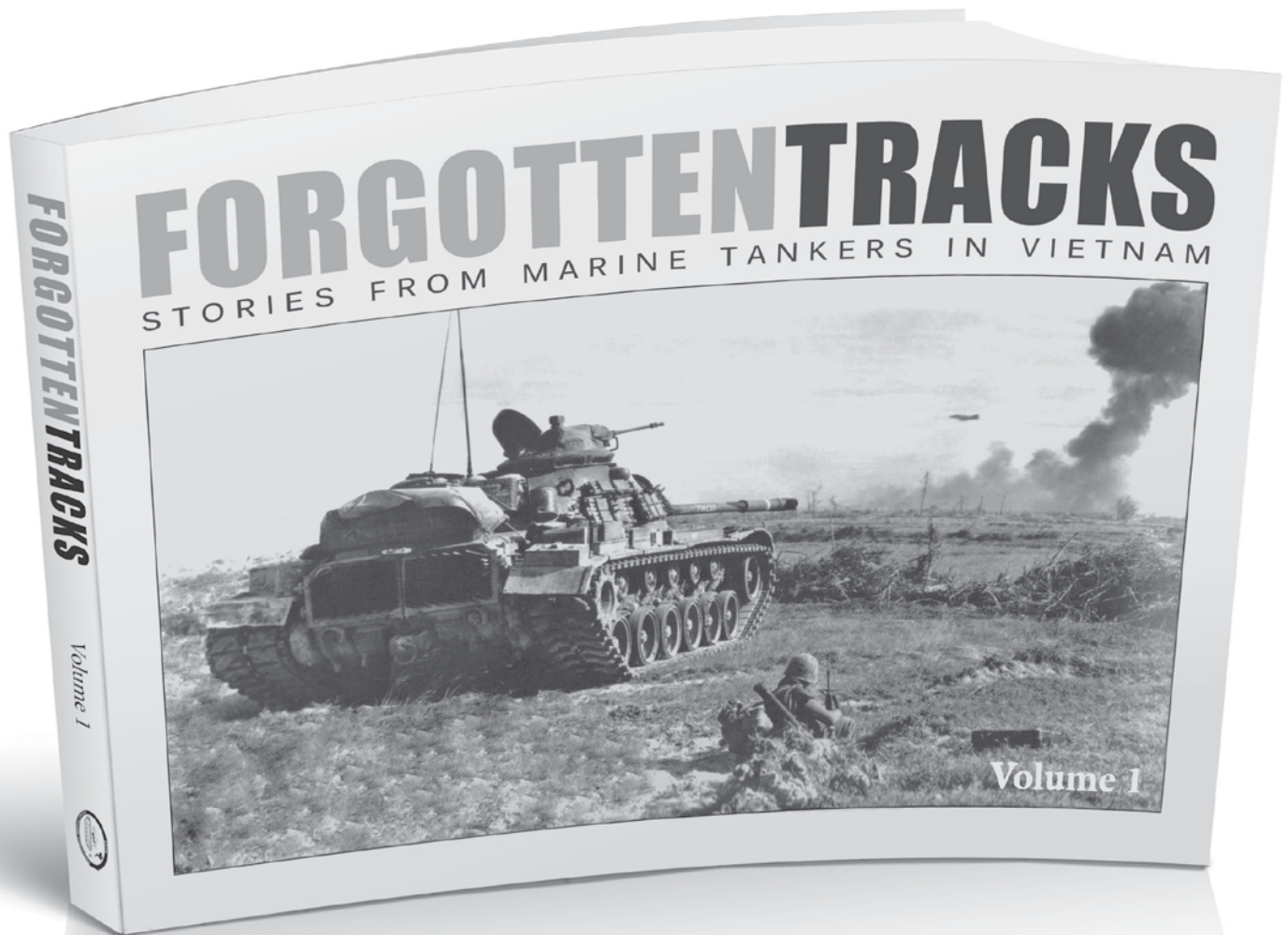




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Vietnam Tankers
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Letter from the President

"Without a witness, they just disappear."

These words about honor & respect for our dead appeared in the 2009 movie, *Taking Chance*. And they remind me of the importance of keeping alive the memoirs of our war dead. In other words, by bearing witness we are keeping alive the memory of our beloved comrades who died in Vietnam. "Remembrance" is one of the tripods that holds up the brotherhood of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association. It is imperative that each of us helps with this memorial. Need I remind you that if you die with your own story of your time in-country untold, there may be no witness to keep your memory alive. The longer that you wait to put it down on paper, the fuzzier it becomes. There is no day like today to start or complete your own story. We have a small staff of members who are part of the VTA History Project and they can help.

The next reunion will be in Washington, DC. The dates are October 28 to November 2, 2015. The contract with the reunion hotel has been signed. Inside of this issue the room reservation phone number is provided. The next issue of the Sponson Box we will plan to have the reunion activity schedule worked out and published. You can bet that we will spend some quality time at the National Museum of the Marine Corps and we will plan to have a wreath-laying ceremony at The Wall.

What I am the most thrilled about is featured on Page 2 of this issue. As the VTA History Project evolves, we keep adding meaningful substance to the program. The price of our first book reflects almost to the dime what it cost us to produce it. There is virtually no profit being made on the project with the idea that a more affordable book should be enjoyed by more of the membership. And if we have an over whelming response, you can bet that there will be more volumes of our history forthcoming. The second thrilling announcement is that we are now set up to take credit cards for the book on the VTA website. The details are on the ad on Page 2.

Semper Fidelis,

John

"A society grows great when old men plant trees whose shade they know they shall never sit in."

An old Greek proverb



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MOS: 9999

DOB: 8/24/52

Wife: Phyllis

Recruited by: Paul Tate

Bartashus, Vincent P.

18 Edgewood Drive
Mechanicsburg, PA 17055-2771

Phone: 707-766-1364

Email: DV14147@verizon.net

A Co, 3rd Tanks, '65 – '66

MOS: 1811

DOB: 8/7/44

Wife: Nancy

Recruited by: Kent Quinter

Doty, Don S.

9 Stonehaven Drive
Bella Vista, AR 72715-5570
Phone: 479-876-1946

Email: Don1213@att.net

A & C Co, 1st & 3rd Tanks, '65 – '66

MOS: 0311/1811

DOB: 12/13/44

Wife: Linda

Recruited by: Dick Carey

Hayes, Thomas J.

11 Wilson Terrace
Waldwick, NJ 07463-1232
Phone: (201) 652-5264

Email: dotdash48@aol.com

C Co, 3rd Tanks, '67 – '68

MOS: 0141

DOB: 9/28/47

Wife: Dorothy

Recruited by: Jim Langford

McCauley, John D.

W213 N16723 Glen Brooke Dr
Jackson, WI 53037-9489

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C Co, 3rd ATs, 1962

MOS: 3531 – 0311

DOB: 2/14/43

Wife: Lorraine

Recruited by: John Wear

Ponder, Michael H.

