tank Bn, Motor Transport Dispatcher at Camp Pendleton, CA. To quote Cpl. Joe Dimattio, “Cattle Car” Driver at 1st. Tank Bn, at Camp Pendleton, Dave was: “Red On The Noodle Like A Peter On A Poodle!” because of Dave’s red hair. Dave also attended the 1st. VTA Reunion, Wash. DC in 1999.

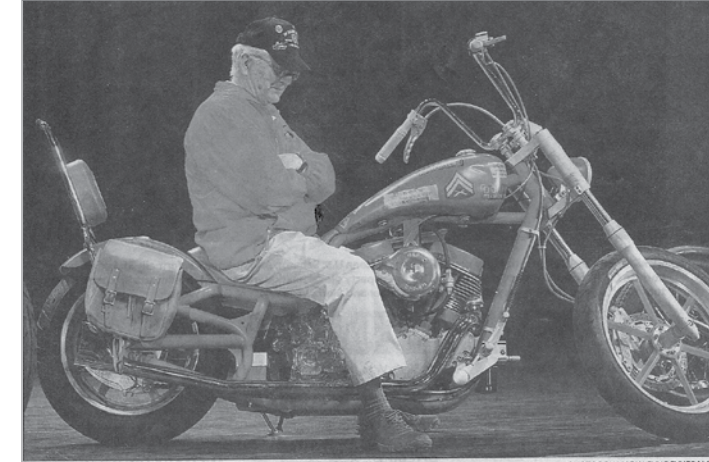
“Buck” Bachmeier

(November 30, 1946–October 22, 2015) Gary Andrew Bachmeier, age 68, passed away on Thursday, October 22, 2015. He was born on November 30, 1946 in Bismarck, North Dakota, to Theobald and Gladys Bachmeier. Gary grew up in Selfridge, North Dakota and attended high school there. He proudly served his country as a United States Marine Tank Crewman in the Vietnam War.

William T. Santos

Darwin Stengaard of Fort Collins, Colorado, passed away on 3/11/2016. He was 69 years old. After long battles with COPD and Lung Cancer, Darwin passed away peacefully on his own terms, remaining active till the end. He received his education in Loveland. As a child, he was active in FFA

Jim “Devil Dog” Coan



Marine Jim Coan rests on the Marines Tribute Bike, built by Brigitte Bourget, during Friday's Tribute Bikes Ultimate Tribute to our Soldiers and Veterans event held on the Buena Performing Arts stage. Coan was one of four veterans who spoke to Buena High School students at the event.

This photo was on the front page of the local paper. Each branch of the service was represented by a customized motorcycle at the Buena High School assembly last week. I was the guest speaker representing the Marine Corps at this Veterans Tribute. Note that my inner “Hell’s Angel” was about to surface.

Bruce Finds an Elephant Tank



This past March, Bruce Van Apeldoorn took his two grandkids, Caleb & Georgianna, to Camp LeJeune where they found a 1960’s era M-103, 120 mm “Elephant” tank. Both kids are members of the Capital City Young Marines in Raleigh, NC

Dave Danner writes:

Hi John...It’s been a while but thought I would reconnect with you and maybe update my situation. Still working my day job but only 34 hours per week. I wanted to retire in 2003 but that didn’t happen. Also, have not got the house remodel finished yet but closer now, and maybe this might be the year. Thanks for the rerun on the bio in the latest

publication. You really do fine, professional work with all the articles in there. I was just going back through some emails and forgot that I had been in contact with some 0311s a while ago. I always liked working with 4th Marines for some reason, and they were up on Con Thien with us in May ‘67. Anyway, I did a rough draft a while back about one of my experiences in-country. I don’t want to get into it with the “Old Breed” or anything, but 3rd Mar Div. carried a lot of the war to the NVA from summer ‘66 up until Tet in Feb ‘68. For some reason, Division pulled me off the DMZ in July ‘67, then sent me to Saigon, where there might have been 3 or 4 Marines. And then they sent me to Guam for their Liberation Day ceremony from the Japs in WWII. Anyway, compared to what we had been going through up North, there was not much going on down South. So maybe I can crank this out before St Louis. I do plan on getting everything wrapped up in time for this one. Hope to see you there...

Jimmy is in the news again



When Corpus Christi Police divers plunge into the deep in search of evidence, narcotics, vehicles, explosives, or drowning victims, it’s often dark, cold, and dangerous because of hazards found underwater. But they do it anyway. “You can’t see anything. We tell kids it’s like putting on a blindfold and going in your closet to try to find your favorite shirt,” said Jimmy Didear of the Underwater Recovery Team.

Jimmy Didear, who has been in law enforcement since 1974 and with C.C.P.D. since 1980, says he has always had a love for the water. That is why he joined the dive team in 1990. Twenty-six years later, he is still going strong. If you ask anybody on the dive team, they will tell you Didear is the man that keeps them and the team’s diving equipment, vehicles and their 29 and 19 foot boats with more than 50 thousand dollars’ worth of electronic equipment, in tip top shape. “This dive unit’s main goal is to be at its best every time it goes into the water on a recovery mission. We >>

are a family that depends on each other every time we make a dive,” said Didear.

The C.C.P.D. dive team has 14 members, 10 fully-qualified primary divers, and four probationary divers that are full-time. They do regular patrol duty and don the diving gear when called upon. The dive team makes sure they make every training session count and go over the equipment and every safety and dive procedures. “We train for things we hope never happens,” said Didear.

In addition to their patrol duties, the Corpus Christi Police Department divers also work closely with the Coast Guard, Port of Corpus Christi, and Homeland Security. “We enjoy working with these other organizations. One of the things we do that people do not realize, is that we are the dive team called upon to go and search for explosives any time a military ship comes into the port area. We make sure that we don’t miss an opportunity to get in the water. It is fun,” said Didear.

At the Movie Premier



Doc Dave Forsyth, Clyde Hoch and Todd Phillips at the premier of Clyde’s documentary film on the history of tank warfare on May 7, 2016 in Easton, PA

Boy Scout, Marine Veterans Make Medal of Honor Recipient’s New Grave Marker a Reality

When Marine veteran Carl Ludecke, right, and 17-year-old Boy Scout Micah Martin, left, and Marine veteran Gene Packwood (not shown) learned that World War II Marine and Medal of Honor recipient Private Robert M. McTureous Jr. was interred in their small town of Umatilla, Fla., with only a standard-issue grave marker, they banded together to give McTureous’ resting place a tribute befitting a hero.

McTureous, for whom Camp McTureous, Marine Corps Base Camp Smedley D. Butler, Okinawa, Japan, is named, was awarded the MOH for actions during the Battle of

Okinawa on June 7, 1945, while serving with 3d Battalion, 29th Marine Regiment, Sixth Marine Division. Medically evacuated from the battlefield, he later succumbed to his wounds on June 11.



The group raised more than \$5,000 to pay for a new grave marker. Packwood, an editorial cartoonist, designed the face of the memorial, which includes an illustration of McTureous, a sculptured depiction of the Medal of Honor, the Marine Corps emblem and the 6thMarDiv shoulder patch. (Editor’s note: Packwood served as art director of Leatherneck from 1952 to 1954.) The new marker was dedicated during a Memorial Day ceremony on May 25, 2015, in Glendale Cemetery in Umatilla, and was attended by more than 200 people, including 10 of McTureous’ relatives.

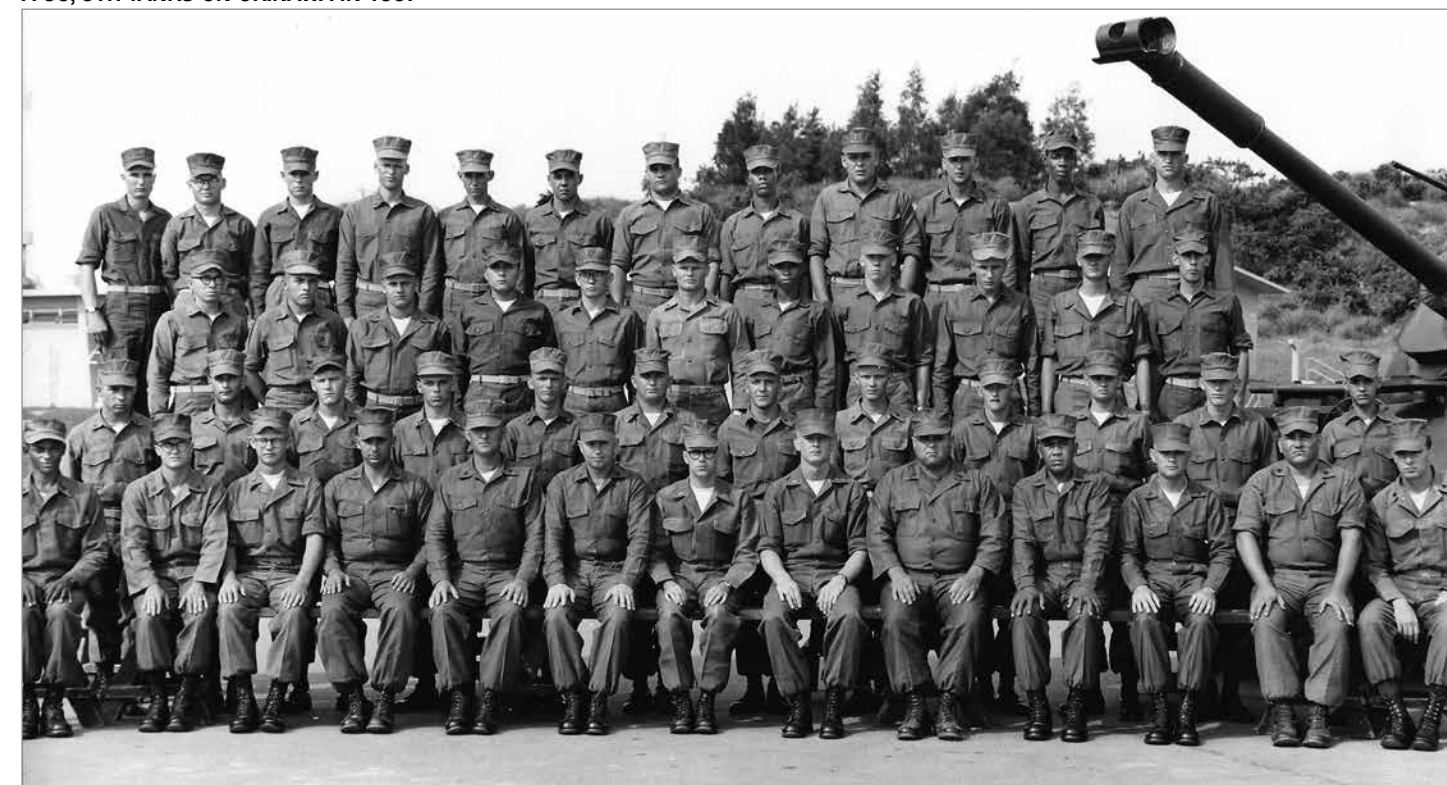
—Featured in Leatherneck magazine June 2016



Armando Moreno writes: I am on the far right with some of my old friends including the MCL Commandant, George Moran, who is standing next to me holding the flags. This was taken at the Elks Rodeo Parade, Coastal Valley MCL Detachment #1340, in Santa Maria, CA ■

Looking for

A CO, 5TH TANKS ON OKINAWA IN 1967



Longtime VTA member Howard Blum read the article about needing specific photos of KIA Marines for the “Faces at the Wall” project, so he sent this photo of A Co, 5th Tanks on Oki in 1967 that was taken just before they deployed as a unit to Vietnam. He identified Anthony H. Bennett is the 8th Marine (left to right) on the top row.

THE QUESTION IS: Does anyone recognize any of the other faces in the photo? Please contact John Wear if you do.

RPG HIT

Richard Peksens writes: The enemy made a major assault on a 5th Marines nighttime position in the Arizona. Early that evening, when PFC Phillip Epps and the TC were manning the tank, they were apparently inside the turret when the RPG hit. Epps’ wound must have nicked an artery in his arm and a medevac copter couldn’t land during the battle. By early morning, with the arrival of the medevac, Epps had died. The S/Sgt in the photo was medevaced off the same tank. Does anyone recognize him and remember the S/Sgt’s name?

Not much of a story beyond L/Cpl Epps’ untimely death. When the operation ended, we had a small “beer drinking” party and



Note: Under the range finder ears and below the track block is an RPG penetration hole.



Note: Clyde Hoch thinks that this may be S/Sgt Alvarez

eulogy for him. And then in memory of Epps, we all decided to get our scalps shaved as a unit salute to his sacrifice. After a few toasts, one of the crewmen on Epps' tank started calling for Epps with "Epps, Epps, where are you?"

I never saw anything like this either before or after. He seemed not to know that Epps was dead and his eyes were glazed over like a zombie. Two Marines had to hold him down while he was still screaming for Epps, and another person ran to get help from the Med Company next door. The corpsmen arrived and "sedated" the crew member and then carted him away for overnight evaluation. I don't remember the outcome.

On a later occasion, one of our TC's had his head nearly blown off by a bouncing betty during the daily "sweep" of Liberty Road. Another E-5, hearing the radio news, tried to get into a tank to "exact revenge" on the NVA, and we had to literally drag him away from the tank and calm him down....again he seemed "crazed" and out of control.

Earlier with Charlie Company, I had a crewman who had dropped to the bottom of the tank under small arms fire. He cried "uncontrollably" even after no shots were being fired. When we returned to our CP, we had to send this individual back to Battalion to assume an office position.

This photo is shortly after a "trim." I believe that it is Cpl. Shrekengost behind me at our shower. Around the same time at An Hoa, Cpl. Schrecongost was killed by an incoming 122 mm rocket and two other tankers were seriously wounded and medevaced. If anyone remembers that instance, I am looking for their names as well.

The enemy overrunning the artillery position at Liberty Bridge is another long story involving our tankers. Sometime just before these incidents, more enemy incom-

CAN ANYONE RECOGNIZE ANY OF THESE TANKERS?



The above photo was submitted by Allen Cohen seeking anyone who might recognize any of these faces. The "dark green" Marine in the back row was PFC Phillip Epps (KIA). ■

ing rounds caused our ammo dump at An Hoa to ignite causing casualties and BIG explosions. A few of our "injured tanks" went to 1st Tank Battalion for repair when the ammo dump at Da Nang blew up and two Marines were wounded by stuff falling from the sky.



SHORT STORIES

The Brotherhood

BY RICHARD PEKSENS

Another interesting story...I had left the Marine Corps and had become a medical physicist assigned to the Philadelphia Naval Hospital in 1976. As an avid skier, I had signed up for a hospital-sponsored ski trip to Vermont, and the transportation was via three buses based out of Philadelphia. This was during a time of turmoil in the black communities with many of the residents having bought into the "Black Power" movement. As I boarded the bus at the Navy Hospital, I noted the driver was a black dude with a really big "Afro" hairdo, so I thought to myself "Black Panther or worse." I was sitting near the front of the bus, and the driver asked if he knew me...and from where? As we talked, I asked if he had ever been in the Marine Corps and his answer was affirmative. As it turns out, the bus driver was one of my TC's from Charlie-3. It was Corporal Clemmons! I would never have recognized him in his new hairdo and civilian duds! Before I left Charlie-3, I had written both Sgt. Coco and Cpl. Clemmons up for Bronze Stars which they received after I had left for Bravo Co., 1st Ontos. Bottom line, it was one of my proudest moments when Cpl. Clemmons introduced me to his buds as "The only LT that he had respected in Vietnam." The fact that I "always" went to the field and took care of my men seemed to have made an impression. I had also gotten him promoted to Sgt. So I spent the weekend playing pool with three black "brothers" while they had nothing to do with other white dudes at the resort. I felt like a member of the Ninth Marines!

Another Moment

BY FRED GOGER

When I first arrived in Dec '65 there

was liberty available from noon till 1600 on Sunday. That meant be at the motor pool, get on a truck for a 10 mile ride off Hill 34 into Da Nang. Being an FNG, another guy from com offered to go with me. Mike Maulsby was from Detroit (I think) and had been in country nearly 13 months and was very short (due to rotate back home). We walked to what looked like an abandoned store and went inside. Mike told me we could get a great massage here. When I saw the beauty at the front desk my tongue started to water—Suzie Wong was there. She took our \$5 and told us to go sit in the hallway, undress, grab a towel and wait to be called. Next the shower curtain in front of me opens and a Vietnamese man motions me in. I lay down on the table and he begins to beat the crap out of me. All of a sudden he bends down and whispers in my ear—"You want a woman?" Of course I thought of Suzy Wong from the front desk and said "Ok."

The guy leaves, I roll over and put the towel across my junk and I hear the curtain open and in walks this old lady with a bandana on her head. She was about a foot taller than the bed I was on, had one arm in a cast, and when she looked at me I saw she had no teeth. She quickly put her good hand under my towel, grabs my nuts and says—"You want suckey – suckey?"

She had my nuts in her hand so partly through fear, I said—"OK".

Now she goes to work on me with that toothless mouth and I'm trying to think of Raquel Welsh and Joey Heatherton because my grandma is giving me a BJ. I finish in her mouth and tell her to get out. Now I'm trying to dry the sweat off and I yell to Mike in the next stall—"Let's Go!"

He yells back—"In a few minutes, I'm getting this great BJ from a no tooth broke arm old lady." He was in-country for a year and was lovin' it. Semper Fi

Tears

BY TOM FENERTY

I've been sitting on this for a while ... perhaps too concerned about admitting a perceived vulnerability.

After my turn in the war, I went back to work, met a girl, got married and started a family (it wasn't picture perfect but does fit neatly into one sentence). I just went back to the "World" and began my attempt at "fitting in." I never joined any post-military organizations such as the VFW or the Vietnam Veterans of America. I never to this day attended a parade. I can't explain why. I guess I wanted no parts of any reminders of my "tour of duty." I didn't know at the time but I was mentally wounded. I'd seen enough. Now 48 years later I'm a member of the American Legion, the Marine Corps League, the VFW, USMC Vietnam Tankers Association ... (I was a grunt but they publish my stories), Second Battalion Ninth Marines Association, Guardians of the National Cemetery, Washington Crossing, PA, and a mentor in the Veteran's Court, Bucks County PA. Parades are still out of the question. I have reasons and/or rationalizations for each.

My retirement has afforded me the opportunity to join and participate in various functions with these worthwhile organizations. I attend work parties, dedications, services for deceased veterans, flag planting ceremonies (58,000 small flags), reunions, and I seek to help fellow Veterans whenever possible. Giving back is great.

Now, about the tears ... invariably, at some point during a ceremony, any ceremony, emotion gets the best of me and I begin to tear up. There's no controlling this and the tears come rolling down my cheeks. No sobbing, mind you ... just tears. It seems that as I age this is more of a constant then infrequent occurrence. It just happens.

Vietnam 1967–1968, the places >>

Fox 2/9 visited offered more than a fair amount of horror and sadness. It's hard to explain what one witnesses and endures as a rifleman in almost 13 months in the northern-most part of South Vietnam. Men formed friendships, then bonds that sometimes were extinguished in seconds. There was enough death, casualties, and fear to bring some to the breaking point; worse yet, the fear was contagious. Violence always came so suddenly. Ambushes, snipers, incoming artillery, mortars, rocket propelled grenades, and fire fights left no time to mourn... only time to react. Survival... only survival ... was the proper attitude and word. After a fire fight, or an 'incoming' attack, work began setting or resetting perimeters, accounting for survivors, followed by the removal of wounded, then dead by chopper.

But, but, but there was ALWAYS another patrol, another ambush, another listening post, incoming chopper, another squad meeting. There was never time to discuss losses, never time to mourn, never time for tears. Saddle up, we're movin' out!

I understood the need to "soldier on," after all, this is WAR. And such is war. And war is Hell. So I begin to wonder... about the current tears at taps, at speeches, at ceremonies, at TV shows, at stories read, at stories told, at the nightmares of the past and the emotions held in check for so long. Are these the tears that were never shed all those years ago? Me thinks ... don't mean nuttin'!

Just sayin'.

Are You a Fully Qualified Tank Crewman?

BY FRANCIS "TREE" L. REMKIEWICZ

This is the year 2015, and for many of us tank crewman seem almost like 40 – 45 years ago that we entered Vietnam. Since that time many of us have gone into all different types of professions. For example, I have worked for a metallurgy firm, a Governmental agency, a national accounting firm, custodial services, fry cook, teacher at both undergraduate and post-grad-

uate schools, and several large California school districts. During that time, I was required to take many different types of courses to "qualify" for or maintain the position in which I worked. I believe that is nothing new or different for most of us. In fact, if we were to put all our jobs together and listed each one line of standard 8x11 paper at a time, we could probably create a book similar to War and Peace.

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

Now, when we first arrived in country, we were considered "FNG" and the old salts, who we all immediately trusted, shared some in-country qualifications that were required before new guys were permitted on a tank. The first qualification was with a sledge hammer. We all know how important a sledge hammer is to the well-being of a tank (second only to C-4). So the procedure went something like this. The crew the new guy had joined helped the new guy get up onto the back of the tank. The turret had been turned forward so as to not interfere with the qualification process. Now, if you have qualified with a sledge hammer or remember qualifying with a sledge hammer, check this out to make sure I am completely accurate. One of the three crewmen pulled out what would pass for a blindfold, another crewman had secured the sledge hammer, and the third crewman helped out the new guy by removing and holding his cover. Once the new guy had been sufficiently blindfolded so he could not see at all,

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

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

hard charging group of Marines. Anyway, we all take a break and grab a beer. Beer-thirty occurred about whenever beer-thirty occurred and no one missed it. So beer-thirty passes and it is time to get back to work. As the work is about to commence, the tank commander says to the new guy, "Hey, Frank (or John or Grady or whoever was new), go over to Alpha 23 and get me a can of muzzle blast, would ya?" Now unfortunately for me, I failed this test. I knew from my time in Schools Battalion about muzzle blast. So when asked, I said, "HUH?" And the TC repeated the request. I said, "A can of muzzle blast? Are you kidding me?" For me, the qualifying test was over and of course I did not pass, but I didn't have to get the can of muzzle blast either. I must say that, over my time in the 'Nam, I did see several others qualify by getting a can of muzzle blast and returning with a can of muzzle blast and a slightly embarrassed/miffed look when they asked for muzzle blast from the TC and got an earful.

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

UNFORGETTABLE CHARACTERS Sgt. Rex Davis

BY: JIM COAN



I want to thank VTA Vice President Rick Lewis for sending me a photo

that he found pinned on the wall of the San Diego VFW (above). Seeing that photo of Sgt. Rex Davis stirred my memory bank into high gear. Sgt. Davis was in 1st Platoon of Alpha Co., 3rd Tanks, when I arrived at Con Thien in September of 1967 as the new platoon leader. I was TC of A-11 and Sgt. Davis, Cpl. Hodge, and PFC Minch were the other crewmen.

Rex had been through all of the heavy fighting around the DMZ that spring and summer of 1967. He was salty through and through, a real gungy veteran. And he didn't take any crap from anyone. I was the "new guy," not yet schooled on how to stay alive on The Hill. More than once, he gave me advice that likely saved my life.

I recall one time, when a helicopter was landing at the Aid Station LZ, I was climbing out of the turret to go on some errand that platoon leaders had to do. Sgt. Davis grabbed on to me and pulled me back inside. He said, "Don't go out there, Lieutenant, until that chopper takes off. You won't be able to hear the gook mortar tubes firing with all that chopper noise." That was one survival lesson learned from him.

That same evening, I said I was going to make a head call. A sandbagged "shitter" was about 30 yards behind our tank. That's when Sgt. Davis said, "Wait till it's dark, then the gooks don't shoot at us because their gun flash gives away their position. And don't take a flashlight as a sniper will spot you." I waited till dark, then had to take a place in line behind two other Marines. I took a flashlight anyway, snipers be damned.

When Rick Lewis informed me that Sgt. Rex Davis had passed on to that Great Tank Park in the Sky, I was saddened. Rex had taught me how to stay alive at Con Thien, and he had taught me more about what tanks could do and what they couldn't do than I learned back in tank school at Pendleton. He was only with me on A-11 for a few months, then he rotated back to Dong Ha to catch the Freedom Bird home. I'll always remember him as one

of those unforgettable characters we served with in Vietnam.

Vietnam Vignettes 1966 – 1967

BY BILL "LURCH" LOCHRIDGE (2012)

Here are some of my stories ... some are funny and some are perhaps a little more serious.

Rabies at Kilo Company April 1966

In mid-April, 3rd Tanks attached me to become Assistant Platoon Commander under Lt. Dix Garner, of 1st Platoon, Kilo Company, that was positioned down at Horse Shoe Lake. The Horse Shoe was just a few miles south of Marble Mountain. Dix was a great Platoon Commander until one morning, while making coffee with C-4, a small piece of it accidentally fell into his C-ration can-made-cup. He said something like, "Screw it" and drank it down anyway. Within an hour or two, we had to medivac him out to Charlie Med. He became very sick from ingesting that C-4. So, now I became the Platoon Commander.

Many of our company personnel had various types of pets. Our pet was a puppy named Point. We also had a monkey named Chico that belonged to my Platoon Sgt. Chico was a real pisser at times.

One night, Capt. Bob Brooks, who was Kilo's CO, went into the command bunker to listen to radio traffic. As he came in, just wearing his skivvies, his company dog, which was named Asshole, came out of a corner in the bunker and bit him in the leg. He yelled and threw the dog off his leg. Asshole ran back into his corner growling. Bob said, "Hey, what's with Asshole?" One of the radio operators that night said, "Skipper, we don't know, but he bit me last night, too." Bob said, "Get the Corpsman down here now." The Corpsman came in and Bob explained what had happened. The Corpsman said, "Well, maybe he's got rabies." Bob said, "Rabies, what the hell are you talking about? He's our Company dog." >>

The Corpsman said, "Sir, I think we should crate him up and send him back to BN for tests." Bob said, "Okay, let's do it." So, Asshole went back to the 3/9 HQ, and several days later, we got the word that Asshole did in fact have rabies.

As a result, all company personnel who had had contact with Asshole had to come into BN for personal interviews with a team of Navy doctors; so, the very next morning, 23 of us formed up as the "Dog Platoon" and marched back to BN HQ. Arriving there, we saw a line of over 100 people who were waiting to see the doctors. I said to some Sgt., "What the hell is going on here?" He said, "Well, that BS Asshole broke loose in the BN area and bit a number of guys, other dogs, and Communications' pet cow, "Mooie." There we were, standing in the heat of the day to get interviewed about Asshole.

By the time it was my turn, I walked in, and the docs asked me, "Who bit you, Lt.?" I said, "Not Asshole, but we had a puppy that played with him." Remember, many of us had "jungle blisters or whatever." I showed them my arms and they said to me that I needed to get rabies shots fast. "OK," I said, when do we start?" And they said, "Tomorrow." So, out of 120 people, 69 of us had to get rabies shots.

Every morning after that, the "Dog Platoon" formed up in the company area and marched back to BN for our shots. All the shots were injected around our navels. One morning, a brash Sgt. came in and lifted his shirt to show where he had outlined a target around his navel. He said to the Corpsman, "Hey, Doc. Hit me!" The Corpsman stood back, aimed the needle like he was playing darts in a bar and threw it at him. The needle actually hit the target. Everyone else there quickly said, "Oh, shit! Not me, Doc."

Each of us was required to get 12 daily injections, and then we had to come in for two extra booster shots a few days later. On my 13th shot, my abdomen swelled up like I was pregnant, but even

though I looked like I should have been in a maternity ward, I was able to walk off the swelling on my return trip to the company position. Thanks, Asshole!

The Laundry Lady

One evening, as I normally did, I moved our tanks into new positions. I was aboard one of my tanks and moved it about 100 yards or so to the north, where we overlooked a small village. I had just got us into position, and all of a sudden, rifle rounds came zinging just over my head. I grabbed my Thompson submachine gun, leaned forward and fired off a complete magazine. All became quiet. A company fire team went out to search the area. They came back and said, "Hey, LT, you shot our laundry lady, but we have her carbine rifle." I really felt like shit because my first-ever kill was a woman. Oh well, such is combat.

The Horse Shoe Lake Operation

Capt. Bob Brooks left Kilo Company to become the S-3 of 3/9, and our new CO was Capt. Valdis V. Pavlovskis (aka the Mad Russian), who had been one of our Basic School instructors – one of Monte Morgan's favorite people – Ha!.

After a couple of weeks aboard, "The Mad Russian" decided that the company had to go on a sweep to clear the VC out of the Horse Shoe. So, one morning we lined up our tanks, our Ontos, and the company, and we marched off into the sun. We had gone several miles south and then turned east toward the South China Sea. On a sand ridge, we were met by a bunch of Vietnamese women who began wailing and throwing stuff at us. Our Vietnamese troops, who were also with us, explained the women were acting this way just to slow us down, allowing the VC to evacuate the village. Capt. Pavlovskis told me to return to a hill that overlooked the west of Horse Shoe Lake, and they would then proceed downhill into the village. Once there, they would turn north into the Horse Shoe village on the east side.

He wanted my platoon to be the blocking force, so off we went.

Arriving at the west side of the lake, we had a perfect position. As Kilo Company entered the village, the VC began to run into the lake to escape. We watched them as they jumped in the water and started to swim north into the lake reeds. We started hitting them with .30 cal. machinegun fire, but they simply went under the water. Seeing that, I decided I'd hit them with a 90mm HE round. We fired the round, and it skipped off the lake surface and exploded on the beach right behind Kilo Company. Right away, the radios came up saying that the VC had a BIG gun in the village. That BIG VC round that I fired into the lake apparently scared the shit out Capt. Pavlovskis, and he immediately pulled the rest of our company out of the village. What more can I say?

As the company was moving back to our company position, an Ontos hit a mine. I had already gotten back in the company area and was positioning my tanks when I heard the explosion. I literally ran back with a few other Marines to where the Ontos was hit. When we got there, I saw the Ontos had been split in half by the explosion. I dove under the vehicle only to find that the crew had all been killed. Another Ontos was on our far right, but that Ontos crew had left their vehicle to try and rescue their brothers. Suddenly, the VC began firing on us, and they were even using an M-79 grenade launcher. I ran to the empty Ontos, got up on the top and began firing the .30 cal. machine gun until it ran out of ammo. I saw a VC running into a nearby rice paddy and grabbed an M-14 rifle. After setting the sights all the way to the top – for a distance of at least 600 yards or more – I opened fire. My first round missed its mark, my second round hit him, and he went down. Next thing I saw was a woman running to his side. I said, "Oh God, I'm going to let her go," and I did. She started to drag the VC back to the village. Perhaps, he was her son – who knows?

In the meantime, Capt. Pavlovskis had really gone "hyper," but he didn't know what to say to any of us. Nevertheless, he didn't last long as the Company CO, for on July 4, 1966, the company got caught in a serious ambush near An Hoa, and he was relieved of his command because of his total lack of leadership.

2ndLt. Bob Mattingly on Our Trip Back from Hoa An on Route 1

One day, when I had come back to BN, Lt. Bob Mattingly decided we should go down to Hoa An for a meeting. We left by jeep and proceeded down Route 1. After our meeting we began our return trip. About half way back to BN, a Vietnamese bus loaded down with people was ahead of us moving very, very slowly. Bob became upset and stood up with his Thompson sub machine gun, firing off a full magazine over the bus's roof. The bus ended up in the ditch, and we drove by, waving "Hello." Oh, well, it was just another Civic Action exercise to help win the hearts and minds of the people.

TET Dinner 1967

It was TET '67, and my interrupter, Lac, invited our 3rd Tank BN Civic Action members for dinner and celebrations at his house in "Dog Patch," which was near the DaNang Air Base.

We drove down to Lac's house and met his wonderful wife and children. We began by drinking a lot of Vietnamese Tiger Beer. Then, dinner was served. What a display it was, as we dug into the food. I asked Lac to identify the delicious food we were eating. After drinking a lot of beers, he finally made a chicken "cluck, cluck" sound. We all thought that was wonderful. Then we asked, "What else did we eat?" He then made the "arf, arf" sound of a dog. "Oh, that's great! That tastes good," we said. And then we asked, "What else did your wife put in the pot?" Lac danced around the room scratching his under arms, making an "ooh, ooh" sound. OK, it was monkey.

Hey, Ray, what a dinner we had! And nobody got sick.