4045 S Buffalo Drive, A101-283
Las Vegas, NV 89147
Phone: 859-393-7859

Email: mikehponder@yahoo.com

B Co, 3rd AT Bn, '66

B Co, 3rd Tank Bn, '67

MOS: 1802

DOB: 6/19/43

Recruited by: VTA Website

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MOS: 2143

DOB: 1/20/47

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MOS: 1802

DOB: 9/3/43

Wife: Pamela

Recruited by: Dick Carey

Williams, Larry L.

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Weatherford, OK 73096-4114
Phone: 580-774-9177

Email: larrylw4782@gmail.com

US Army "sky duster" crewman

Attached to Task Force Robbie, '68

DOB: 8/26/47

Wife: Cara

Recruited by: John Wear

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Email: jtysonmm90@gmail.com

Steve Hydinger

Bravo, Co, 1st Tank Bn

Letter to the Editor

Moving On

I'm sure I have notified you of my wife Elsie's passing on January 26th. The families had a private graveside service at the Greenlawn cemetery in Bakersfield, CA. This has been a family burial facility and where Elsie wanted to be laid to rest. She was born in Canada but grew up in Bakersfield.

I'm relocating to CA on May 23rd of this year, where I have been invited to stay with my daughter and son-in-law until and if I decide to do something different. I will of course maintain my memberships with you all but don't as yet have a new address to give out. I'll be getting a PO Box for my mail. I will be living in Inyokern, CA, which is a small "bedroom" community near the Naval Weapons Center at China Lake, CA.

The old saying that "What goes around, comes around" would seem to apply in my moving plan. I started out my meaningful adult life as a Marine back in 1951 when I was first stationed at the then Naval Ordnance Test Station (NOTS), China Lake, CA. I feel certain that this is the area where I will spend my last days as well. I will be centrally located to be able to spend a lot of quality time with my children and grandchildren.

In the last few months, I have attended the funeral services of my son, David, and my beloved wife, Elsie. You are not supposed to outlive your children and I also would have loved to spend more years with Elsie. That being said, the next funeral in my family I want to attend is my own!

Thanks for all the work you do to maintain the camaraderie of our Association...

Ev Tunget

Shoreline, WA

Phone: (206) 546-3206

Thanks for the Flowers

Dear John: This sounds like a letter we all feared in Nam! I would like to thank our wonderful tankers for the flowers I received after my shoulder replacement surgery; they were truly beautiful! Fresh flowers in Michigan in February reminded me that spring isn't too far away. All we have to do is melt the remaining snow that covers my yard. With sincere gratitude,

Craig Newberry

Linden, MI

Phone: (810) 735-4863

Memorial Day 2014

Today, Millicent and I will be visiting the grave sites of Dale Otto, KIA May 14, 1967 (which was Mothers Day) at Gio Linh, and Miles Jensen, KIA July 27, 1967 at Con Thien.

As you know, RB (English) was our Platoon Sergeant and I was a Corporal in the platoon at the time of their deaths. I had the pleasure of meeting both of their mothers when I was the

Sergeant Major of the Recruiting Command here in Minnesota back in the late 80's. I visit the Marines' resting places every year around Memorial Day.

Bill "JJ" Carroll

Stillwater, MN

Phone: (651) 592-1121

Born to be a Tanker?

My father (God rest his soul) was a 30-year career Air Force officer. My family lived all over the world, but he was assigned to three different jobs in the Washington, DC, area which afforded my family to live in the same house for six years. And that is something that is pretty much unheard of for a military family. As many of us know, most military families seem to have a PCS (read: Permanent Change of Station) every two or three years and those moves are normally thousands of miles apart. While growing up over those six years in the Washington, D.C. area, my family was able to attend all sorts of military appreciation events and live shows of military might which took place all over the geographical area. I vividly recall one event where my father took me to Ft. Meyer for one of the Armed Forces Day events when I was probably six or seven years old. I was allowed to climb into the turret of an old M-1 Sherman tank and then they drove the tank around in a field. During that moment in time, I was hooked at the thought of me becoming a tanker!

Fast forward to 1966 and USMC boot camp Platoon #3306 sitting on the bleachers during a "school house" session at Edson Rifle Range on Camp Pendleton. We were facing the Pacific Ocean and out along the beach there were several tracked vehicles from the Schools Battalion traveling up and down the beach. I leaned over to one of my recruit buddies and said, "I'm going to be a tanker." He gave me 'that look' and said, "In your fuckin' dreams!"

So on our next to the last week of boot camp, during the period of time between evening chow and lights out, the Senior DI called all of the "Two Year Pukes" out on to the company street. By the by, back during the Vietnam War, the USMC offered a two year enlistment which I had signed up for "just to see what the USMC was like." After he called us out and we were assembled, the Sr. DI announced that all of us "short timers" would be going to the grunts and would be sent directly to "VIET-fuckin'-NAM!" He explained further that this drastic move would allow Uncle Sam to be able to get his money's worth for training us to be mad dog killers. I raised my hand for permission to speak and when it was granted I asked, "How can the private remedy this situation?"

He said, "Gimme a year and you can have any MOS you want."

>>

So I then "shipped over" (adding a year to my original two-year enlistment) in order to fulfill my destiny that had been struck in stone back at Ft. Meyer inside of an old Sherman tank's turret.

John Wear
New Hope, PA
Phone: (215) 794-9052

Sent to me by a Vietnam Marine Grunt and a Brother

On the occasion marking the 203rd Birthday of the U.S. Marine Corps, 1978, onboard Camp LeJeune, N.C. and in the presence of several thousand Marines and their Ladies, General Louis H. Wilson, then Commandant of the Marine Corps, arose to deliver his long awaited address to the troops.

He approached the dais, nodded to the Commanding Generals of the Base, FSSG and the Division. He then proceeded to explain to the captive masses that he would be short on words that night. Then he turned to his bride, took a glass, and amid absolute DEAD SILENCE, offered this Toast and promptly SAT DOWN!

"LOVE"

*"The wonderful love of a beautiful maid,
The love of a staunch, true man,
The love of a baby, unafraid,
Have existed since time began.
But the greatest of loves,
The quintessence of loves,
Even greater than that of a mother,
Is the tender, passionate, infinite love,
Of one drunken Marine for another."*

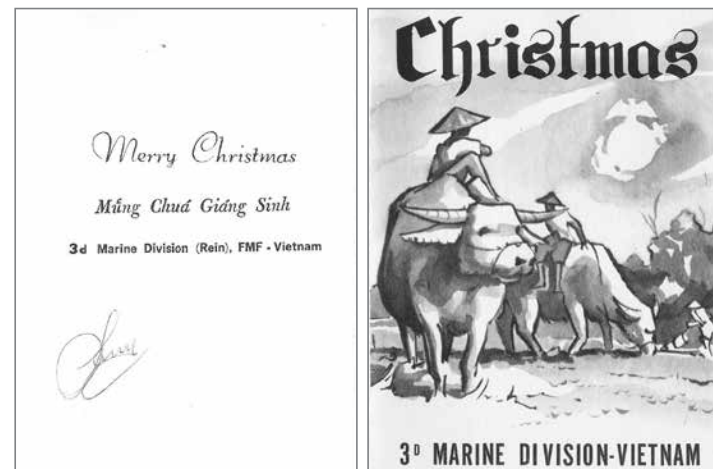
The WHOOPIN' and HOLLERIN' went on for a good 10 minutes!