New Captain Joins the Combined Action Group – early 1967

One morning, a new captain showed up at our Combined Action HQ at III MAF. Several of us were sitting at our desks doing our work when this new captain arrived at our door. He walked in, and we just looked at him. He said, "Don't you people stand to attention when a senior officer comes in?"

We looked at this young captain and got up. "How can we help you, Sir?"

He said, "I'm reporting aboard to see LtCol Corson, men."

"He's in the back office."

The captain immediately knocked on Corson's door (which was always open) and walked in. LtCol Corson had heard the commotion in our outer office. The young captain came to attention and announced his name.

Corson looked him over and asked, "Captain, is that .45 cal. pistol loaded?" Whenever you came through the III MAF HQ gate, you unloaded your weapon(s). The captain's .45 had its magazine in it.

He said, "Oh, Sir, yes, it is loaded."

Corson suggested he clear his pistol. The captain pulled his pistol out of his holster, pulled the receiver back, and removed the magazine from the pistol. He then pulled the trigger, and a .45 round went right through the Col's roof. When we heard a pistol loud report, we all immediately ran into the Col's office. What we saw was a trembling captain, and he was actually shaking in his boots. It was not his best day in the Corps, but after several days, we totally accepted him into our shop. He ended up doing a good job as our new logistics officer, but even he could not deny that he had come on board "with a big bang." ■

Photo from Vietnam



2/4 Marines June 67



2/26 Marines Operation Hickory Aug 67

OPERATION STARLITE

Editor's Note: Operation Starlite was the first major battle and regimental sized battle between U.S. and enemy forces during the Vietnam War. Over the course of six days, between Aug. 18-24, 1965, units from the 3rd Marine Division, 3rd Marine Amphibious Force, clashed with the 1st Viet Cong Regiment south of the newly established Marine base at Chu Lai in the I Corps area of responsibility. Being no unit of part-time farmers, the 1st Viet Cong Regiment was a thoroughly professional organization of battle-hardened fighters. It was commanded by Col. Le Huu Tru, who had led a battalion at the iconic battle at Dien Bien Phu against the French in 1954.

OPERATION STARLITE

BY MILO W. PLANK, JR.

I was the driver of A-32 during OPERATION STARLITE. Our crew consisted of Cpl. Bill Laidlaw (TC), L/Cpl. Court (Gunner), Cpl. Milo Plank (Driver) and Sgt. Dan McQueary (Loader). Sgt. McQueary, the Platoon Chief Mechanic, had been conscripted to the crew because Ken Zebal was on R&R. Alpha Company 3rd Platoon was attached to 3/3. For Operation STARLITE that meant supporting 3/3 during the assault on the village of An Cuong (1).

We embarked on U.S. Navy LSD 16 (USS Cabildo) on the morning of Aug. 17 and headed east over the horizon. At H-Hour (0500) on D-Day (Aug. 18) we were off shore near An Cuong (1) and made an uneventful landing.



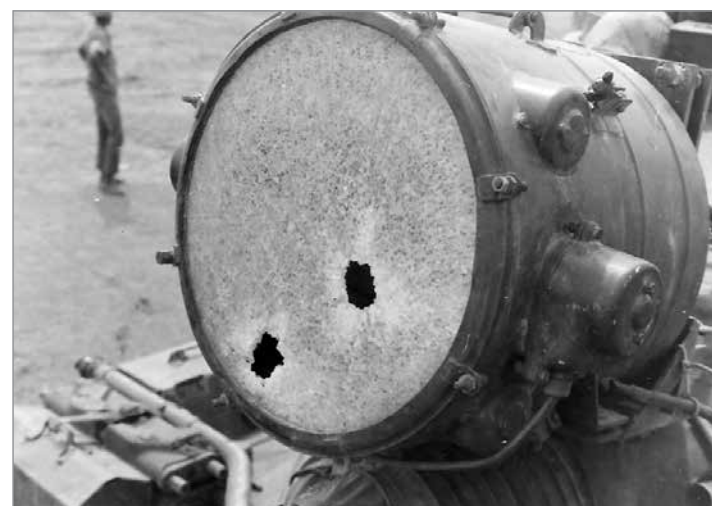
STARLITE Beach Landing

For this operation our platoon was organized into two sections. The "heavy" section was A-31 (Lt. Thompson), A-32 (Cpl. Laidlaw), and A-34 (Sgt. Sipel). The "light" section was held in reserve at the Regimental CP and consisted of A-33 (Cpl. Williams) and A-35 (S/Sgt. Wilder).

The heavy section headed inland, then turned north on line with India and Hotel Companies where they met heavy resistance near An Cuong (2). On our right was a trench line running parallel to our line of advance. To our front was a trench line that ran across our line of advance. A-31 was in the center with A-32 on the right and A-34 on the left.

Cpl. Robert O'Malley, a squad leader in India 3/3, was

with one of his four-man fire teams riding on our tank. When we approached the trench on our right flank, the enemy opened up with automatic weapons fire and the grunt fire team all became casualties. A-32 then moved to the edge of the trench to engage the enemy with our co-axial .30 caliber machine gun. There was thick brush growing up on both sides and we couldn't see very far. The gunner (L/Cpl. Court) traversed the gun right and lowered it to fire. Then there was another burst of enemy automatic weapons fire. One round hit the tank's blast deflector causing it to ricochet up the gun barrel and it wounded Sgt. McQueary in the forearm. Two more rounds hit the searchlight.



A32 Searchlight

A corpsman got into the turret and gave Sgt. Mac first aid. When Sgt. Mac was ready to be moved, I opened the driver's hatch to get out and help get him down. However, I first looked out of the periscopes to see if it was safe. In my right periscope there was an opening in the brush and I could see a VC in the trench about five feet away pointing a rifle towards the top of the turret. As I raised up to fire my pistol, the VC swung his rifle towards me. In trying to keep my head out of his line of fire, I fired with my face too close to the .45 and the slide hit me on the right eyebrow. I thought I had been shot. I put my

hand on the wound but I didn't find a hole, so I knew it wasn't my time to go.



This periscope probably saved my life.

I could hear some movement in the trench, then more enemy shooting. Several rounds hit my periscope which thankfully stopped the rounds from hitting me. There were Marine M-79 rounds being fired into the enemy trench, but they exploded in the brush and weren't at all effective. I had a high angle of fire from the driver's seat position so I could fire down through the brush, but I thought that I might be able to at least suppress their action. After quickly firing all 3 magazines from my pistol ammunition, I attempted to get topside, but I noticed a large number of VC coming down the trench and I knew I couldn't get out. It looked as if the VC would soon be in force on our flank and they might be able to fire into our own troops at point blank range.

About ten feet away and on my left, Cpl. O'Malley was dressing the wounds of one of his men and saw that I was shooting. He turned my way and I shouted at him that the trench was full of gooks and that they were coming this way. Without any hesitation at all, he jumped right into the enemy trench, firing his weapon, and as he moved out of sight I could hear the explosion of grenades and more rifle fire. I never thought that I would see him alive again. I sure wasn't going to get out of the tank, not without loading my weapon, so I told L/Cpl. Court to throw me some .45 ammo. Almost immediately, I got the ammo and I reloaded my magazines just in time to see Cpl. O'Malley climbing

out of the trench with his arms loaded with enemy weapons. We loaded them onto the back of our tank and then evacuated the casualties. Cpl. O'Malley received the Medal of Honor for his actions that day.



Weapons captured by Cpl. Bobby O'Malley.

A-32 continued advancing to the front when A-34 was hit on the left side of the turret by an enemy 75mm recoilless rifle round. The blast appeared to wound everybody on board. Sgt. Ed Sipel was severely wounded in the leg and, after having a tourniquet applied by Cpl. Jim Thompson, he was evacuated. During the battle, Jim Thompson sustained multiple shrapnel wounds and was evacuated to the USS Boxer later that day. The rest of the crew suffered minor wounds, but the tank was still operational, so A-34 continued with the mission.



Hit on A-34 went through left side of turret and blew the fuse out of a WP round.

A-31 was then hit on the right side in the turret ring. The tank's gun traversed to the right side at 90 degrees and then it could not move. The penetration re- >>

sulted in 2/Lt. Ky Thompson being wounded and having to be evacuated. The rest of the tank's crew also sustained wounds, but the tank remained operational except that penetration prevented it from being able to traverse the turret.

A-32 moved into a position to knock out the enemy 75mm recoilless rifle. The tank fired two rounds of 90mm WP and destroyed the gun. Our tank then shifted west only to meet heavy resistance near An Cuong (2). Either our radios or our antennas were damaged ... but either way, we couldn't make radio contact with A-34. So, we moved in close to them to communicate by voice. Then, a different enemy 75mm hit the left rear corner of A-34's engine compartment and penetrated the left fuel cell, causing the tank to catch fire; it then had to be abandoned. Because A-34 sustained further multiple penetrations and burned up, it was later destroyed in place by Marine combat engineers.

Cpl. Bill Laidlaw was hit by shrapnel and killed. A-34's driver, PFC Cunningham, transferred to A-32, and A-34's gunner, Cpl J. B. Thompson, transferred to A-31. The dead and wounded from our platoon along with many casualties from 3/3 were loaded on to the tanks and we returned to the medical evacuation area.

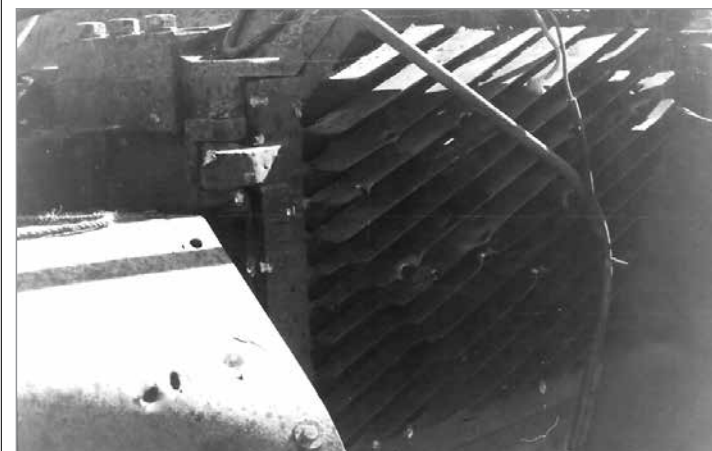


Tanks defending Medical Evacuation Area

Later that afternoon we got orders to proceed to Hill 43 and help secure it. A-31 and A-32 moved west and ended up becoming lost. It seemed as if in no time it began to get dark and we knew we were in big trouble if we didn't make contact at Hill 43 soon. Our radios were damaged and periscopes shot up, while A-31 could not use its main gun or its coax. It became very dark as we came upon some burning vehicles that turned out to be the "Lost Supply Column 21" that consisted of five LVTs (amtracs) and two flame tanks. Then A-31 somehow managed to make radio contact with our Charlie 6 (Capt. Saunders). They reported the situation and asked for further instructions. Charlie Six told us to stay put and defend our position as best as we could for the night.

3rd Tank Bn Command Chronologies:

18 August 1965 - A twenty-six man patrol was conducted between 182200H and 190600H forward of the Battalion Command Post. No enemy activity noted. Company "C" reported that two of their tanks were extensively damaged during "Operation Starlight." The tanks had been involved in a very close and intense battle with the Viet Cong near Van Thong. Tanks were damaged by anti-tank rockets, 81mm mortars, 57mm recoilless rifles, and well aimed small arms fire. Due to fluid nature of the situation the exact disposition of the tanks was unknown at this time. Company "C" reported one KIA and seven WIA. Company "B", 1st Tank Battalion reported one flame tank damaged and four WIA.



Flame Tank

As it turned out, "Supply Column 21" made the same mistake we had earlier that afternoon and they also became lost. They got caught in an enemy ambush, faced extremely close fighting, suffered heavy casualties and could not escape. Two LVTs tried to escape by crossing the rice paddy and they got hopelessly stuck. Even though they had radio contact, evidently because they were lost they could not describe their exact position to their CP.



Supply column 21 ambush site.

It was now completely dark and the only light we had were the glowing hulks of burning vehicles. It was fairly quiet except for an LVT that sounded like a loud popcorn popper as their .30 ammo and the occasional whump of a grenade cooked off. We didn't know if anyone was still alive but we had no other choice but to stay there buttoned up and wait for daylight ... and to be ready to fight for our lives.

A shadow moved in front of my driver's periscope and

my first thought was that we were in for an enemy satchel charge attack right on top my driver's hatch. I was about to open the hatch and start shooting my .45 when a voice asked if we had any more room in there? I could see that it was a Marine and I told him that we would make room. He climbed on top of the tank and dropped down through the loaders hatch. He told us that he was an LVT crewman and had been wounded and had been playing dead. About that time, it was about 110 degrees (and very humid) outside and he didn't have any water left. We had very little but we shared what we had.



This attacker was shot off the top of this LVT

At about 0100 we all became extremely dehydrated. We knew that if we didn't get some water we wouldn't last till morning. At the time, we had two five-gallon cans of water strapped to the side of the turret and next to the loaders hatch, so I decided to go out and get one of the jerry cans. I crawled out of my driver's compartment and noted that the flickering light of the burning vehicles was not enough to illuminate me, so I proceeded to go unstrap the water cans. They were both shot full of holes but one had about a gallon left in it so I handed it down inside of the loader's hatch. That small amount afforded by the shot up water can didn't last very long so I decided to find another can. The LVT crewman said that the amtrac directly across the clearing from our tank, with its ramp down, had a full supply of water. But he cautioned that if anyone was going to get some water they'd better do it before daylight or else they'd be an easy shot for an enemy sniper. So at about 0400, I quietly got out of A-32 and walked the twenty-five yards across the opening and, after stepping over some bodies, I made it inside the LVT. I was initially going to carry two cans but I then decided on only one because I wanted to carry my .45 in my free hand.

As daylight approached, all was quiet and Marines began to stir in the area. The remaining Marines came out of their vehicles and set up a defensive perimeter. Then later in the morning (on August 19th at about 1000) the rescue force arrived.

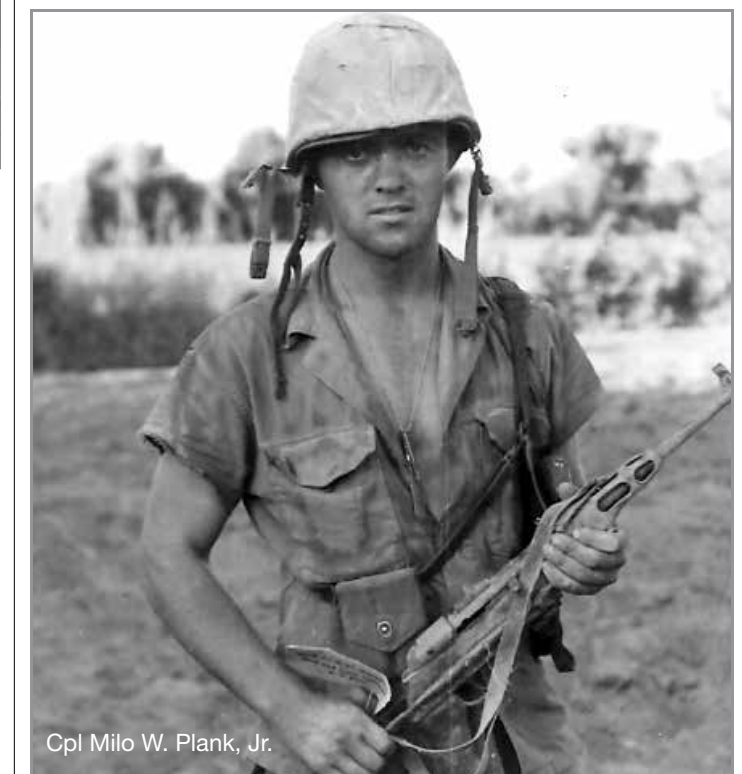
3rd Tank Bn Command Chronologies:

19 August 1965 - Company "C" sustained extensive damage on two tanks and moderate damage to three others during Operation "Starlight." One tank was damaged beyond repair and was destroyed by a demolition team. One other tank will require evacuation, remainder can be fully restored. Tanks destroyed numerous enemy fortifications, captured twenty-nine weapons and accounted for sixty-eight confirmed VC KIA.



Reinforcements arrive

We stayed at the Regimental command post till August 25th then boarded LCUs and back loaded directly to Chu Lai.



Cpl Milo W. Plank, Jr.



Left to right; Cpl. Milo Plank, PFC Cunningham, L/Cpl. Court >>



Captured weapons and 75mm recoilless cases.



L/Cpl. Court with M3A1 Grease Gun

OPERATION STARLITE



TANK A-32 BY KEN ZEBAL

The 3rd Platoon of Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks was attached to Battalion Landing Team 3/3 and we trained together much of the time on Okinawa. BLT 3/3 had several mount outs for Camp Fuji and the Philippine Islands before we actually embarked in the middle of the night aboard LSD 28 USS Thomason from "White Beach" in late May of 1965. The most exciting thing about this was loading up with live ammo. Sgt. R. B. Johnson, my boot camp drill instructor, who was also a tanker, and he was there to send one of his former recruits to combat. BLT 3/3 was tight and our tanks were part of it.

In August 1965, we had our first quota for R&R. S/Sgt. Don Clark, our Platoon Sergeant, put all the Marines names in a utility cover and someone drew Cpl. Charlie Denton's name. Charlie chose R&R for 3 days and 2 nights in Hong Kong and off he went. I was the second one to get selected for R&R and based on Charlie Denton's account, I too decided Hong Kong was where I wanted to go. So, on or about 17 August, I got on a C-130 for Da Nang and then on to Hong Kong. Little



In the photo above and on the cover: Cpl. Bill Laidlaw, Tank Commander (KIA), is standing in the Tank Commander's cupola, and just barely visible in the loader's hatch is Sgt. Dan McQueary (WIA). Other members of the crew of A-32 during STARLITE were Cpl. Milo Plank Jr., driver, and PFC Tony Pinnetti, gunner (WIA 8/18/1965).

did I know what would happen to our platoon during the next 3 days.

After Sgt. Sam "Pineapple" Kaleleiki rotated out of Vietnam, we were shorthanded. I became A-32's tank commander, but because of my R&R, Cpl. Bill Laidlaw, who recently joined the platoon from Charlie Co, 2nd Tanks, was tagged to fill in while I was gone. We had no idea of the impending operation that was to change so much. So on or about 17 August, a C-130 took me and a dozen other Marines from 3/3 and 2/4 and their attached units for the 30-minute ride to Da Nang. The next day along with a bunch of guys from Da Nang (mostly 9th Marines), we all got in another C-130 bound for Hong Kong. While enjoying liberty in Hong Kong, I read a very small and low keyed article in the Straits Times newspaper about Marines being in a battle south of Chu Lai. I couldn't help but wonder what the platoon was doing, but knew I'd be rejoining them in a few short days. No way did I ever imagine 3/3 was in a major fight.

I returned from Hong Kong on a C-130 to Da Nang and right away left for Chu Lai on an old R4D (DC4) that was loaded with blood plasma. I hitched a ride to the beach and saw medevac litters all over the place while also witnessing BAS (Battalion Aid Station) going at warp speed. Some litters were on the sand or on ponchos on the sand, while others were up on saw horses. The scene was very much like one would see at the movies about the aftermath of WWII beach landings.

A few days later the company 1st Sgt. assigned me to accompany our dead (Cpl. Bill Laidlaw) as part of the 3/3 graves registration detail. There was a Chief Corpsman in charge and an NCO from each company and attached unit. Since we had been attached to 3/3 for a quite a while we all knew the dead—all 37 of them, personally, by name. The body bags were located in the rear at FSR stored in green refrigerator boxes about as big as a CONEX box. The dead were stored right alongside the potatoes, carrots, milk and meat in about 6 or 8 different reefers. As always, guys in the rear tend to live well. We placed each body bag on a stretcher and then loaded the stretchers onto 6x6s. I didn't want to look at the toe tags.

Our small convoy left FSR on the hill and went to the airstrip where we waited for about a half-hour in the sun, with our dead. After the plane landed, we loaded the stretchers and took off. It was supposed to go to Da Nang, but it headed towards Saigon which we found out once we were airborne and made a long and sweeping 180 degree turn instead of going straight north. While in route, one of the dead had rigor mortis and partially sat up, another eerie moment. On the short final approach into Tan Son Nhut airport, we took some small arms fire but we landed safely and then transferred each

litter to Graves Registration at the airport. It was a small and spotless building that was also completely equipped with stainless steel tables and refrigerators which were very different than what I just saw at FSR and what I was later to see at Bravo Med, Da Nang in 1968. Our job was finally done, but the memory of losing all those men over such a short time still weighs heavy today.

The Chief took our detail to the Saigon Red Cross and we each received a \$40 grant. He got us a place to sleep and told us where to meet in the morning. Vietnamese Buddhist monks had been protesting the war by burning themselves, so the next morning I went walking around to see the sights. Saigon was bustling and huge with very wide streets and the U.S. personnel were mostly unarmed and wearing either nice, clean and pressed utilities or the uniform of the day. By comparison, I must have looked like an armed hobo.

After I got back from Saigon and was with the platoon again, I noticed changes. We went about our daily business much differently because the men now had an edge about them. Most of the platoon had been wounded. Lt. Thompson had been medevaced and he was rumored to have had his heel shot off. Sgt. Ed Sipel, also medevaced, was rumored to have had his leg amputated. I cleaned up the TC cupola and turret where Laidlaw's and McQueary's blood had been. The platoon spent a lot of time picking small shrapnel flakes just beneath the surface of each other's skin. Seeing this reminded me of how the Vietnamese women picked lice from each other's hair.

Our original platoon leadership (1st Lt. Ken Zitz, S/Sgt. Don Clark and Sgt. Sam Kaleleiki) rotated out in mid-August, so now we had new leaders. 2nd Lt. Ky Thompson and S/Sgt. Joe Wilder held the reins. Although Lt. Thompson really was new, S/Sgt. Wilder was a combat-tested Korea vet and he knew the ropes well. Both leaders were tested sooner than anyone expected.

When Laidlaw was killed some of the shrapnel also wounded Tony Pinnetti; but it did not get Sgt. Mac, who was wounded later. During a subsequent firefight, a Viet Cong rifle round ricocheted off the blast deflector, leaving a clearly visible ding on it, and it ricocheted into the open end of the 90mm gun tube and then travelled the entire length of the main gun leaving Sgt. Mac with a huge gaping wound on his right forearm. Stranger than fiction, at that time Sgt. Mac was in the process of loading a 90mm round into the breach. Every time thereafter when we cleaned the bore or bore sighted the main gun, I'd see the evidence of that day and remember how Dan McQueary got wounded. I also recall later on that some of the men were recounting that: "While on the beach, swapping sea stories, someone mentioned that Milo (Plank) was seen shooting at some VC with his .45 from the driver's hatch during one of the many firefights." >>

In retrospect, there was “Divine Interventttion” for me during those fateful days in August 1965. Instead of me being killed on A-32, Cpl. Bill Laidlaw died. Instead of me being on the C-130 that crashed into Hong Kong Bay, I departed on a flight before. ■



Republic of South Vietnam— August 1965
L/Cpl. Kenneth (Ken) Zebal 3rd Tanks.
TAD to H&S 3/3–1965



Major Ken Zebal, USMC (ret.)



Front row from left to right:
Sam Kaleleiki, Louis Borriello, Dave Erickson, Rob Lockett, Ivan Williams, Rich Shaver, Charlie Denton, Tony Pinnetti, Steve Nicholson

Back row from left to right:
Rich Huff, Dan McQueary, Andy Senecal, Ed Sipel, Bill Raines, DJ Clark, Hal Austin, Dave Doyle, JB Thompson, Ken Zebal, Milo Plank, Pat Boromeo, Ken Zitz

The photographer is Chris Vrakelos

Recollections of an Amtracker

BY CPL. REGIS DeARZA

“A” Company, 3rd Amtrac Battalion, 1st MARDIV

I was a 20-year-old corporal at the time of Operation Starlite. Like many of the Marines engaged in Operation Starlite, it was my baptism by fire. Even though I participated in many Marine operations after Starlite, none of them were as memorable to me as my first one.

On August 17, 1965, the Company Commander of “A” Company, 3rd Amtrac Battalion, 1st Mar Div., Captain Beir, called a formation of “A” Company in the Company Area at the Marine enclave at Chu-Lai. He advised certain elements of “A” Company, of which my amtrac and crew were part, to prepare several day’s gear and be ready to embark by ship later that afternoon. He did not elaborate beyond that very basic command. I remember looking out to sea and thinking where is the ship? There were no Navy ships to be seen at that time. However, at the given time an LSD (Landing Ship Dock) appeared over the horizon and we loaded our amtracs (LVT’s) into the tank deck and the ship departed the area. It was not until we were aboard ship and underway that we were told the full nature of our mission.

On the morning of August 18, 1965, our ship, along with others, was positioned about a half mile off the shoreline. As daylight appeared, Marines from the troop ships began to come alongside our ship in LCVP’s and climb aboard using the wet nets which were hanging from the ships side. The Marines then began loading through the open top hatches of the LVT’s, which were on the tank deck of the LSD. As this was taking place A-4 Sky Hawks began strafing runs along the beach dropping napalm. Standing on the deck of the LSD and watching all of this, all I could think of was the World War II movies I had seen as a youngster. I remember thinking, after spending three years in the Marine Corps, which had included a previous tour of duty in the Far East, I was really going into a full-blown battle.

My LVT (3A 01) of which I was the crew chief, was on the far left end of the first wave to the beach. Shortly after making land fall I remember hearing radio traffic from other Marine units that had already engaged the VC. It didn’t take long to start hearing reports of KIA’s (killed in action) and WIA’s (wounded in action). I remember thinking there are actually Marines being killed and wounded. After weeks of chasing the elusive VC we are in a real fight now.

My LVT was a “Command Tractor”, which meant it was configured with radio equipment to be a rolling Command convoy. Shortly after landing, a convoy, which included my amtrac, was formed. The convoy became Col. Petross’s roll-

ing command post. As I recall, the convoy consisted of at least two command tractors, several regular LVT’s, and an Ontos or two, however I am foggy on that issue.

As the infantry moved inland, the command convoy moved slowly along behind. Periodically, we would stop for periods of time and the officers would gather outside of the LVT’s and talk and point at maps, and then the convoy would move a little further and stop, and the same activity would repeat itself. Sometime before noon the convoy was positioned along a dirt road, and I overheard reports concerning an LVT supply column engaged in a fire fight. At about the same time, there were two rounds, probably recoilless rifles, that whizzed overhead. An M-48 flame tank came roaring into the area and stopped. What I remember was there was a hole about the size of a silver dollar through the turret of the tank. Up until that time I didn’t think much of anything could penetrate a tank turret.

From a distance, I watched several Marine officers and Staff NCOs gathered beside the tank talking with the tank commander. It seemed like all of a sudden a decision was made and Marines started loading aboard several of the LVT’s. I saw Sgt. Lessie Strickland standing on the open ramp of one of the amtracs waving Marines aboard. To my surprise S/Sgt. Forsythe, my platoon sergeant, hollered at me to grab some 3.5 rockets and get aboard an LVT with him. I ran inside my amtrac and grabbed three 3.5 rockets from the storage locker and, as I was trying to get my M-14 rifle, S/Sgt. Forsythe hollered at me again and said to come-on and don’t worry about a rifle. I ran and boarded the amtrac on which Sgt. Strickland was standing and took a seat on the troop bench with S/Sgt. Forsythe beside me armed with a 3.5 rocket launcher. The amtrac filled with Marines, the ramp closed and off we went. So history has it that as I approached the first fire fight of my life, me being a three-year veteran of the Marine Corps and an NCO on top of that, I was armed with three 3.5 rockets which I was carrying in my arms like a baby and no rifle. Not very John Wayne of me.

Not being able to see anything outside of the interior of

(Continued on page 31)

Tanks in the Bush

When Push Comes to Shove

BY BEN COLE

Since the Marines first acquired tanks prior to World War II, they have been assigned many tasks and served many roles. Vietnam was no different. In northernmost I Corps in 1967, our most versatile tank, the M-48 Patton, performed another job for which it was not designed.

As the tank commander of Alpha 31 in Gunny English's platoon of Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks, in the summer and fall of 1967, we mostly worked around the area now called "Leatherneck Square." This included the areas around Con Thien, Cam Lo, over to the coast near Gio Linh and back down to Dong Ha. At one time or another we were attached to almost every Marine infantry regiment there. During a few weeks in late summer of 1967, we were part of an effort to find an elusive big caliber gun that the NVA were hiding somewhere in the area. It would typically fire a few rounds, then disappear only to pop up a few days later at another location.

Our platoon was attached to 26th Marines for this particular sweep. Typically, with two tanks abreast, we would follow the lead elements as the as they made their way through the brush with the other tank section further back in the group. Dry rice fields where years earlier farmers had grown rice sprigs for replanting in wet paddies were a common feature of the area. The ground west of the Charlie-2 artillery fire base and Con Thien had many of these flat dry rice fields that were bordered by overgrown terraces that had claimed a few torsion bars of the unwary. It was not hard to negotiate around them if you took your time, but the surrounding wooded areas were a different matter.

The trees and brush there were thick and a perfect place for enemy bunkers or to hide a big gun, so someone had to go in there to look around. These were

mostly old growth jungle-like areas with the big trees interwoven with thick vines. Being almost impossible to walk through, cutting a path with a machete was the normal method for grunts to get through. But it was decided that this required too much time and effort, so today our tanks were given a new mission.

We would become armored bulldozers, but instead of a blade or plow we had our 90mm gun and sturdy slope plate. A couple of grunts with machetes would ride along on the tanks to cut the clinging vines and tree limbs as we pushed through making a path for the infantry battalion to follow. It was a learning experience and something never covered at Tank School.

Depending on the density of the trees and type of terrain, we had to precede very slowly. Even then the vegetation took its toll on the tanks and the men. Fenders, searchlights, and radio antennas were the first to suffer. After a couple machete men were swept off by tree limbs, having them walk behind the tanks seemed a better idea. From there, they would be close enough to cut down a vine or RPG team if necessary.

The first day we did find and overrun a few enemy bunkers without friendly casualties, but what seemed to be the biggest danger was the forest itself. After a few encounters with whiplashing limbs that could take off a head or pull someone out of the turret, we learned a few tricks.

Communication between the TC and the driver was critical. Winding slowly through this green maze and being able to stop to cut a vine or limb was slow but prudent. If they could not be bypassed, fairly large trees with few limbs near the ground were the easiest to push over. But we learned that there was a certain way to do it. By placing the slope plate against the trunk with the gun barrel well to one side and pushing steadily, the tree would

start to lean. When it reached a certain point, the driver would gradually decrease the throttle to where the tree would fall over of its own weight.

Up to certain point, larger trees were actually easier to topple due to the center of gravity being higher off the ground. But the problem was that the larger trees had larger root balls. As the tank continues to push, and as the tree falls, the large root ball will emerge under the tanks belly lifting the tank off the ground. There you sit high and dry with your tracks spinning and going nowhere. Usually, another tank in the section was nearby and could be called to pull you off the root ball. That is, if your radio antenna still was unbroken and functioning.

When smaller trees couldn't be by-passed, the tracks in conjunction with the slope plate would work. This action required more speed and close coordination between the TC who had a better view. Here the fenders could catch the brunt of the limbs and sometimes were badly mangled in the process.

Another problem was trees close together and wrapped with vines. Even if we could maneuver past them, "wait-a-minute" vines could grab a searchlight or take off a radio antenna, not to mention anything else within the vine's grasp, including the tanker's heads and helmets. Even equipment stored in the gypsy rack behind the turret could get snagged, especially water cans and cases of C's.

On one tank, a thick vine managed to pull an engineer's explosive pack off the gypsy rack, somehow setting it on fire near the turret ring. Luckily, the tank commander managed to toss it off the tank before he accidentally traversed the turret on it.

Another even more exciting scenario was the part the main 90mm gun tube played in this situation. The muzzle

extends about eight feet in front of the tank and is potentially the first part of the tank to make contact with an obstacle. The TC had to constantly move the turret and gun tube right or left and up or down to avoid obstacles. That worked in open spaces where trees and vines could be seen, but, as the foliage got thicker, trees became harder to see and avoid. Once, as my driver accelerated to push over a tree, the end of the gun barrel went hard against the trunk of a nearby tree. It pushed the barrel back into the recoil position faster than I could get the driver to stop. I will never forget the horrible image of the three-foot long tank shell as it was ejected from the breech and slammed onto the sharp corners of the metal ammo boxes on the steel deck of the tank. If any edge found the soft metal of the primer, we would have had a very bad day. I still remember the look on my loader's face after the ejected main gun round finally

quit banging on the ammo boxes and lay quietly on the deck.