This has to be the greatest toast ever offered to our fellow Marines, our Corps, and to love!

Happy Birthday Marines...

Tommy Fenerty, Foxtrot, 2/9
And proud Honorary Member of the USMC VTA
Trevose, PA
Phone: (215) 275-0228

Found in a Footlocker



I am an (associate) member of the USMC Tankers Assoc. I keep my subscription to the Sponson Box to honor and remember our USMC Tankers. I came across this 1967 Christmas Card from Vietnam in some of the things I have been going through from my late husband Larry Don Staats, C. Co., 3rd Tank Battalion, 3rd Marine Division; USMC Serial #2238312, Vietnam 66-67, MOS 1811. I thought you may be able to use this in some way on your website or in an issue of The Sponson Box. Thank you for all the hard work and in helping me to understand what all of you went through during Vietnam and in the years after.

With love and respect,
Kristine Murdock
krissym2@hotmail.com

You May Have Missed This USO Show



As the guy who took the picture, I am pretty sure she was part of the USO tour in 1970 that was run by Johnny Grant out of LA. He was like Bob Hope but not quite as big of a show. Notice there are no weapons in the photo. It was taken at LZ English during a one hour stop by the USO folks. As I recall, the guy, Grant, was telling jokes while 4 or 5 of the cuties wandered among the troops who surrounded the temporary stage. After my 8 months of field duty, I was the Brigade Special Services Officer, and somebody had to escort the USO folks and Doughnut Dollies... it was a real tough duty! Of note, every location in the Brigade we had visited, the troops acted with respect. At the end of the day, the USO folks got in a helo and went to some other unit.

Mike Rogers
Posted on Facebook

Tough Training Works

I was a Marine recruit in 1967. The first night in boot camp, I got out of the shower before the command to exit. I was whipped bloody with a pistol belt. My nose was later broken with the butt of an M14 rifle and my teeth knocked out on another occasion. That was the Marine Corps way of preparing me for combat in Vietnam. It did not traumatize me, and I was later grateful for it. I later became an officer in the U.S. Navy.

I was amazed at how the vaunted units were treated like babies and acted the same. We are now [more] interested in a person's computer and social skills than occupational or, God help us, combat skills. I have served in multiple wars and have watched the medals-for-all and the Boy Scout badge mentality run the enlisted and officer promotion boards.

When I went into the Marines, the officers and senior enlisted were World War II leaders. In 30 years in the Navy, I was working with computer geeks. Maybe this is why there are two million claims at the Department of Veterans Affairs now. If you hurt your pinky, it's time you get VA compensation. Full speed ahead to the Third World Navy.

Cmdr Gilbert Black, U.S. Navy (Ret.)
Columbus, OH
From "Letters" at Marine Corps Times

Editor's Note: There was a message going around with several images of this incredible "mess hall" at the Camp Pendleton rifle range. It looked like a five star restaurant with many indoor grills and natural stone floors, etc. There was a reply written by an "Old Salt" who stated:

I'm sure improvements have been made since the time that I served at good old Camp Los Flores with HQ, 1st Tank Bn., which was before we all deployed en mass to Vietnam.

Edson Range was a very modern facility for me back in the early 1960's. When I went to the range for the first time while a boot at MCRD San Diego, we went to Camp Mathews (near Torrey Pines) to qualify. That was my introduction to the U.S. Rifle, .30 Cal. M-1.

The range at Camp Mathews was part of a larger facility then known then as Camp Elliot. The land is now part of which now is known as MCAS Miramar.

Two years ago, I was on my way to Laughlin, NV for the Arizona Fire District Assn. Meetings. Not having been back to 29 Palms in over 30 years, I took the time and detoured to 29 Palms. I could not believe the place. First I was just amazed at the build-up. The base is like a modern city in the middle of the desert; same for the civilian town as well. I had one hell of a time finding the tank battalion area. My only hint was the very old M-4 Sherman parked in front of Bn. HQ. I was warmly welcomed by the SgtMaj. and Bn. XO. After a conversation with both the SgtMaj and Bn. XO, I was escorted to "A" Co., my last command. Back then, A. B. Diggs was CO of "A" Co. When I mentioned A. B. Diggs, the company commander of "A" Co. asked, "Are You referring to Col. Diggs?"

I replied, "Affirmative."

The skipper then asked, "How old are you?"

When I told him, "I first went to sea with Capt. Noah back in 0001." The entire office staff busted a gut laughing. Now, mind you, I still hadn't found the tank park yet.

Finally, the Platoon Sgt. for 2d. Platoon, my old Platoon, took me in tow and we went to the tank park. My barn in back of the house here in AZ should look this good. But that's a story for another time.

By the way, if you want to hear a REAL SEA STORY, ask Emit Nation about the time he took his tank down "Stage Coach Road" on the far side of Edson area over into in what used to be Chappo Flats near 24 Area at Pendleton. Some time before I leave this planet, I plan to return to Camp Pendleton one last time.

Art Nash
Tucson, AZ

Chu Lai, Vietnam (Then) and Brenham, Texas (Now)



John Lang and Gene "Doc" Hackemack

"Smoke Room" Alpha 1970

Art Nash sent me this photo that he said was taken at Camp Pendleton right after 1st Tanks got back from Vietnam. Art

added: "I don't recall (these three) men from back then. All I can recall are just a few of the "Old Heads" like: Joe McConville,



Emmet Nation, "Cowboy" Smith, Ed Chang, R. L. Thompson."

He Would Not Change a Thing!

On the weekends when I ride my motorcycle with my son, I travel to his house in Escondido, California via Interstate 5. It takes me through Camp Pendleton, past the north gate at Basilone Road, further south past the gate at Las Puglas Road, which was closed when I was stationed there. Camp Las Pulgas was where we slept, and Camp Las Flores was the tank park. It was five miles between the two. I remember hiking to Las Flores one payday morning, 5 miles, and it took us 60 minutes. Just before you reach Las Flores you can see the beach on the western side of I-5, this is the beach where I drove my tank off a Mike boat and landed on the beach, early in 1965. I had visions of a flooding tank, and me sinking to the bottom. Still further south is Edson Range, or Stuart Mesa Rifle Range as it was called when I was there. In 1965 it was brand new. I remember lying in the rack at night and hearing the big rigs passing on the freeway--a lonely sound. Just beyond Edson is the Main Side Gate and Oceanside Harbor with a nice view of the pounding surf. Just north of the Main Side Gate there is a high rise building going up. I have still not learned what it is. It appears to be on the base, so I'm assuming a new headquarters building? You can also see two new structures at Edson Range, and Camp Las Flores looks like a resort city. Much nicer than the 1940's Quonset huts of our day.