Another unseen obstacle we encountered were craters from B-52 bomb strikes. Fresh ones were easy to see and avoid because the red mounds of charred red clay marked the tank-swallowing craters. The craters from years earlier were another matter. They now had vegetation growing around the sides and were harder to spot until it was



almost too late. The TC could see better, but sometimes you were almost over the edge before you could get the driver to stop. It was not uncommon to get a radio call from the tank on your flank and to look over and see only the radio antenna waving above a hidden crater. Depending on the size of the crater, it could take two tanks in tandem and several sections of cable to pull it out.

We never did find the mystery enemy gun, but we did destroy some bunkers and ran off the NVA where airstrikes took them out. Fortunately, the enemy decided to make their stand in the open area rather than in confines of the woods, where it could have been a different story.

When we returned to our tank slots at the Charlie-2 arty base, we fixed our fenders, antennas and other repairs getting the tanks ready again. We learned that our tanks could do even more than expected, when push comes to shove. ■

Recollections of an Amtracker (Continued from page 29)

the LVT, it didn't seem like we traveled more than a mile or so when the amtrac came to an abrupt stop. The ramp fell and Marines started pouring out, me included. We ran out into a barrage of small arms fire and mortar rounds dropping all around. Marines were trying to take cover and engage the hidden enemy.

To go into great detail would not serve a particular purpose. That day, the 18th, we lost several of our men. Marines from "A" Company, 3rd Amtrac Battalion, 1st Mar Div, as well as from "B" Company, 1st Amtrac Battalion, 3rd Mar Div. These men will never be forgotten: Lt. Robert Cochran; Sgt. Lessie Strickland; Cpl. Rowland Adamoli; L/Cpl. John Bell Jr.; L/Cpl. Victor Flores Jr.; L/Cpl. Verlon Hadley and Pfc. James Kalil. I do not recall how many others were wounded from "A" Company. After the medical evacuation, the majority of Marines continued on to the ob-

jective, which was to reach and rescue the embattled LVT supply column. Several of us were assigned to stay and guard a crippled amtrac damaged during the ambush. Late that night, we were joined by the remnants of a Marine Company and we all walked back to the command post.

It wasn't over yet. On Aug 24, Pfc. George A. Bell died when his R&R flight crashed in Hong Kong Harbor trying to return men to the battlefield.

History will tell you there was little contact with the VC after that first day. Operation Starlite was a success; it showed the VC as well as the South Vietnamese Army that the U.S. Marines had come to fight. I hope my recollections of Operation Starlite will help those who might be interested in this battle to have a better understanding. I am retired after nearly forty years as a Texas Law Enforcement Officer.

Semper Fi,
Cpl. Regis DeArza,

"A" Company, 3rd Amtrac Battalion, 1st MARDIV ■

The Food Game

BY TOM FENERTY

In the photo: Resupply in the bush...



Sometimes the chopper brought our resupply with a cargo net hooked to the bottom of the fuselage and quickly deposited the food and supplies without touching the ground. Other times there were personnel arrivals, dead/wounded, rotators, or lucky R&R departures which caused the bird to touch down, however briefly. This required those aboard the craft to toss the cases of c-rats (ammo, mortars) very quickly to us, the work party.

Work parties were a hastily arranged group of 'volunteers' chosen by leadership.

The platoon sergeant would 'requisition' a man from each squad for work. The chosen were usually FNGs,

but not always; sometimes, special talent was required. The task could have been a water run to a stream to refill canteens, collecting trash, burning shitters, and of course, get and distribute the inbound supplies. The gunny was the man in charge of this mission. The gunny was always in charge.

After communication between ground and air, the big bird came in and made the drop.

The timing here is critical because the moment the gunny is distracted (and believe me it's only a moment), a full case of C-rats vanishes. Now . . .

just keep a straight face and continue to unload anything else. Look busy.

He never saw it disappear, but when he has the time to make a count, he begins to swear loudly. By then, that case has been moved to a more secure location and all of us had this 'wasn't me, gunny' look. Eye contact was rough.

Wouldn't be until later that those with special talents shared peaches and pound cake, all the while with a watchful eye for the GUNNY.

This game of 'get an extra case' became a challenge and a wonderful escape from the reality that existed. Let's call it 'fun for misfits.'

It's memories of times like this that I've come to cherish.

Hope you do, too. ■

Robert H. Gage—MIA

BY MICHAEL GIOVINAZZO
SGT., 3RD PLT., "A" CO., 1ST AT BN



I first met Bob Gage in late November, 1965, when I arrived at Camp Butler, Okinawa to fill in the ranks of 3rd Plt., "A" Co., 1st AT Bn. The 3rd Platoon came from Camp Pendleton shortly before I arrived and was preparing to go to Vietnam as an attachment to 3rd Bn., 1st Marines.

I felt the usual strangeness one feels when reporting to a new assignment. Most of the crewmen were West Coast Marines and most knew each other for some time. My duty stations up to that time were East Coast, 2nd AT's, and then one year in Marine Barracks, Portsmouth, VA. I had two-and-a-half

years in the Marine Corps. Somehow, Bob and I gravitated to each other and became good friends. Our personalities were different in that Bob was confrontational when he felt disrespected and questioned certain authority. I often played his straight man, making light of the situations. Bob was a well put together Marine and would be a good man to have with you in a fight. I often wonder if that same hard head had anything to do with him being killed. He was not the type to go easy.

I remember us being in Chu Lai in what looked like a secure area, tents with wood floors and a mess hall and other comforts we most times did not have. There was an outdoor movie that was shown in the evening. One evening Bob and I went to see the movie. My watch was broken, so I depended on Bob to periodically give me the time so I would not be late for my watch duty. While we were watching the movie, we could hear loud human noises coming from our rear where there were metal connex boxes stored. The noise was very distracting. Finally, I asked someone, "What is that noise?" He said, "It's a Marine under detention for assaulting an officer." He was being kept there until the next day, when he would be removed to a brig. I got the feeling I was the only one who thought this was anything out of the ordinary. It certainly didn't affect Bob. Next,

I was going to pay for not having my own watch. I will never know if Bob continually gave me the time, each time I asked, one hour behind the time it actually was. I suspect he wanted me to stay until the end of the movie and be late for my watch. He would never admit to it.

I left the movie thinking I would be about a half hour early and relieve the member of my platoon on watch. When I got to the watch tent, the Marine was waiting for me. He had a strange look in his eye and said, "Is this the time you relieve me?" I said yes with a smile, thinking I was doing something good by giving him a break. The next thing I saw was his arm going back to take a swing at me. I caught his arm and held him, asking what he was doing. Just then a sergeant came over and pulled us apart. I then found out I was about a half-hour late. Thanks, Bob.

The following morning, the platoon commander heard about the commotion and interviewed me. I told him what had happened and he somewhat accepted it, but told me to get a new watch. I found out later from Bob, the lieutenant checked Bob's watch; it had the correct time. Bob just dismissed the whole thing. The Marine that started the commotion sort of apologized, not really sure what to think. So much for good intentions >>

It was now July 3rd, 1966. We had moved to Da Nang from Chu Lai a few months prior and the 3rd Platoon was split in half. I stayed with the original platoon, as did Bob. We were told the platoon was split to stagger the rotation dates back to CONUS. We received members from another platoon.

On this day, three Ontos led by S/Sgt. Pandavella, who took over as an Ontos commander and was also acting platoon commander, set out to a location somewhere south/south-west of Da Nang. I was Sgt. Pandavella's driver. Bob was on one of the three Ontos. I believe he was also a driver. I was the lead Ontos and directed to take a turn off the main road onto an unpaved path. From this path we went through a heavy wooded area. We passed no villages or signs of life. I had no idea where we were or where we were going. I started to have that disconnected feeling, that we were all alone—three Ontos making a lot of noise and very vulnerable.

On the trail we were following we encountered a series of at least six holes, each about six feet wide and four feet deep. These holes were likely from bombs. I remember having to balance the Ontos on the edge, rocking and gently going down before going up. To do otherwise you would bury the guns.

Shortly after passing the holes, we came upon the Marines we were to support. Some of my recent research indicated that this was 1st Platoon of "D" Co., 1st Bn., 1st Marines. I could see they had been there at least long enough to dig holes, which they were in. This platoon was definitely undermanned, judging by the amount of Marines present. We were greeted by S/Sgt. Dawson, who I believe was the acting platoon commander. During the next several hours, I would see my first impression of S/Sgt. Dawson was correct. He was a real leader and a true Marine professional. He was calm under pressure, which I would soon see, and a real down to earth man. In fact, all of these Marines were good guys.

We picked up with them like we were old buddies. I think it may have a lot to do with their leader.

I would meet S/Sgt. Dawson ten months later in Quantico. We both attended The Technique of Military Instruction School. This was a three-week school, that in the wisdom of the Corps I needed to attend with less than two months left on my enlistment. Perhaps they thought I would be so enthused that I would reenlist. It turned out to be time well spent and would be useful later in life.

To my surprise S/Sgt. Dawson recognized me immediately, and the first words out of his mouth were, "Did they ever find that Marine?" This indicated to me that this was not a business as usual event, even to someone who saw as much action as he did and not in Bob's command. I believe there were few cases where a Marine became missing in such circumstances.

At the platoon site, we had positioned the Ontos and dug in. There were no fields of fire as it was thickly wooded. I didn't think we could use the 106's, so I set up the .30 Cal. on the tripod in front of my hole. I was busy digging a personal hole and a hole for the Ontos to hide the hull, leaving only the 106's exposed.

I worked on my position and whatever else I did until I overheard S/Sgt. Pandavella ask someone, in voice above conversational, "Where is Gage?" I didn't know what was going on, but he sounded worried. It was starting to get dark. Finally, it was determined that Bob went down to the village with a crew member, whose name I can't remember but have a mental picture of. The Marine was not in the platoon very long. I can understand this Marine not volunteering information out of an unwritten loyalty 19-year-olds have.

I had no idea there was a village below us. No one mentioned it, and I could not see it through the trees and vegetation. I have no idea if Bob had permission to go there or what his in-

tentions were. The official story indicated he was looking to have his laundry done. This is possible, but it was a practice unknown to me, especially in the middle of nowhere. I believe a squad went to the village and quickly investigated, but could not stay long since it was just about completely dark.

I remember thinking, how can this be? I could understand if someone was killed and the body was present, but to just disappear. It had to be accepted, because there was nothing that could be done as darkness came. What is really strange, the official report indicates Bob was shot. How could it be? No one heard a shot.

This was only the beginning of what was to shortly follow. Sometime after full dark, a squad was sent out to set up an ambush in front of our line. I saw the squad go out and very shortly heard bursts of automatic weapons fire. The firing lasted less than 30 seconds. The squad was ambushed in an "L" shaped ambush.

As soon as the firing stopped, S/Sgt. Dawson sent out a few Marines to see what happened. Shortly, they all came in dragging two Marines. One was KIA and the other was shot in the chest and choking on his blood, according to the corpsman. He needed immediate evacuation. That was not to happen. Our position was not remotely close to any suitable landing. So, we just waited against any hope and soon the Marine died. Not more than an hour before, we were sitting around talking to these two Marines, one of which opened a large can of hot peppers he got from home and shared them with anyone who could tolerate them. I believe he was Hispanic and the other was a redhead. That is all I knew — not even a name. It doesn't really matter. I know they were Marines and that is all that is important. At least, in the case of Bob Gage, I got to know him and forever will remember him and all the others who were too young to die. ■

Stories by Lee Dill

11/02/2015

I would like to submit these stories for consideration in our publication, The Sponson Box. The inspiration behind my document is Ed Hiltz. I spent three months with Ed at An Hoa. In his own story that appeared in the magazine in 2015, he did not mention remembering me even though we were both from Baltimore, Maryland. I don't blame Ed, but it made me realize that if I did not document my own tour, it could be lost forever, so I am delivering as promised.

To me, the one (and maybe the only) downside of my first reunion this past year in Washington, DC was the red tag that was on my name badge that read "First Time Attendee." It was a mixed blessing. Yes, it could have meant that, if the "Old Salts" would be nice to me during my first time with you guys and, in being nice, I might come to the next reunion... but it also means "FNG." While getting on the bus to visit the Marine Corps Museum at Quantico, I was referred to as a "FNG" (probably in jest). It still pissed me off, so here is my story. I do want to address the clown who called me the FNG. If he has not written his own story for publication, then he may become the forgotten one and this FNG (me) one day will be gone ... but not forgotten. Yes, I am the "Fortunate Son—I am the Fortunate One" which is pure luck... but I'll take it.

Join the Marines?

BY LEE DILL

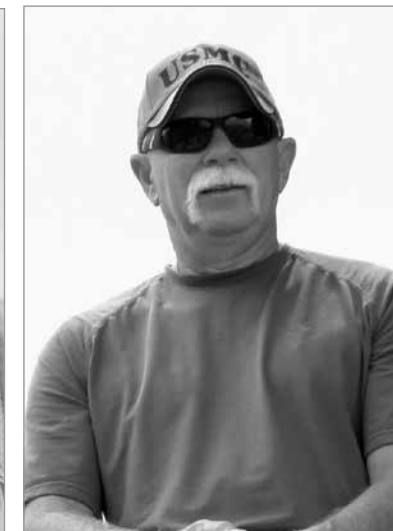
When the old neighborhood gang and I got together we played ARMY. We didn't play Marines. No one played Marines. It was the ARMY all the way. When Vietnam reared its ugly head while I was in high school, we all began to look toward our futures. We knew that if you were drafted, it was going to be the Army. But if you

wanted to avoid the draft and maybe avoid Vietnam, there were a few ways to skate:

1. **National Guard** — at this point in time they rarely left the State of Maryland and they never left the USA.
2. **Army Reserve** — same as above, and only one weekend a month — plus two drunken weeks a year with a six-year commitment.
3. **Navy** — wet feet and no mud there — but if you joined the Navy Reserve you did two years Active Duty with a lot of the same stuff as above. How stupid was that? Actually, looking back, that really was "John Kerry" stupid!
4. **Coast Guard** — yep, they mainly guarded the coasts.
5. **Air Force** — fine dining and clean bedding as privates. >>



Lee Dill in-country 1968



... and home in 2015

6. **Army** — at that time there were 500,000 men in Germany – 100,000 men in Korea and 500,000 spread all over the world with only 400,000 in Vietnam (and they were mostly FNG's).
7. **Marines** – who the hell joins the Marines?

When I graduated from high school in '66, I got a minimum wage + 80 cents a week job. That was a grand total of \$60.80 per week. Somehow I landed it in the computer field. Don't be too impressed. I actually hauled (physically) data from the computer room to the users and back to the computer room. The bright side was that I was ambitious and I was learning EAM operations (Electrical Accounting Machines) and primitive computers. That was the computers that filled rooms and had less power than a 1995 calculator. I continued on this path until February, 1967.

Over the previous summer, I had attempted to enter Anne Arundel (Maryland) Community College. Yes, I was so dumb that I took remedial English and Math that summer in order to start as a for-real college student in the fall. Good plan huh? Not exactly. I failed one of the two courses. I really don't remember which one ... but I think it was English. So now I am thinking that maybe I'll get drafted, so I took matters into my own hands. I marched into the Army recruiters and announced I'd like to be a helicopter door gunner. (Yes, I had watched too much TV!) According to the news, in Vietnam there were more helicopter gunners than grunts.

The recruiter looked at me, searched his handbook and said, "We don't have that job exactly – why not fly the helicopter?"

WOW! Now that's some Hot Shit... absolutely!

I promptly failed that test, too!

So he then says, "You want to do something in the air, correct?"

I said, "Sure."

He said, "Airborne."

Hell, why not? I had read enough to know all about airborne, so I signed up right then and there.

The next step was the physical at Holibird. I took the physical and all was good except for the "pee test." The little sliver of paper was to turn a certain color. Mine didn't. The doctor tells me I am diabetic... Huh? So now I have to go to a private doctor, get tested, and try again. This is embarrassing. I'm not even qualified for the Army?