It is with bitter sweet memories when I pass through Camp Pendleton... sweet because of the good times and good friends from those days. Not a lot of people can say they learned to drive a 52-ton

tank when they were 18 years old. Some of the people I met at Camp Pendleton are still my friends today... Bitter because I am no longer the 18 year old of 1965. Just to have some of my hair and stamina back would be nice. Would I change anything? Not much!

John Hunter
B Co, 1st & 3rd Tank Battalion
RVN 1965-1966

I'm Planning on Seeing You in DC

I haven't been able to make it for several of the past reunions. There have been medical reasons (my heart) and my oldest granddaughter got married. As much as I love you guys, she took 1st place. My wife and I are already making plans for a trip to DC in 2015. God willing, we will be there.

Huey Ward
Amity, AR
Phone: (870) 342-6204

Feed It In Backwards

I was in 3/67 Basic School right behind you. After Tank Orientation at Camp Del Mar, I was assigned to 1st Plt, Bravo Company, 2nd Tank Battalion at LeJeune. We had trouble with the .50 cal. turret mounted machine gun jamming on us in the M48-A1 tanks. We had all kinds of technicians from the factory out, but none could figure out what was wrong. Finally my Platoon Sergeant, GySgt Harrington, figured out the problem. The .50 cal. was laying on its side in the mount with the normal feeding slot pointing down. Everything was backwards. We merely had to unload the ammo and feed it in backwards. The gun worked beautifully. The only problem was that we had to repack all the ammunition in the ammo cans. I had that platoon for over a year and we seemed to be assigned out in support continuously.

Ed Dodd
1st Lt USMC (forever)
From the Sgt Grit's Newsletter

The Three Servicemen



Sculptor Frederick Hart (second from right) poses in front of "The Three Servicemen" statue with his models in the early 1980s. The models from left to right: Guillermo Smith De Perez, Cpl James Connell, the artist, Cpl Terrance Green. **Rodney Sherill and Scotty Dillingham also posed for the African American service member but they are not pictured.

USMC Tattoo Saved A Marine's Arm

Here's a story for you as to how a USMC Tattoo saved a severely wounded Marine's arm and most likely his life.

Having been severely injured by an IED while on patrol, this young U.S. Marine was transported to a field hospital where Doctors amputated his leg. Turning to his badly mangled arm which was also being prepped for amputation, the surgeon noticed the USMC tattoo on his injured arm. I am told that the surgeon, having been a former Navy Corpsmen serving Marines in combat, the Doctor announced "This man is a Marine and by God we are going to do everything possible to save this man's arm." The Marine survived his wounds, mastered his disability, overcame alcoholism and depression, became a competitive runner, actor and model. He has spoken at many Veteran groups and has become an inspiration for many wounded veterans.

Several years later the Devil Dogs of The Marine Corps League Detachment 906 in Prescott, AZ, with the donations and contributions of material and labor by local individuals and businesses, constructed a \$250,000 Multi-Sports Court at the V.A. Hospital in Prescott for the use by all veterans. Based on the generosity of the citizens, a few bucks were left in the budget which allowed the funding of a life-size bronze sculpture showing a winning handicapped runner victoriously crossing the finish line. Needing a model, the aforementioned Marine's name came up, and when asked, the Marine amputee dropped his busy schedule of public appearances and flew in from L.A. to Prescott to pose for the sculpture; which as matter of fact, the sculptor is another Marine veteran who, once again, dropped all of his other projects, worked around the clock, and turned out the larger than life-size sculpture in a matter of weeks, rather than months, in order to meet the ribbon cutting date for the Sports Court. (Ergo, if you have a problem, call for the U.S. Marines) The sculptor included the USMC on the sculptures' arm.

The story gets better. Miniatures of this sculpture were auctioned off for several thousands of dollars by veterans groups to benefit Marines Helping Marines. On several occasions, the winning bidder has donated the sculpture back to the veterans group to be again auctioned. I am told in one case the miniature is in its fourth auction and to date has raised many thousands of dollars for wounded Marines.

Bob Galloway
Sgt 3/7/1 FMF '56-'59
From the Sgt Grit newsletter.

This past April 30th marked the 39th anniversary of the end of the Vietnam War (in 1975). Rick Lewis wrote about being at Camp Pendleton as the thousands of Vietnamese war refugees arrived in the CONUS:

I was at 1st TK BN at Camp Pendleton then and we set up hundreds of GP tents, heads, and showers. I was put in charge of reviewing documents, issuing and signing ID cards. I know I signed ID for NVA. They were the ones that would never look you in the eye when being interviewed. The CIA and FBI was present there and I turned them over to them. I was told by one

CIA that one was a ranking officer in the NVA. I also remember all the gold these people had brought with them. There was even a bank set up to exchange the gold and to set up accounts. Real estate agents would pick them up and show them houses. Within one month it was all done and everything packed up.

Rick

Korean War Marine Tankers



On left, driver PFC Jackson and right, asst. driver/bow gunner Cpl. Cizar.

I was wounded on June 3, 1951, and turned myself in on June 5. It was Chicom bullet fragments in my left eye. I was treated on U.S. Hospital Ship Haven and returned to duty July 4. We had a brand new USMCR Sgt. TC; I was Cpl. gunner on A-34, on patrol recon by fire. Gook MG rounds splattered on turret, peppered the new loader standing in his hatch. The TC had been out of the turret to fire the .50 cal. Buttoned up, I blasted the hell of their hill positions. TC was worried a spent .50 cal. would jam his ability to rotate. I warned him not to go out, that the gook MG had us zeroed in. He ignored me, jumped out, and the gook let him gain confidence that he was safe. Just as he jumped back into the TC cupola, a MG burst cut off all of his fingers on his left hand. I had hollered at him to get his ass back in, when that burst hit I had turned and was looking up at him, bullet fragments simultaneously hit me in the face and peppered the radio casing. The loader tended to him to stop the bleeding. I wiped my face

(Continued on page PB)

Book Review



Review by Bing West, published November 24, 2013

For the past decade, the public has ranked the Marines as the most prestigious service by a wide margin. After serving one tour of duty in the Corps, you are considered a Marine for life and expected to conduct yourself accordingly. Why? Because the commandant of the Marine Corps says so, that's why... and once a Marine, always a Marine.

In his new book, Aaron B. O'Connell investigates how an organization averaging 180,000 active members has succeeded in attracting such

intergenerational fealty and admiration. Covering the period from 1940 to 1965, "Underdogs" is a scholarly work based on a decade of research. An assistant professor at the U.S. Naval Academy, O'Connell enlivens his academic framework with sharp anecdotes and assertive personalities. He reaches several conclusions about the Marine Corps, some old and some refreshingly new.

He begins by describing the old, well-known essence of the Marine image: heroism in combat. Every Marine is a rifleman, and you do only one thing with a rifle. There are no doctors or chaplains in the Corps, only shooters. They pay a cost for their aggressiveness. In World Wars I and II, Korea, Vietnam, Iraq and Afghanistan, the Marines absorbed proportionately heavier casualties than the U.S. Army and other units such as the Special Operations Command. In response, Marines forged a powerful self-identity that O'Connell calls a narrative of exceptionalism. While Army draftees in World War II and Korea saw themselves as citizens first and soldiers by necessity, the Marines held themselves apart from society. One advertising slogan summed up that attitude: "We don't promise you a rose garden."

The Marine motto was the "first to fight" — and maybe to die. To cope with that loss of life and limb, they embraced an ethos that transcended any one life or any one time. O'Connell refers to this tradition as "the Marine belief in a timeless community of the living and the dead." That community's most famous members — like Smedley Butler, John Basilone, Chesty Puller and Jim Mattis — shared the trait of boldness in battle and defiance of death. Starting in boot camp, a Marine learned about a heritage two centuries in the making.

The tradition persists today. Last year, for instance, when a string of improvised explosive devices killed and maimed six Marines in southern Afghanistan, the company commander exhorted his men to remember the hardships borne by that same company in Korea, 61 years earlier. The next day, the Marines again attacked, some with waiting tourniquets strapped to their legs so they could staunch the bleeding when the next IED scythed through their ranks.

That Spartan code of the Marines is well-known; what O'Connell adds is a new insight. He argues that for several decades in the mid-20th century, the Marines were an organizational underdog, fighting for survival against the U.S. Army and the White House. The Marine Corps risked being disbanded after World War II. In the view of Army generals, there was no

need for two land forces; the Marines should revert to their 18th-century mission as guards on board Navy ships. Both President Truman, who had proudly served in the U.S. Army, and President (and former Army General) Eisenhower saw merit in a small or nonexistent Marine Corps. In response, the Marines sought allies in the public and in Congress. O'Connell weaves a tale of intrigue, describing how the Corps survived the bureaucratic wars in Washington by engaging in guerrilla politics. They organized what was called the Chowder Society, an unofficial, clandestine cabal of officers that leaked budgetary and organizational plans from the Pentagon and the White House to the Congress; some of the officers' actions were so outrageous that a secretary of defense like Robert Gates would have sacked a bevy of Marine generals. But the generals successfully conducted a bureaucratic insurgency, never confirming their insubordination to the public. Knowing funding was tight, the Marines made a virtue of doing with less, a parsimony that won widespread approval on Capital Hill. The Marines also enlisted journalists and Hollywood to tell their stories. John Wayne, playing Sgt. Stryker in "Sands of Iwo Jima," received plenty of help from script-writing Marines.

The Marines' desperation, brought on by the realization that their service was the most likely to be eliminated, spurred innovation. After World War II, the Corps opposed the national strategy of tactical nuclear war and was determined to place infantry battalions on ships, ready to land at a moment's notice as a "force in readiness." In 1956, when England, France and Israel seized the Suez Canal, President Eisenhower sent a Marine battalion ashore the next day at Alexandria, to protect Americans and signal his anger at our allies. Two years later, as the Lebanese government tottered, Eisenhower sent 6,000 Marines ashore to stabilize the situation. During the Cuban Missile Crisis in 1962, 25,000 Marines were afloat in less than two weeks, poised to invade.

By 1965, the Marines had established themselves in the minds of the public and the Congress as the "can do" service, asking for little and delivering more. Gradually, the antagonism with the executive branch and inside the Pentagon waned. As the war in Vietnam escalated, political furor over the unpopular war overwhelmed any reservations inside the Pentagon about the Marines as a duplicative land army. Marines fought hard; that was reason enough to retain the underdog.

After Vietnam, American attitudes about war changed dramatically, because our volunteer military comprised only about 2 percent of our youths. The public, with few relatives involved, moved to the sidelines. War became a spectator sport, in which all-star teams were cheered. Our commandos — the Special Operations Command — captured the public's imagination. The small SEAL team that killed Osama bin Laden garnered more publicity than the 100,000 soldiers and Marines who toiled in Afghanistan.

Today's Marine Corps is no longer the underdog, scrapping for its existence. Marines are now part of an integrated military machine, where the four services perform all tasks jointly. Alongside the Army, the Marines are cutting back their numbers and funding as we pull out of the war in Afghanistan. O'Connell concludes that the Marine Corps, even as its size diminishes, will retain "an ideology of elitism, superiority, and paranoia . . . which shares some similarities with narratives of American exceptionalism and keeps the Marines forever on the attack."

Bing West served as a Marine in Vietnam. He is co-author with Medal of Honor recipient Sgt. Dakota Meyer of "Into the Fire: A Firsthand Account of the Most Extraordinary Battle of the Afghanistan War."

UNDERDOGS: The Making of the Modern Marine Corps, O'Connell, Aaron B., Harvard Univ., 381 pp., \$29.95

© The Washington Post Company



Can you guess what the vehicle is in this photo?

The first person to contact John Wear at (215) 794-9052 with the right answer will receive a yet un-named mediocre prize.

GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Last Issue Winner

On Wednesday, May 14, 2014 at 11:12 p.m., Milo Plank correctly identified **Jerry White**. This photo was taken at Hill #55 by Lee Johnson in May 1966 at Bravo Co., 3rd Tank Bn. His Tank Commander was Sgt. Reed and the Bravo Co. CO was Capt. E.V. Tunget.



To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

From Leatherneck Magazine:

Col. Bruce Martin "Mac" MacLaren, USMC (ret)



Colonel, USMC, 82, died February 26, 2014. He was a graduate of North Providence High School in Rhode Island and received his bachelor's degree from Norwich University in Vermont and his master's degree from the University of Maine. Col.

MacLaren served 30 years in the Marine Corps, including a tour in Vietnam where he was awarded the Bronze Star. He was the Executive Officer of the 3rd Tank Battalion in Vietnam. The Colonel resided in Belfast, ME from 1984 until 2006. While in Belfast, he participated on the Water Aquifer Committee, the Comprehensive Planning Committee, Ward 1 City Councilman, Literacy Volunteers, Belfast City Charter Commission, Waldo County Law Enforcement Agency, American Legion, Marine Corps League, MSAD #34 School Drop Out Committee, as well as a substitute teacher for the Belfast School District. He and his grandson, Cole McLaren, are old friends of the Leatherneck editorial staff. A Memorial Service is to be announced at a later date.