The next day I go to my long-time family doctor, Dr. NaCann. The good doctor sends me to the facility that tests for diabetes via the glucose tolerance test ... (I think that is what it's called). I get the results back—Negative. Although I think I could have gotten a 4F status if I wanted ... especially since the Doc and I had spent my life together. I visited the recruiter again, bringing the test results with me. He delivers the test results to the medical people at Holibird and I meet him at the end of the day. I am really ready to begin my Airborne assignment. When I get there, he says that I failed.

I failed?

Within a month, the letter arrives from the Draft Board. Now I am classified as 1Y... I am draftable only in time of national emergency.

You can only imagine how this sat with me. I am all dressed up and nowhere to go. So, through March, April and May it gnawed my insides. Unqualified? How embarrassing. How could I face my friends that were starting to disappear into the military? I had no idea. Then one evening I was at home watching TV. It was late and I was all alone. The classic war movie "Battle Cry" was on. It is a movie about young guys from Baltimore who join the U.S. Marines and go to war. "Battle Cry" got me hook, line, and sinker. The next morning back to the recruiter in Glen Burnie ... but it was not the Army – this time it was the MARINES!!

The Marine recruiter must have thought he died and went to Heaven!

He asked me what I wanted to be.

"A Marine, Sir!" I replied.

He then asked me what I wanted to do in the Marines.

I spit out, "Infantry!"

He began to smile.

He then inquired about my health. I told him I was 1Y. That I had failed in my attempt with the Army but that it was a mistake. I was in good health.

Well, his smile was pretty big by then and he stepped towards me. The gunnery sergeant whose name escapes me, put his arm around my shoulder and looked me in the eye and said, "Son, I am going to get you in!"

It was at this point I thanked him and I signed up for three years. He suggested I take the "summer delay path." That I did not need to leave immediately for Parris Island in June but to wait until September and to go when the weather in South Carolina cools off a bit. That made a lot of sense to me. And it turned out that by my delay that I also avoided Khe Sanh and Tet '68.

At this point I was extremely proud of myself. I was on my way. Unfortunately, most of my relatives, friends and family didn't think I would finish boot camp and become a Marine. In my world, that was the best incentive for me to succeed. Like most Marines, I had something to prove and prove it I did. They would have had to kill me to get me out ... well at least at that time. Semper Fi!!

The Skipper's Driver

BY LEE DILL

I extended my tour in Vietnam in order to get the position of tank commander, but that goal wasn't a given. First I had to become Jeep driver. So early in June of 1969 I reported for my second tour to Bravo Co, 1st Tanks, which was located on Hill 55. The Company First Sgt. asked me what I would like to do, and of course I said, "Tank commander."

He said, "We are full. But we do have an easy job that you might like.

That's the skipper's Jeep driver." We all know how the Corps works—it really wasn't a suggestion, it was an assignment.

My next words were, "That sounds exactly like the job I want." Now I'm a Jeep driver.

I lasted a week. The main issue was I was terrified of driving the Jeep. There's no armor, no guns, no crew. A bullet can kill you and a mine or RPG leaves nothing when they hit a jeep. Actually I did give it my best shot, but I drove flat out at all time — maybe 55 MPH?

The day before I got fired, oh yeah, I got fired. When I put the Jeep in a rice paddy, we nearly lost a .50 caliber machine gun and the company armor. Earlier, we had had the .50 repaired back at Battalion and I was driving with the armor sitting in the front passenger seat with the .50 in the back. I simply lost control at my flat out speed. The road leading to Hill 55 was a raised road with rice paddies on both sides. Before we flew off of the road, I did manage to slow the Jeep down a little. Landing in a rice paddy is ugly! You know how they are fertilized with human and water buffalo shit! We did manage to keep our heads out of the water but the smell was "unpleasant" to say the least. Almost before our wheels stopped spinning the Seabees arrived to pull us out with a bull dozer so we ended up in good shape. Unfortunately, I realized I had to go fishing for the .50. The barrel had been removed from the gun, so I just shuffled my feet thru the soft mushy bottom of the paddy until I found it. Very luckily we got it out of the water without doing any scuba diving. It was full of nasty mud ... but undamaged. When the Seabees pulled us out there was no damage to the jeep. I went to Hill 55, cleaned everything up, begged the armorer to keep silent about our excitement and I skated off to chow.

I think later that evening the armorer reported our incident to the First Sgt. and that was a strike

against me (deservedly so). The next morning the First Sgt. told me to drive careful and to keep the Jeep clean from now on. He actually wanted me to wash it often!!

The next morning, I was to take the Skipper to Battalion, spend the day waiting for him, and then transport him back to Hill 55 before nightfall. I did as I was instructed, but the Skipper was tied up all day and it was nearly nightfall when we were heading up to road to Hill 55. We were on about the same stretch of road where I had lost control the day before. I was again going flat out... the Jeep was skittish but doing well. The unplanned situation was that a tank going down the road heading towards us and they were trying to get to Battalion by dark. He was flat out at maybe 35 MPH. If you ever drove that particular road it was barely two tanks wide and no more wiggle room.

The tank roared by us at its top speed. We were still doing 55 MPH, it was almost dark, the dust cloud behind the tank enveloped us and, after traveling another mile or so, we flew into the Skipper's parking spot sideways. I was totally pleased with my performance and ability.

The Skipper "not so much." He just sat there in the passenger seat shaking a bit while he gave much thought to his next words. Those words were, "Son, you belong on a tank." He dismounted the Jeep and entered his office. The next morning the First Sgt. told me to replace the tank commander of F-11, who apparently wanted to drive a Jeep. F-11 was currently working with the Korean Marines, so I went from the frying pan into the fire. But finally I had a tank, not a gun tank ... but a tank!!

Clean Utes or Else

BY LEE DILL

As I mentioned before, I had extended my tour to get the position of tank commander and, after I finally got it, I didn't realize how it would affect me. Unfortunately, it went to my head.

We were coming in after being out for a couple of weeks on an operation in the Dodge City, Go Noi Island, An Hoa area. As usual, the time in the field was hard on F-11 and we blew an engine. We managed to get it back from An Hoa to Battalion by adding lots of oil and watching it blow right out the exhaust in a big blue cloud. We arrived late in the afternoon, pulled it up on the ramp, and went to get cleaned up. All the while trying to avoid guard duty. Not sure why, but I was down to one set of cammie's and they were full of oil, so I went to Supply to get a new set or two.

I may have been a bit "too full of myself," but after being in the bush (an easy operation), getting the tank back safely and getting the crew squared away, all I wanted was a shower and to reconnect with some of the buddies that I knew in Battalion. I arrived at Supply just as the supply pogues' day was ending. The supply hooch had a half door set up with a shelf on top. I politely requested a new set of jungles. The reply was, "We're closed for the day and we don't have anything in your size."

I looked on his rack in the distance (right next to the expensive stereo and new Japanese camera) and I spotted on the center of his rack about ten sets of jungles freshly cleaned by Momma-san and still in the plastic.

This is a bit embarrassing to relate, but at this time I took the .45 off my hip, slapped it on the shelf between us, and blurted out something like: "M-F-er, I'll bet we're the same size and you have at least ten sets on your rack!"

He paled a little bit, agreed with my declaration, gave me three sets, and to my great relief he apparently never mentioned it to anyone. I happily took my treasure, grabbed a shower, and continued my tour. Ah, the days of being young and dumb and dangerous. Looking back on it, I look like an idiot, but truthfully it seemed a good idea at the time. ■

Saluting in Quang Tri

BY FRANK "TREE" REMKIEWICZ



There are days when I find it difficult to remember anything about Vietnam. The story by John Wear, "No Cover? No Problem!" did bring a similar memory to mind. We had returned to Dong Ha for some weird and unreasonable reason and, just to add to our woes, we decided (perhaps, we were told) to go to Quang Tri. That was our first mistake.

One of the things I learned in the Marine Corps is when one has a first mistake there is no need for a second. We (there were about 3 or 4 of us) were walking down the main drag where 3rd Marine Division HQ was nearby, with no covers, un-bloused boots, and for the most part either fully or partially unbuttoned utility shirts. From a distance we saw two jeeps approaching at a rather rapid pace. The first passed us in a few seconds and no one looked back. We did notice that the jeep had some kind of fender ornaments or flags or something. The second jeep came right behind the first jeep and, as it passed us, literally stopped on the proverbial dime. Out jumped an old grizzly Marine with more stripes up and down than I knew existed in the Marine Corps. It seemed that even before this Marine's feet hit the deck he was yelling for us to come to attention. At that point things went downhill. He asked if we had recognized "the jeep" that had passed us just before his vehicle. We all pretty much agreed that we did not notice a thing. I think that was the wrong answer. The 3rd Marine Division Sergeant Major then proceeded to inform us ignorant bumpkins that the Commanding General (Raymond G Davis) had just driven past and, unless we were all completely untrained and ignorant, all enlisted personnel are required to salute an officer, especially the commanding officer of our (freekin') division. Then, the Top's eyes turned less red and he seemed to discover our dress...or the lack thereof. We then listened to a harangue on proper dress and decorum. After about five minutes of this screed, he took a breath and gave us a moment to respond. You know, in that Marine Corps way, "Yes or no, aye, aye." Little did he know

the response he was about to get. One of our group, I may or may not know who it was, said, "What are you going to do? Cut off our hair and send us to Vietnam?" When he finally permitted us to move on and as he was getting into his jeep, we thought that our response was just perfect, given our circumstances and environment.

We hurried about our business and then hurriedly returned to Alpha Company, 2nd Platoon at Dong Ha. We just wanted to get back to a "safe place" away from brass and proper military decorum. Unfortunately, I do not remember who our platoon commander was at that time (I think Lt. Fuller) but he met us as we were returning to the company area. He called us over.

Then he said, "You are already here in Vietnam, but you could be in LBJ (Long Binh Jail) for the duration." As it turned out, our skipper had received a message from Division Headquarters and he had to listen to a rant that generally was reserved for Marines of a far lesser rank. Our Captain in turn "spoke" with our platoon commander. I am pretty sure that it probably drifted down hill and became more animated until it finally got to Lt. Fuller. As I say that because Lt. Fuller was about as animated as I ever saw him. While I was always on good terms with our lieutenant, he had us standing at attention as he read us the riot act. He explained to us that, not only were we in trouble for our "slovenly look," but he said that insubordination could very well be added to all the other potential charges. What saved us from "death" was twofold: (1) At the time the company was short-handed tank crewmen so that losing a tank commander or two was just not what he wanted; and (2) We were headed back out to Charlie-2 the next day and we'd be far away from the brass hats from Division.

Needless to say, I had the opportunity to once again travel to Long Binh Jail before the final few days left in my tour. That, however, is another tale altogether. ■

50 YEARS AGO - MAY 21ST MY LONGEST DAY

BY ROD HENDERSON (LT. FUZZ)

I joined the Marine Corps PLC program the summer of 1960 following high school graduation. Boot camp was at Quantico, VA the summers of '62 & '64. I graduated from college in '65 and was off to Officer Basic School the rest of '65, and then Tracked Vehicle School at Camp Del Mar in January & February '66. Arrived in RVN March 22nd and assigned to Co. A, 3rd Tank Bn. A number of new 2nd Lt's arrived during March and the battalion commander, Lt. Col. Raphael, had more Lt's than he knew what to do with! As such, he decided to spread us around to tank sections and let attrition weed out and determine who would be platoon leaders. Being that platoon-sized actions of tanks in Vietnam was not frequent, this worked quite well.

My station turned out to be Hill 22, southwest of DaNang. The first section of tanks I had from 1st Platoon, were TC'd by S/Sgt. Coco, and Cpl. Williams. Coco was the type that always addressed me as "Sir", but I knew his inner thoughts were, "Oh boy, we've got a training process to go through here!" I learned a lot from him and caught on quickly. My first baptism under fire came while he was the section leader. Toward the end of April, the infantry company, H/2/4, was redeployed along with the tank section and replaced by C/1/9 and another section of tanks from 1st Platoon. S/Sgt. Cosmo and Sgt. Banner



March '66 - 3rd Tank Bn - Put me in Coach, I'm ready to go! With a Tiger in my Tank!

were the TC's.

Hill 22 was an active area with seemingly daily enemy contact. The rice paddies were drying out, but tank movement was very limited. One of the infantry platoon leaders was 2nd Lt. Dan Brittain, who I knew from Basic School. I went out on a foot patrol with him - **one time** - he had the idea that in a firefight, line your troops up like British redcoats and advance! He must have missed our classes on "fire & maneuver." This did not go over well with his troops! Lt. Brittain was KIA on May 30, 1966.

In early May, the word came down that I had been 'chosen' to go to Japan,

the end of May, for a 6-week course to learn the Vietnamese language. I don't recall that I prayed about this, but I certainly asked, "Why me, Lord?" There are two things I have never been able to do in life - dance and learn a foreign language. I took French in high school, and after 6 weeks the only French I knew was *parlez vous francais?* Chevrolet coupe. The teacher told me she'd give me a passing grade if I agreed to drop the course. I went for it! One of the reasons I majored in engineering in college was a foreign language was NOT required for graduation! I did not want to go to language school, but didn't know how to talk my way out of it, nor did I have the 'cojones' to argue with the Colonel!

Then, on May 21st, I learned a very valuable lesson - even Marine 2nd Lt's were not immune to enemy fire! A squad size patrol from A/1/9 made contact with a large VC unit in the area of Dong Phu (3). We were about 2 miles north and got the word to proceed with infantry to relieve the patrol. The paddies were dry and we made good time getting to the area. I'll never forget the sight as we came around a tree line and there was the battle right in front of us. Opening fire with everything we had, the VC were emerging from spider holes, tree lines, and heading south!

Both tanks had full crews, so I rode on the back of Sgt. Banner's tank, with helmet plugged in and able >>

to see everything going on. The firing continued for 15-20 minutes, moving through tree lines pushing south.

From across the river, the VC fired a 57mm, hitting S/Sgt. Cosmo's tank. Cpl. Payne, the loader, was wounded



from this blast. He was a tall kid and had to have the loader's hatch open in order to stand up in the turret! We shared a common bond, as we were both country bumpkins, raised on hog farms. Sgt. Banner and I saw the back blast area and he sent several 90mm HE's after it. I thought we hit the gun and crew. In the course of a few more minutes, we continued around and thru hootches and tree lines. Numerous VC bodies were observed, and a neutral steer was performed over a spider hole, complete with occupant, the gun tube swinging thru a grass hootch before we backed off of the spider hole. I thought the battle had ended and started filling up the empty .50 cal. trays. All tankers hated the side mount .50's with only 50 rds per tray. As I was doing this, the next thing I realized was my left arm was numb. My first thought was, "Oh shit, I lost my arm." Looking at it, I saw that, yes, I had been hit, but no horrible exit wound and, well, that's not too bad! Sgt. Banner yelled at me, "Stay down, we just got hit!" I don't remember the explosion; a 57mm hit the front of the turret, causing minor damage, but no penetration. S/Sgt. Cosmo's tank returned fire and knocked out that 57mm.

A lull in the battle did occur and the infantry Lt. and I made the decision that I would stay with the wounded and fallen Marines and get them evacuated – Cpl. Payne had already been medivaced – while the rest would push on. Word was received that a Sparrowhawk was on its way and all would link up. I was left with 5 wounded and 3 fallen Marines. All of us wounded were able to move (hobble) and looked like a band of rag-wrapped warriors. We started gathering the fallen, preparing for that medivac when we came under fire from a few VC still in spider holes—one of which was entirely too close to me! For some reason, he was firing at the Marine farthest distance from him. I dropped behind a rice paddy dike, pulled out my .45 ACP and realized I had left Hill 22 with full magazines, but had forgotten to lock & load! I went to pull the slide back with my left hand and discovered I had no use of my hand – I couldn't grasp anything! It was at that moment I experienced sheer panic! Luckily for me, I was next to a fallen Marine. I grabbed his M-14, threw it on the dike and fired 3 times before the bolt stayed open – empty! That fallen Marine probably saved my life, and I don't even know his name. That thought has been with me ever since. I yelled to the closest grunt if he had more ammo. He answered, "Lieutenant – we thought we were getting medivaced, so we gave our full magazines to the Marines moving on. We've got just a magazine apiece." Time for strict fire control and ammo conservation. As the afternoon wore on, we let our adversaries know we were still there and thinking of them. There was a ditch about 50 yds to the west of us and we decided that was our best place to make a stand – crawling along paddy dikes wasn't going to work for long.