Don't know if you heard but Col. Bruce MacLaren passed recently. He was the XO of Task Force Robbie. He was my boss when I first arrived at Gia Le, 3rd Tank Bn., in August of '67. He was the Bn. S-3 and I was his assistant. He took me under his wing and really helped me understand how best to deal with what I was going to face up at Con Thien. Also, when I arrived at Gia Le, Capt. Dan Kent was the Bn. S-2. He also schooled me on what to expect and how to conduct myself around other units I'd be attached to. Both of these Marine officers were among the best I ever knew. I was fortunate to have served with both of them the short month I spent at Battalion Hdqs. It's ironic that Capt. Kent's last words to me were: "Stay in the turret and don't do any John Wayne stuff." He was later killed up at Camp Carroll doing what he had warned me not to do.

Semper Fi,
Jim Coan

Chris DeSpain

Chris De Spain, 65, of Linn Creek, MO, died in his home on June 27, 2014. He served with Charlie Co, 3rd Tanks from 1968 – 1969. No other details are available at the time of this publication. Photo provided by Dave Woodward



(L to R) Chris DeSpain and Dave Woodward at Dong Ha in 1968.

Found in the 3rd Mar Div Assn, "Cal Trap" newsletter: Sgt Maj Phillip Mackert, USMC (ret)

He served with 3rd AT BN during 1965-66, died October 8, 2013. He is survived by his wife, Jeanette and daughters Frances Siegel and Phyllis Wendt.

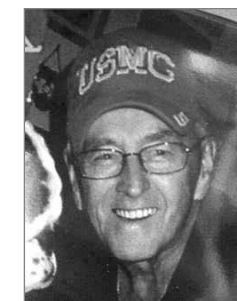
George B. Hummer



HANOVER, PENNSYLVANIA. George Bernard Hummer, CDR, CHC U.S. Navy (Ret.), 88, resident of Homewood Plum Creek in Hanover, departed to be face to face with the Lord on Wednesday, February 5, 2014. Born in York, on May 26, 1925, George was the son of George Alexander Hummer and Marguerite (Deinger) Hummer. George graduated from William Penn Senior High School, Albright College, The Evangelical School of Theology, and U.S. Naval Chaplains School, and was ordained by the Evangelical United Brethren

Church. He answered his country's call to duty as a U.S. Marine from 1943-1945 and in the Chaplain Corps U.S. Navy from 1967-1987. Cpl. Hummer, with 3rdBn/4th Marines, 6thMarDiv, was wounded in action on Okinawa. Chaplain Hummer's service included tours in Vietnam as chaplain of the 3rd Tank Battalion, Bahrain, Parris Island, Korea, Annapolis, on U.S.S. L.Y. SPEAR (AS-36), and with the Coast Guard in Yorktown, Va. His combat awards include the Bronze Star Medal with Combat "V" and Purple Heart. Reverend Hummer was a member of the Central Pennsylvania Conference of the United Methodist Church and ministered in Danville, Selinsgrove, Williamsport, and Gettysburg. As a volunteer and donor, George supported numerous organizations including the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association, the American Red Cross Blood Donor Program, Military Order of the Purple Heart, Veterans of Foreign Wars, Marine Corps League, and Firefighters Association of York County. George is survived by his beloved wife of 63 years, Helen Ruth (Rohrbaugh) Hummer; son, LtGen Steven A. Hummer, U.S. Marine Corps, and wife, Sheri, stationed in Stuttgart, Germany; and grandson, David A. Hummer, wife Stephanie, and great-grandson, Jaxson of Everett, Wash. He was preceded in death by his daughter, Romaine A. Hummer. A Memorial Service will be held on February 10, at 11 a.m. at Homewood at Plum Creek Chapel, Hanover. Burial with military honors will be at Prospect Hill Cemetery, York. In lieu of flowers, memorials to the American Red Cross or Homewood Benevolent Fund

Gerald Patrick Ravino



Ravino, Gerald, 83, of Redington Shores, FL completed his walk of faith on Earth February 5, 2014.

Gerald, known to most as Jerry, served his country proudly for many years. January 10, 1951 to January 31, 1952 Ravino served in the United States Naval Reserve. From August 15, 1952 to August 23, 1953 Ravino served in the Flame Platoon, First Tank Battalion, First Marine Division as a Flame Tank Commander. Ravino participated in

the Korean war conflict as a tank crew member and was awarded a Purple Heart. Completing an honorable discharge from the war, Ravino served with the Marine Detachment, US Navel Retraining Command Naval Base in Portsmouth, New Hampshire. Ravino served as a Board Member for the Marine Corps Tankers Association Foundation and a member of the Marine Corps League (Spring Hill, Florida) Detachment #708. He was also an Honorary Member of the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

Ravino had many successful careers following his conclusion of service in the military. He retired from Charles Pfizer Corp. as Foreman in Chemical Operations in Connecticut after 32 years of service. The following 14 years, Ravino committed himself to Operation PAR as a Substance Abuse Counselor. In that position, Jerry touched many lives with his compassion and expertise in Substance Abuse.

Writing from first hand experience and extensive research, Ravino wrote and published his first book "Hearts of Iron (Flame Dragons)" and his second book "Elite USMC First Reconnaissance Company of the Korean War 1950-1953".

In 2007, Jerry was honored as a member in the Lakota Sioux Tribe, Pine Island Ridge, South Dakota. Jerry was presented an Eagle Feather and quilted with a Starburst Quilt. Living his life with a kind spirit, Jerry was dedicated to serving others, professionally and personally. His family will miss his positive attitude and willingness to give of his time and advise.

Jerry leaves behind his beloved wife of 30 years, Nona. Jerry was blessed with three children, Dorathea Carters, Jay Ravino and Thomas Ravino; and four Step Children, Darlene Fernandez, Sharon Reyes, Donna Hudon and Donald Reynolds. In addition he leaves fourteen Grandchildren and seventeen Great-Grandchildren.

A gathering of friends and family will be at 10:00 AM on Wednesday, February 12, 2014 at St. John Vianney Parish, 445 82nd Avenue, St. Pete Beach, FL 33706. A Mass will follow at 11:00 AM with Father John Blum. Interment will be held at 2:00 PM with honors presented by Marine Corps League Detachment #708, Spring Hill at Florida National Cemetery, 6502 SW 102nd Avenue, Busnell. . ■

Looking For

AFTER 48 YEARS AN IDENTIFICATION COMES THROUGH!



Posted in the #3 – 2013 Sponson Box: This truly wonderful photo of “The Duke” and our “Doc” Gene Hackmack appeared in the Feb-March 2013 issue of the Vietnam Veterans of America Magazine. The photo includes a bunch of other Marine faces. QUESTION: Does anyone recognize any of the Marines behind Doc and the Duke? If you do please contact: John Wear - 215-794-9052 or Doc Hackmack - (979) 551-0581

Doc Hackmack writes: On Friday, February 28, 2014, I got a call from a Marine who recognized me from the photo of me and John Wayne in Vietnam! It was from Marine veteran Early Hambly from Shartlesville, Pennsylvania.