One by one, we started running for the ditch, zig-zagging as we went. I saw several rounds hit the dirt, but all made it to the ditch. When it was my turn to take off, I realized I had been hit

in the leg as well. The wound was not major – just lost some meat – but the leg ached. I have never been known to be a fast runner. In high school, there were guys who could run 100 yds faster than I could cover 50 yds! It is said that during times when the adrenaline is flowing, things appear to be in slow motion. So, take a slow runner, in slow motion, and we are talking creeping! I remember getting close to the ditch and jumping for it – I swear, I was still 10 ft from it when I landed! We took count of what we had, ammo, guns, no grenades, a .45 ACP with round chambered, safety on, and fixed bayonets for those that had them. We continued firing a round or two, ever so often. This seemed to work, although by this time I think the only thing both sides wanted was distance! I remember looking at the sun and wondering if I would see it set that evening.

About 6 PM, my 2 tanks and the infantry returned to our position. We learned that medivacs had been called for us, but the inserted Sparrowhawk had met with heavy fire. Many casualties and the choppers were rerouted to the south. We heard all the sounds of war – air support, jets & choppers, rockets, napalm, you name it, it was there. A couple more choppers were called for us.

I rode out with two other wounded Marines and two fallen Marines lying in front of us. We were taken to Charlie Med. Bn. in DaNang. Landing, the living got off the right side and the fallen Marines were taken off the left side. I still see that row of covered Marines on the edge of the landing pad. Inside the triage tent, it was like that scene in "Gone with the Wind" – sawhorses set up with stretchers, and doctors and nurses working double time to attend to us. Several years later, I saw the movie "MASH". I did not like it – in my mind they were making fun of the doctors and nurses that ran these units – nothing could be farther from the truth. My wounds were not serious, so I got to watch the operation of

a MASH type unit – wonderful people, life savers. By the time they got to me and removed the shrapnel, it was close to dark. I got to a cot in a tent with about 10 of us. One Marine had severe head wounds and wasn't expected to make it thru the night. On the cot next to me was a Vietnamese who had gotten shot in the ass. When they removed the bullet, they discovered it was a .45 ACP round. They weren't sure if he was friend or foe, so they put him in a plaster body cast, a stick across at his knees, and holes between his legs for obvious reasons. No chance of him running away in the night! I fell asleep that night, totally exhausted – I had never felt that way before or since. This truly was my "Longest Day."

Aftermath

Over 40 Marines were wounded during that encounter, including several from the Marine Air Wing. 9th Marines lost about 15 KIA – 13 were listed, but a couple more died of wounds. The VC lost over 100 – I don't think anyone knows for sure. It was a very bloody day! The kid that wasn't expected to make it thru the night awoke the next morning, sat up and told the doctor he felt OK, but had a headache. The doctor looked at him, smiled, and said, "I'll be damned; we didn't think you'd make it!" I Don't know what happened to the Vietnamese guy – only that he was really pissed, both figuratively and literally! General English came thru and presented us with our Purple Hearts that morning.

2nd Lt. Don Rohleder 'inherited' my tank section. Don and I had been in Officers Basic School and Tracked Vehicle School together. We called him the "Rommel" of our tank class. He was quiet, super attentive, never joking around. Whereas a lot of us were thinking about what young lovely we were going to meet at the Sandpiper in Laguna Beach for the \$2.95 prime rib & baked potato night special, Don was probably studying tank tactics. Unfortunately, Lt Rohleder was KIA on October 12, 1966. I can't look at "The Wall", see his name, and wonder if I hadn't been wounded, would that be my name. But then I realize, no, if I hadn't gotten wounded, I'd probably still be in Japan, trying to pass Vietnamese 101.

I spent a couple of weeks at the DaNang NSA hospital before it was decided to send me to the naval hospital on Guam. The doctor checked my arm, asked where I was from, and called someone saying he had another patient to send to Great Lakes Naval Hospital. He explained the nerve damage may or may not be repaired, but this 'tour of duty' was over. I spent another week in Guam, enjoying the island, the WWII history, and was there when the last Japanese soldier from WWII came out of the hills and surrendered! He was so ashamed of himself, but his relatives were elated!

Several months at the Great Lakes hospital, then a few months at the Marine Barracks and the arm & hand was back in working shape. It's still numb



Lt. Rohleder – March '66 – 3rd Tank Bn

from the elbow down, but have 90% use of it. I Put in to return to RVN and went back in November '66. I Met Cpl. Payne in Okinawa – he was recovering from a gunshot wound to his left hand – accidental discharge of his .45 ACP. He was on Lt. Rohleder's tank when he was KIA. I got assigned to Co. B, 1st Tank Bn. and the 3rd Herd – but that's another story! S/Sgt. Cosmo got promoted to 2nd Lt. and I met him in December '67 at 5th Tank Bn. in California. I ended up a company commander in 2nd Tank Bn. and had the recently promoted S/Sgt. Banner in my company. I served with some mighty fine Marines and have always been proud of that! ■

Photo from Vietnam - July '66



GENERAL REFLECTIONS

BY LTCOL EV. TUNGET, USMC (RET.)

I'm 81 years old now and seem to be spending more and more of my time reflecting on my life experiences, particularly the ones during the 23 years I spent on active duty from Pvt. to Lt-Col in the Marine Corps. A number of those Marine Corps experiences had to do with personal contact with general officers or "general officers to be." I know we all served under general officers but, while I'm not attempting to set myself apart, I feel I had some unique experiences which I treasure and some of which helped shape my career.

My first encounter with a "general to be" occurred after I completed OCS as a reserve officer and commenced training at The Basic School (TBS). My Staff Company Commander was Major William F. Doehler, a no-nonsense, strict disciplinarian determined to make us worthy leaders of Marines. One valuable lesson I learned from him came as a result of an early morning surprise inspection of our billeting areas. We were told to fall out on the road before the huts while Major Doehler "white-gloved" each of the platoon areas. That week, I was the student platoon leader of my platoon and I could tell that the major was not

pleased with his inspection of the first two huts. When he came to me he said, "Lieutenant, are you ready for inspection?" When I replied that we were not ready, he asked why not. I said, "Sir, we didn't have enough time." He looked me in the eyes and said, "Time, Lieutenant? You had all night!" I took away from that encounter the lesson that no matter how valid we might feel a personal excuse is, that very rarely excuses mission failure. Following his Nam tour as the CO of 3/3 and 3rd Division G-3, Major Doehler received his star.

In the late Spring of 1956, I went before the Regular Officer Screening Board at TBS. By this time, I had served two stints as the Student Company Commander and had received outstanding marks from Major Doehler. The senior member of the board was the CO of TBS. One of the other board members was LtCol Kenny Houghton (later MGen Houghton). My Staff Platoon Leader was Captain John Slagle who, though I wasn't aware of it at the time, had been Houghton's Company GySgt in his Recon Company in Korea, and had received a battlefield commission. The only question LtCol Houghton had for me was, "Who is your Staff Platoon Lead-

er?" When I told him Captain Slagle, he asked me what I thought of him. I said I felt he was a damn fine officer. LtCol Houghton said, "So do I. I have no further questions of this officer." (I was approved for and later received a regular commission.)

My next association with a "general to be" was in the 1st Marine Brigade, MCAS, Kaneohe, HI. I had been serving aboard the USS Tulare (AKA-112) as the Combat Cargo Officer (CCO) when I received orders to the brigade. For the first year, I was XO of Bravo Company, 1st Amtrac Bn.; and, when I was selected for promotion to captain, I was reassigned to Service Bn. Hdqs. as the S-4 and Asst. S-3. Service Bn. was an "umbrella" organization for the combat support and maintenance units for the brigade. The CO of Service Bn. was a real gentleman named Col. Jacob Glick. The Bn. XO was a major who seemed to always be walking around Bn. Hdqs. handing out advice, whether solicited or not. For some reason, he took me under his special tutelage and seemed to think I was the dimmest light bulb he had ever seen.

In the summer of 1961, the Brigade was to load aboard ships and head for Camp Pendleton for a month of field

training. Due to my experience as a CCO, I was appointed embarkation officer for Service Bn. to supervise the loading plans for our five ships. It soon became obvious to me that the five officers assigned for me to supervise had probably slept through a short embarkation course and didn't have the foggiest notion of what needed to be done. As a result, when time became of the essence, I simply told these officers to stay out of my way, do what I told them to do, and proceeded to finish the loading plans myself for all five ships. I didn't spend much time at home for a week or two. And, guess who kept bugging me all this time to make sure I knew that this was an important job?

Long story short, when we returned to Kaneohe, I was so burned out and fed up with the XO's constant harassment, I was ready to cash it all in. I saw our Adjutant and told him I was seriously considering submitting a letter of resignation. When he asked why, I really unloaded on him with all my frustrations regarding the XO. He told me to hold on a bit and a few days later I was called to Col. Glick's office. He told me I had done an outstanding job for him, especially considering the lack of qualified support I had, and that he was going to give me a fitness report to reflect the job well done, which he did. He also said that he felt I had a fine career ahead of me and to stay the course. Surprisingly, I never had the XO on my back after that, as well! Col. Glick did go on to get his star.

When I first assumed command of Bravo, 3rd Tanks, the CP was located just north of Marble Mountain. To our immediate south was a large cantonment area to temporarily house units awaiting further deployment. Bravo was blessed with a strong-back tent mess hall which I later learned was "moved" into our area by GySgt Jim "Cowboy" Smith and members of the 2nd Plt. from the cantonment area. In early '66, 2/4 was taken out of the Chu Lai area and brought north by

ship to Da Nang. Their shipping was not unloaded, and the battalion was placed in the cantonment area until Division decided where they were to be sent. The battalion had been in the field for months in Chu Lai with few creature comforts, including hot chow. The CO of 2/4 was LtCol Paul Xavier ("PX") Kelly, and the XO was Major Ernie DeFazio.

Shortly after they moved in, my company cook, Sgt. Gladden, came to me and said, "Skipper, if 2/4 can provide me with their cooks and sufficient mess men, I can draw rations from Navy Supply in Da Nang and feed them hot meals from our mess hall while they're here." I said, "You know you're talking about feeding over 1,000 men, don't you?" Long story short, I went over to 2/4's CP and presented the plan to LtCol Kelly and Maj. DeFazio, which they happily agreed to. For over a week, that mess hall never stopped rockin'! When 2/4 received orders to move north to the DMZ area, LtCol Kelly thanked me for our "hospitality" and wrote Sgt. Gladden up for a Navy Commendation Medal, which I forwarded to 3rd Tank Bn. Hdqs. with pleasure. By the way, LtCol Kelly became the Twenty-Eighth Commandant of the Marine Corps.

When I moved the company CP to Hill 55 and co-located with 1/9, a very warm and professionally satisfying relationship was born with the CO, LtCol Jones and his XO, Major Jim Day. On our side of the Song Thu Bon at that time, 1/9 was the most active unit of the 9th Marines and got the bulk of my tank support. Col. Edwin Simmons, CO of 9th Marines, moved his CP from the Da Nang area to Hill 55 also. Col. Simmons and I could never quite agree on why my tank park looked "trashy" with battle damaged tank parts lying around! He did make BG and retired to head the Marine Corps Museum at Quantico, VA. Lt-Col Jones was seriously wounded and evacuated, and Major Day assumed

command of 1/9. When 1st MarDiv moved into the Da Nang TAOR, Major Day and 1/9 moved north to Khe Sanh where they achieved fame as "The Walking Dead". Jim Day retired as a MGen.

In Sept '66, I was reassigned to 3rd Tank Bn. Hdqs. as the S-3. Due to Lt-Col Bill Corson's Civic Action Program and our increasingly effective tank operations on both sides of the Song Thu Bon, we had many dignitaries, military and civilian, coming to us on Hill 34 for briefings and "look sees". LtGen Walt escorted most of them. One day LtCol Corson told me to prepare a briefing on our tank operations as Gen. Walt was bringing an Army major general and his Chief of Staff (COS) to see what we were doing with armor in our area. The Army general commanded a mechanized division in the Delta area near Saigon. I had a full scale wall map of our TAOR in the operations shack overlaid with acetate, upon which we could highlight things of interest and show traffic ability for tank operations. I showed the general and his COS that we had learned we could operate tanks in areas "The Book" said we couldn't, such as through rice paddies and across rivers without fording gear.

At the end of the briefing, the Army general said to his COS, "George, do you think we have been fed a lot of bull-shit from our battalion commanders about not being able to operate in certain areas?" The COS said, "Yes, sir, and we'll look into that when we get home." I wisely stayed out of that conversation. It turns out that "George" was Colonel George S. Patton III, who later retired as MGen.

I had two encounters with LtGen Victor ("Brute") Krulak. The first was when he visited the 3rd Tank Bn. Hdqs. in late '66 while on an FMFPAC inspection trip. The officers were all gathered in our thatch hut "O Club" to greet the general. As he came down the line, we were >>

letter: "Cody is a perfect role model for other students. He does not allow his continued athletic success to interfere with his academic and personal responsibilities. I am continually amazed at his good manners, kind words, excellent attitude and work ethic that he carries with him each and every day."

Why I Believe We Should Honor America's Veterans

BY CODY RUDY

Growing up in Indiana, I have heard my grandfathers tell many stories about their time in Vietnam. Some were funny, but most were scary. Until recently, I never fully realized the impact the war still has on them today. As I prepare to go off to college and worry about making friends and taking exams, I think back about how they had just graduated from high school and were handed a weapon, given an assignment and told to go protect our country. The courage and bravery they showed is unimaginable to me! I am so proud that they were such an important part of my life and our country's history. Their actions taught me about being a true American. Before all of my sporting events, as the National Anthem was played, they removed their caps, stood a little taller, hand on their heart, eyes on the flag, and NEVER moving a muscle.

In recent years, I've seen more and more men, women, and children come up to my grandpa, who would be wearing his USMC Vietnam cap, and say, "Excuse me, sir, I want to thank you for your service." Grandpa always stands tall, shakes their hand and says, "You're welcome; it was an honor to fight for my country."

Unfortunately, our Vietnam Veterans were not honored when they returned home from the war. Some believe it is too late to thank these men who fought in a war some 50 years ago. I believe it's never too late to show our thanks and respect to our country's brave men who sacrificed so much so we can live in a free country and have the many rights that most take for granted. It is so important that we continue to listen and encourage our veterans to tell their stories so that we can share our heritage with our children and grandchildren to come.

Once a Marine, always a Marine!

Daniel Mulligan is the grandson of Lt. Col. Frank Slovik, residing in Hillsborough, North Carolina. He has received his school's Scholar Athlete Award all four years of school; been a member of the Beta Club (top 10% academically); played four years of basketball and was captain of his cross-country team. In conjunction with Ronald McDonald House, he was instrumental in raising \$3,000 last year for Christmas presents for needy children. He was also a High-



Daniel Mulligan

way Initiative Clean-up Leader.

Daniel's accumulative G.P.A. was 3.943. His class rank was #5 out of 315 graduating students. He received "A" grades or higher throughout high school in Honors Algebra II, pre-Calculus, Calculus, Chemistry and Statistics. His SAT score was above 2,000! Some comments from his two faculty reference letters: "One of the most intelligent students I've ever taught;" and, "One of the most amazing students I've ever encountered in all my years as an educator."

He plans to major in business/statistics at UNC, Chapel Hill, then attend graduate business school there.

Why We Should Honor America's Veterans

BY DANIEL MULLIGAN

"Let every nation know, whether it wishes us well or ill, that we shall pay any price, bear any burden, meet any hardship, support any friend, oppose any foe to assure the survival and the success of liberty." This quote by JFK makes one wonder who pays the price, bears the burden, meets the hardships, and assures the survival and success of liberty? The answer is our military veterans – those who have served and those who continue to do so. With this in mind, it is clear that honoring our veterans is one of the most important things we can do. All those who served the United States Armed Forces make a great sacrifice, and some the ultimate sacrifice in pursuit of these noble goals. They put our country and all those who live in it above themselves in the most selfless act possible. Risking their lives in service to their countrymen deserves to be lauded and never forgotten.

Both of my grandfathers served in the Armed Forces, one in the Army during World War II, and one in the Marines in Korea and Vietnam. I greatly admire both of these men for their sacrifices. They put themselves in danger to protect the people and ideals they loved. They are truly heroes for their sacrifices. Not only is the sacrifice made when our military engages in deployments and combat, but the sacrifices often continue when they return home. Many veterans suffer from PTSD, or were injured, or deal with other complications due to their service. So, not only is the sacrifice made when they go overseas, but also for years after as well.

There is a saying among veterans: "All gave some, some gave all." Serving in the United States Armed Forces is a choice that many brave Americans make each year and have since our country was founded. They agree to risk their lives, give their time, energy, sweat, and blood for their country. Veterans are the most patriotic and bravest people the country has to offer. They are willing to die to preserve the freedoms we enjoy every day. Leaving loved ones behind to protect these freedoms is a huge sacrifice. As a country and a people, we could not be what we are without those who have served, from the Revolutionary War, Civil War, the World Wars, to Vietnam, to modern day conflicts. The utmost respect and honor should be given to our veterans for all they have done for us: preserving our freedoms, making countless sacrifices, and keeping this great country safe. ■

Mr. Ron Dudek
Rt. #3-Box #1487
Lake Geneva, WI 53147

6-14-86

(414) 275-5427

This poem is dedicated to L./Cpl. Allen G. French, USMC, who died in Vietnam on 8-15-66.

Frenchy and I went all through boot camp together, we shared many laughs and good times. I heard a rumor that he was killed in Vietnam, but no confirmation. After seeing his name on the replica of the Vietnam Memorial here in Chicago, I knew then it was no rumor. It was Tuesday morning, 6-10-86 at 4 a.m., when I visited the Memorial with a light rain falling.

Seeing his name in white letters in the cold black of the night, inspired me to write this poem. We all gave so much and for little in return, but Frenchy paid the ultimate price.

Before I left the Memorial, I wiped the rain off of his name with my finger. Friday morning, I'll place this poem by his name before I march with my Vietnam Brothers in our parade.

Poem

Ron Dudek



6-13-86

DEDICATED TO L./CPL. ALLEN G. FRENCH, USMC
BORN: 10-15-46 DIED: 8-15-66

*Frenchy where did you go on that hot summer day,
To a country we all now know so far, far away.
We trained hard and we fought well,
And God only knows why they sent us to hell.
Just yesterday we were all together and now apart,
When I found out you died it broke my heart.
It was in 1966 when you left us that day,
You went back to the world in a different way.*

*Now twenty years later I found you again,
For you will always be my true friend.
Now you are at rest in the land of the free,
Your pictures and memories will always be a part of me.
As I march today I'll hold my head high,
In honor of all my Vietnam brothers in the sky.
So let us not forget this special day,
In time we will all be together in God's own way.*

By Cpl. Ron Dudek, USMC
Vietnam 1965, 1966, 1967 & 1968
6-13-86

V. A. News & Updates

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

Dealing With The VA

By John Morse—January 30, 2016

Unfortunately, there is no road map for navigating the VA claims process. Because of this, many veterans get frustrated and give up, do not appeal a denied claim, or follow up with an open claim. Veterans that have been successful with the VA claims process have often gotten advice from other vets that have been successful.

The first step for a vet wanting to win a VA claim is to find a VSO (Veterans Service Officer). These folks are experts that do not work for the VA. They are veterans advocates that work for the VFW, DAV, American Legion, etc. They can often be found in VA hospitals or county offices. They will ask for a copy of your DD-214/215.

The second step is to file a claim for a presumptive disease or a non-contestable issue like tinnitus. If the claim is not going to be automatically granted (presumptive or non-contestable), you need to have a condition that occurred in service and be able to prove it—such as gunshot wound residuals or PTSD; in short, an official diagnosis and a nexus.

A nexus or service connection is imperative. This might be a doctor's statement that states that your condition more likely than not was the result of your service. Perhaps the best advice is to immediately take any correspondence that you get from the VA directly to your VSO. Trying to respond to the VA yourself can be very discouraging. The VSO knows how to deal with VA correspondence.

How Veterans Unknowingly Disqualify Themselves

Veterans Beware! Some annuity sales people make persuasive annuity sales pitches to veterans and their families. The typical sales pitch advises a client to buy an irrevocable annuity that pays enough money each month to cover assisted-living facility fees or other living expenses after the client qualifies for the Aid and Attendance benefit. If the client's wealth is too high to qualify for the Aid and Attendance benefit, the salesperson will advise the client to give assets away to family members to reduce the client's net worth. This is not good advice.

Congress has been considering a rule change to disqualify Aid and Attendance benefit claimants for giving away assets for several years. After Congress changes the law, the annuity and gift strategy will no longer work. The big problem is that federal and state laws already punish older people for buying certain kinds of annuities and giving away assets.

For example, Medicaid pays nursing home and home

healthcare bills for people that cannot afford to pay those costs (the average monthly nursing home cost is more than \$5,900). In order to keep people from giving away their assets to speed up Medicaid eligibility, Medicaid law disqualifies claimants if they apply for Medicaid within five years after buying certain kinds of annuities or giving away assets.

The tragic problem that ignorant or deceptive "advisors" create for veterans is that the annuity and gift advice sacrifices critically important Medicaid eligibility for much less valuable Aid and Attendance benefits. For example, consider a veteran's investment of \$100,000 in an irrevocable annuity (the technical term is "immediate annuity"). The veteran may get around \$2,000 per month to pay a \$3,000 per month assisted-living bill. That strategy comes back to bite a veteran whose health declines enough to require nursing home care because the annuity investment may disqualify the veteran for Medicaid benefits to pay a \$6,500 per month nursing home bill.

Some of the annuity sales people described in this article make presentations to people at veterans organizations, senior centers, assisted-living facilities, and nursing homes. Just because they have glossy brochures and fancy slideshow presentations does not mean that they know all of the legal consequences of the investments that they promote.

Compensation Benefits for Aging Veterans

There are numerous veteran benefits available to aging veterans, including some recently implemented programs.

For many veterans, aging, along with changes in physical health and income, makes them eligible for benefits they previously didn't qualify for years ago. Here's some information about what's now available.

1. The Injured Veterans Grant Program offers as much as \$10,000 to those who sustained serious injuries during combat after 9/11. The Veterans Trust Fund is also available for various service-related causes.
2. Housing is another benefit. The Homeownership Assistance Grant for \$5,000 is available for those purchasing a home in many states (not all).
3. The Disabled Veteran's Homestead Tax Credit is a new benefit from 2014 that provides 100 percent exemption of property taxes for 100 percent disabled service-connected veterans and indemnity compensation recipients. The Property Tax Exemption will reduce a veteran's assessed home value for property tax purposes by \$1,850. To qualify, one must have service during war or 18 months of peacetime.

4. Many Veterans Residential Care Facilities have residential and nursing beds for honorably discharged veterans in many states. Ask your VSO for more information.
5. The Brandstad / Reynolds Scholarship Fund offers post-secondary scholarships to children of deceased military members who died during active status after 9/11. Children with a parent who was killed in action after 9/11 are eligible for up to \$11,844 per year in tuition assistance at a post-secondary institution through War Orphans Education Aid. There is also a smaller benefit for children with a parent who died prior to 9/11.
6. The National Guard Tuition Benefits for members in good standing.
7. Many states provide honorary high school diplomas to qualifying veterans who didn't graduate due to service. Again, see your VSO for details.
8. Lifetime hunting/fishing licenses at a reduced rate and specialty license plates are also available to eligible veterans.
9. Many of the veteran's organization such as VFW, American Legion, AMVETS, etc. often donate \$300-\$400 (depending on the length of membership, usually a minimum of five years, and paid up dues status), to the surviving spouse or nearest surviving relative. Many of these organizations will also have a group perform a military honors ceremony at the gravesite of the deceased veteran, with flag presentation to the next of kin.
10. The Brig. General William C. Doyle Memorial Cemetery in Wrightstown, New Jersey provides burial services at no cost to the family, along with military honors, to all veterans with legal residence in New Jersey, and who were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable or undesirable. Requests for burial may be made at the time of death through any funeral director.

VA Medical Foster Homes • Nursing Home Alternative

A Medical Foster Home (MFH) can serve as an alternative to a nursing home. It may be appropriate for Veterans who require nursing home care but prefer a non-institutional setting with fewer residents. MFHs are private homes in which a trained caregiver provides services to a few individuals. Some, but not all, residents are Veterans. VA inspects and approves all Medical Foster Homes. The Homes have a trained caregiver on duty 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. This caregiver can help the Veteran carry out activities of daily living, such as bathing and getting dressed. VA ensures that the caregiver is well trained to provide VA planned care. You will continue to receive Home Based Primary Care services in the Medical Foster Home. You may also receive the following services from the Medical Foster Home caregiver.

1. **For Veterans:**
 - Help with your activities of daily living (e.g., bathing and getting dressed)
 - Help taking your medications

- Some nursing assistance, if the caregiver is a registered nurse
- All of your meals
- Planned recreational and social activities

2. For Caregivers:

- Peace of mind when Home and Community Based Services can no longer meet the Veteran's needs at home
- A place to enjoy spending time with the Veteran

You can use the below Shared Decision Making (SDM) Worksheet to help you figure out what long term care services or settings may best meet your needs now or in the future. There's also a Caregiver Self-Assessment (CSA) worksheet. It can help your caregiver identify their own needs and decide how much support they can offer to you. Having this information from your caregiver, along with the involvement of your care team and social worker, will help you reach good long term care decisions.

- SDM: http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/guide/longtermcare/Shared_Decision_Making_Worksheet.pdf
- CSA: http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/guide/longtermcare/Caregiver_Self_Assessment.pdf

Your physician or other primary care provider can answer questions about your medical needs. Some important questions to talk about with your social worker and family include:

- How much assistance do I need for my activities of daily living (e.g., bathing and getting dressed)?
- What are my caregiver's needs?
- How much independence and privacy do I want?
- What sort of social interactions are important to me?
- How much can I afford to pay for care each month?

Medical Foster Homes are not provided or paid for by VA. To be eligible for a MFH you need to be enrolled in Home Based Primary Care, and a Home needs to be available. Your VA social worker or case manager can help you with eligibility guidelines for Home Based Primary Care and Medical Foster Home care. Also, with locating one and assist with making the arrangements. You will have to pay for the MFH yourself or through other insurance. The charge for a MFH is about \$1500 to \$3000 each month based on your income and the level of care you need. The specific cost is agreed upon ahead of time by you and the MFH caregiver. Talk with a VA social worker/case manager to find out if you are entitled to additional VA benefits that will help pay for a Medical Foster Home. If a Medical Foster Home seems right for you, your VA social worker can help you locate one and assist with making arrangements.

Also, at http://www.va.gov/GERIATRICAL/Guide/LongTermCare/Locate_Services.asp you can use the Locate Services and Resources page to help you locate Medical Foster Homes.

[Source: Geriatrics and Extended Care http://www.va.gov/geriatrics/guide/longtermcare/medical_foster_homes.asp# Feb 2016 ++] ■



Can you guess who this hard-charging Marine tanker is? When the photo taken? And where was it located?

The first person to contact John Wear at 215-794-9052 with the right three answers will have their name entered for a prize drawing to receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Last Issue Winner

On April 14, 2016 at 7:25 PM, I got a telephone call from John Maxwell correctly identifying the photo in the last issue as the Exterior Light Control Switch in the tank's driver compartment.

John's comment was, "This is the first time that I won anything in 40 years!"

And just so everyone knows, there were many later phone calls from members, some were also correct, and a number guessed that it was the "Master Switch" for our tanks and/or a "Magneto Control" for the M-51 retriever.



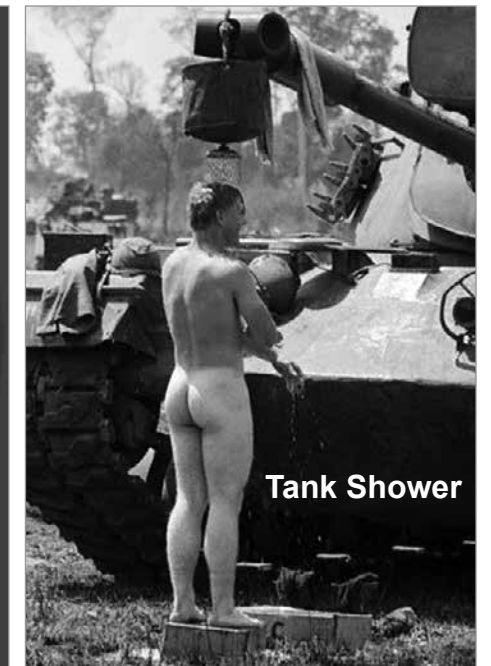
Some folks look better in Dress Blues than others!

TANKERS LAST RIDE

WHEN I WAS YOUNG, I RODE SO PROUD
ON A CHARIOT OF STEEL WITH GUN SO LOUD
I FOUGHT MY TANK ON FOREIGN LANDS
FROM JUNGLE BRUSH TO DESERT SANDS
I FOUGHT FOR NATIONS BIG AND SMALL
TO BRING THEM FREEDOM ONE AND ALL
NOW I AM OLD AND MY COURSE HAS RUN
I TAKE ONE LAST RIDE TO SEE IT DONE
I MOUNT MY TANK AND START IT'S PACK
KNOWING WELL I WILL NEVER COME BACK
I MAKE SP IN A CLOUD OF DUST
FOR I AM A TANKER AND THIS RIDE IS A MUST
WHEN I HIT RP MY RIDE WILL CEASE
AND I PRAY THE LORD WILL GRANT ME PEACE.

K.F. MARKHAM
MASTER GUNNER AND TANKER

USABOT.org



Wounded Ontos commander saves buddy during attack

By: Cpl. Nick Harder

DA NANG—A Marine Ontos commander survived three Viet Cong mortar attacks in one night and carried a wounded buddy to safety, during a skirmish six miles southwest of Da Nang last week.

Corporal Michael Giovinazzo, "A" Company, 1st Anti-tank Battalion, had taken his Ontos in to the command post for repairs where he spent the night along with another crew.

About 1:30 a.m., he and two crewmembers sleeping in a hut were jolted awake by nearby explosions of Viet Cong 81mm mortars. The men left the hut trying to reach their vehicles parked outside. Giovinazzo's departure from the building was greeted by an earth-shattering blast. An 81mm round knocked him back against the hut's metal wall.

Giovinazzo stumbled forward toward the vehicles with blood streaming from slight scalp wounds. One of the other Marines had already gained the driver's seat. The other was just entering the rear of the vehicle when another blast sent a jagged piece of shrapnel into his foot.

Seeing the other wounded Marine falling backward, Giovinazzo lifted him into the Ontos. He closed the double doors and ran back in a crouch to the second Ontos 20 feet away.

Ten minutes later the mortar shower stopped. After a few minutes of silence, broken only by distant artillery, Giovinazzo climbed out of his Ontos. He went to the other vehicle and called for his two buddies to seek better shelter in a nearby bunker.

The other injured Marine was helped from the rear hatch, hoisted on Giovinazzo's shoulder. The three made their way to the bunker.

Mortars began falling again and the three men were forced to stay down. The second mortar attack lasted five minutes. Marine artillery zeroed in on the mortars and silenced them.

Taking advantage of the lull in the fighting, Giovinazzo hoisted his wounded comrade on his shoulder and headed for the Medical Tent.

He then came under small arms fire as he made a 100-yard dash over exposed ground to the safety of the sick bay.

Giovinazzo is now back to duty. He shrugs off his actions that moonless night.

"Just in a day's work," he says.

MY EYES HAVE SEEN THINGS YOURS HAVE NOT.

MY HEART HAS BURNED IN WAYS YOURS CANNOT.

MY SOUL HAS BLED IN WAYS YOURS WILL NOT.

THE HAVE NOTS, CANNOTS AND THE WILL NOTS ARE THE SHEEP OF OUR NATION.

THEY SLEEP WITHOUT FEAR BECAUSE I AM THE WOLF THAT KEEPS THE OTHER WOLVES AT BAY.

I AM A UNITED STATES MARINE.



USMC Vietnam Tankers Association
5537 Lower Mountain Road • New Hope, PA 18938

Please check your address label. If the last two digits of “EXPIRES” is less than “16” then your 2016 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.

**All men are created equal...
& then some step up**



and become tankers