When the photo was taken on June 20, 1966 of John Wayne and me on Hill 55 between Chu Lai and Da Nang, Vietnam, he said he was standing next to the Marine who took that photo. He also named one of the guys in the photo, the one with a cigarette in his right hand and M-14 strapped over his right shoulder as a Lance Corporal Denton from Ohio; two others (the one next to Denton; the other peeking around John Wayne) were also in his outfit but he could not remember their names. Earl Hambly was with “F” Company, 2nd Battalion, 3rd Marine Regiment, 3rd Marine Division. Forty eight years after this photo was taken, finally SOMEONE out there recognized some of the guys! This was after I ran the photo in the Vietnam Veterans of America (VVA) magazine – AMAZING!!!

TONY PRONNETT

VTA member Robert (Bob) Fierros writes: I got a call from VTA member Tony Pronnett last week. I do not know or have not served with him during the Vietnam years. He called and I listened. After boot camp in San Diego, he said that he went to 5th Tanks at Camp Pen for almost a year. In '68 he was sent to Nam and joined “B” Co., 1st Tanks. He was assigned to B-54. He said that the tank was equipped with a blade and the crew was from the retriever.

We chatted on the phone for some time and I got the feeling Tony needed to talk to anyone that would listen. He doesn't have access to the internet and has stated U.S. Postal Service is the

only way to reach him. Can you put out a call to our membership to see if anyone remembers Tony and would be willing to write him a letter? One of our brothers is calling out. Tony's wife (Alicia) has a phone (318-848-5820) that can be used; but Tony prefers letters.

Anthony L. Pronnett
120 Egan St.
Shreveport, LA 71101

LOUIS CRISWELL

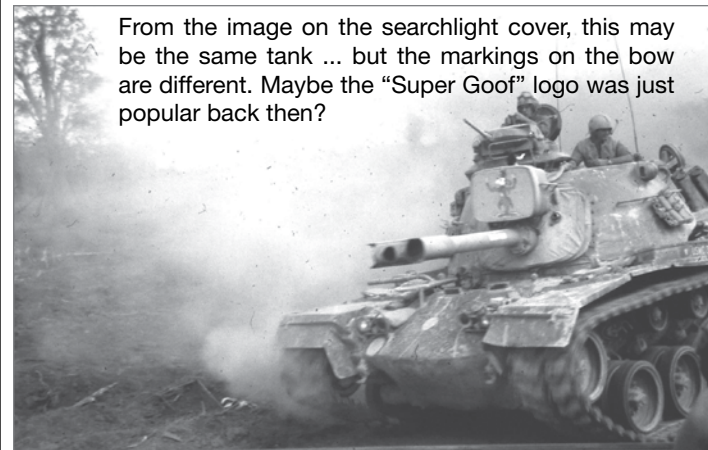
I have been a member (of the VTA) for several years and I am looking for Louis Criswell from Texas. Louis was a shitfister with 2nd Platoon in An Hoa and served with me on what I believe to be Hill #10, but looking recently on maps, it looks like it may have been Hill #37. I was a shitfister for 3rd Platoon, Bravo Co. from '68 – '69. Criswell was with me on Hill #10/37 and then he was sent to An Hoa. If anyone can help me get in contact with him, please let me know.

Ira B “Smokey” McQuade
Email: buc1tkbco@yahoo.com
Phone: (317) 356-2158

“SUPER GOOF” OR WHAT?



This photo is identified as Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks, Camp Carroll but does anyone recognize these two Marines? Please call John Wear at 215-794-9052 with your reply.



From the image on the searchlight cover, this may be the same tank ... but the markings on the bow are different. Maybe the “Super Goof” logo was just popular back then?

What Members Are Doing

Memorial Day 2014



On the far left is VTA Treasurer Bruce Van Apeldoorn marching with the Vietnam Veterans of America color guard at the Memorial Day parade in Rochester, NY

Ric in Saigon



February 2014, Ric Langley standing in front of one of the tanks that broke down the gates at the South Vietnamese Presidential Palace in 1975 — in Ho Chi Minh City (Saigon), Vietnam.

Vax & Val Tie The Knot

Vax writes: About three and a half years ago I met a very nice lady and we began to date. I tell everyone who asks me that we met at the local Kroger (grocery) store. Anyway, as time went by we found that we liked many of the same things: fishing, movies, reading, and several others. Our dating became exclusive to each other and started becoming serious. In 2013 we went on a Caribbean cruise together. I guess at this point I should add that she raised two (count them... two) Marines! Her son, an Iraq vet, left the Corps a Sgt. and her daughter, also an Iraq vet, left the Corps a Captain. Needless to say she knows something about Marines.

In August we made plans to spend Christmas in Las Vegas. We both went to the VTA reunion in Texas and we had a great time. By this time it became apparent to me that she and I were “an item” as they used to say. OK, I admit it, I was the last person to figure this out. My kids and her kids had been asking her for months when we were getting married.

Anyway, in November 2013 I asked Valarie to marry me. The silly woman said, “Yes.” I could not stop myself and reached into my wallet and handed her my shrink's business card. She asked what it was for. I told her that anyone willing to marry me had to be crazy and this guy could help her. Then I ducked.

As we were already going to Vegas, we decided to get married there. She wanted Elvis to marry us at the drive-through chapel. I wanted Alice Cooper to marry us at the middle of the >>



main floor of the Luxor. We compromised and were married in the chapel at the Luxor. So, after 25 years of single bliss, I now have married bliss. I like the latter better.

Bob "Lurch" Vaxter
Driver of C-31, 3rd Tanks 1968-69
Livonia, Michigan
Phone: (734) 385-6395

Grandpa for the 18th Time!!!



Joseph James Tyson
March 7, 2014 at 5:36 PM - 8.1 lbs

Papa Joe Tyson's "AN IRISH CATHOLIC FAMILY"

Count 'em, Nineteen Grandkids!



Left to Right Standing: Holly, Kelly, Matthew (held by) Amanda, Joe Jr. (held by) Emma, Thomas (held by) Douglas and Terrance. Kneeling: Jim, Caroline, Jack, Megan, Shannon, Abby, Austin, Mary, Danny
Bottom: the latest, Timothy

Mini-Reunion in Central Pennsylvania

We had a great reunion at the Best Western / TGI Fridays, 1830 East 3rd Street in Williamsport, PA. Six members of 2nd Plt, Charlie Co, 2nd Tank Bn were present: Cpl Charlie Tubbs, Sgt Clay Marks (with his wife Carolyn), Cpl Vince Bartashus, Cpl Jim Brzezinski, Sgt Kent Quinter and myself.

It was good to see that all present had retained their character, values and still looked like the Marines we remembered for all these years. It was good to hear that the memories were still intact and that the things we thought we remembered actually happened as we compared Tales and 'Sea Stories'.

We are planning to do it again next year. We are going to try to get in contact with a few others we have information on (i.e.) Pat Rogers, Tony Pinnetti and Frank Wisniewski. It appears that more than half the original platoon was from PA, NY, NJ and New England.

Steve Lyon

Canandaigua, NY
Phone: 585-394-2155

Note: Vince Bartashus is on the New Member list!!!

Tomball Texas German Heritage Fest



From Doc Gene Hackmack: Krista and I worked as a team for about 1-1/2 hours. There are certain benefits that come with playing as a strolling accordionist!!!

Back in the Turret at Camp LeJeune



Jeff "The Griff" Griffin and his wife, Mary Beth (center), toured the H&S Co., 2nd Tanks tank park the first week of April of this year. Jeff called ahead and they had a S/SGT on standby waiting

to take them on a guided tour. They had a great time. His wife thinks that it was the highlight of their vacation driving 2000 miles down the East Coast! They also toured the USS North Carolina. Mary Beth said that it was awesome for Jeff to sit in that tank and talk with the wonderful troops. Those young Marines were so respectful and anxious to hear Jeff's stories.

"Belmo" and "Mad Dog"



Last night I attended an event at the Marines Memorial to honor veterans of OIF and OEF. The guest of honor and speaker was General James Mattis, USMC (Ret). After the "main event" I and a few other detachment members were invited to attend a "gathering" along with a few other detachment members that included detachment life members former Sect. of State George Shultz and the former Commanding General of the 1st Mar. Div., Maj. Gen. Mike Myatt USMC (Ret). A great evening just begins to describe what I experienced. FYI--General James Mattis is without a doubt one of the finest men I have had the honor of having met. He is a very humble man and perhaps the most knowledgeable and the greatest military mind of our time. One of the virtues I was most impressed with is that he is a very humble man who openly acknowledges that it is not the generals or the REMFs who deserve the greatest of accolades as it is not the "brass" that bring about success. He really does believe the credit should be given to the men who serve in their command. He is an enlisted man's general, and in my mind, he is truly a Marine's Marine. He, without a doubt, cares more about the men and women who wear the cloth of our nation than anything else. As the Commandant of the oldest detachment in the Marine Corps League, I have met quite a few generals and even two Marine Corps Commandants. General Mattis is what I would call a modern day "Chesty Puller" and he is definitely the Marine who should have been appointed to be our Commandant or, perhaps, even the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. Unfortunately, being the best of the best was not enough. America needs more men like him.

Mike "Belmo" Belmessirri
South San Francisco, CA
Phone: (650) 756-2324

Restoration Project Helps Veterans Work Through Vietnam Pain

May 7, 2014 by Jennifer Smiga



Kelly and her father, Casper "Cappy" Everhard worked together on "Operation Huey," a project by a group of Vietnam Veterans to restore a 1964 Bell UH-1D Huey helicopter.

During the day, Kelly Everhard paints Buicks and Mustangs. In the evening, she paints a piece of history. The New Jersey native, who works as an auto detailer, volunteers her services as the principal painter of a Huey helicopter that served in the Vietnam War. The project began last February, when a group of Vietnam veterans received a 1964 Bell UH-1D Huey from the National Guard.

It took 5,000 hours of labor—400 of which were credited to Kelly—to restore the Huey to its 20th-century glory. But the product isn't merely a testament to her artistry. For Kelly, her involvement with the Huey is a gift to her father, a Marine who was deployed to Vietnam in 1966.

On May 7, Kelly and her father, Casper "Cappy" Everhard, will stand together as they witness the unveiling of the Huey during a remembrance ceremony at the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial in Holmdel, N.J. "It was an honor to be involved with this project," she said. "I love the smile it puts on my father's face."

Cappy served as a tank crewman in Bravo Company, 1st Marine Division. While he spent his 20th birthday overseas, his only wish was to return to the United States, start a family, and begin celebrating his children's birthdays on American soil. But the return home wasn't what he expected. Instead of being embraced by his country, Everhard said he was shunned. "Looking back on it now, it was easier to fight a war in Vietnam than it was to come back after the war," he said. For three decades, he didn't talk about the war. But when the New Jersey Vietnam Veterans' Memorial opened up to the public, so did Cappy. "I've been doing tours ever since the memorial opened," he said.

As he shared the stories of Vietnam with those willing to listen, the process of healing began. And it continued as Cappy witnessed his daughter working side-by-side with Veterans who once brushed shoulders in Vietnam. The pair's involvement with the project opened a channel between them. "We were close to begin with, but we are closer now than ever before," Kelly said.

The project put a strain on her daily schedule. Kelly would work at her day job from 7 a.m. to 6 p.m., drive an hour to the Holmdel memorial and accompany the Huey until 10 p.m. or later. >>

But she said the “once-in-a-lifetime” project was worth it. After spending hours and hours with the veterans, Kelly feels as if she has dozens of “adopted” fathers.

As for Cappy, he couldn’t be more proud. “Every time I look at the Huey, I’m going to think of her,” he said. “And the camaraderie between the Veterans working on the project was inspirational.”

The project is being dubbed as the Huey’s “final landing.” But in the hearts of the Vietnam War Veterans, it continues to soar.

School Kids Honor Vietnam Veterans



This is a photo of me in the lobby of the Cochise County Supervisors Office in Bisbee, Arizona. All school kids in the county, grades K-12, were invited to submit posters, poems, or essays in honor of the 50th anniversary of the Vietnam War. I was one of four judges, all Vietnam vets, and I represented the Marine Corps. This photo was taken on 10 June when the winners of the competition and their parents were invited to attend the County Supervisors meeting and receive their award certificates.

Jim Coan

Bobby Joe Blythe Has a New Toy!

Details to follow....



Clyde and Rolling Thunder



Rolling Thunder Chapter President David Sheats presents VTA member and published author, Clyde Hoch, with the Rolling Thunder back patch that he said, “I will wear it with honor.”

VTA Scholarship Awards for 2014

by JIM COAN, CHAIRMAN

VTA Scholarship Committee

We received five applications for the VTA Scholarship Program this year. All of the applicants were highly qualified, thus it was a real challenge for the scholarship committee to choose the most deserving. Since we had no applicants last year, we decided to offer scholarships to the top two applicants this year.

Josef Perry is the grandson of VTA member Darrell Enneking. Joe is presently attending Alma Jr. College in Michigan and will be a sophomore this fall. Joe previously attended Lapeer Sr. High School where he graduated 42nd in his class of 233 with a 3.67 GPA. Note that he was a 4-yr starter on his H.S. wrestling team, a 3-yr. starter on his varsity football team, and was A.P. All State football his senior year. He was captain of both his football and wrestling teams his senior year.

He belonged to National Honor Society, was Academic All-League in both football and wrestling; won the Presidential Award in 2013 for academic excellence. He was also on the Student Council and played a lead role in the school drama production of Hamlet, plus being a stage hand building props.

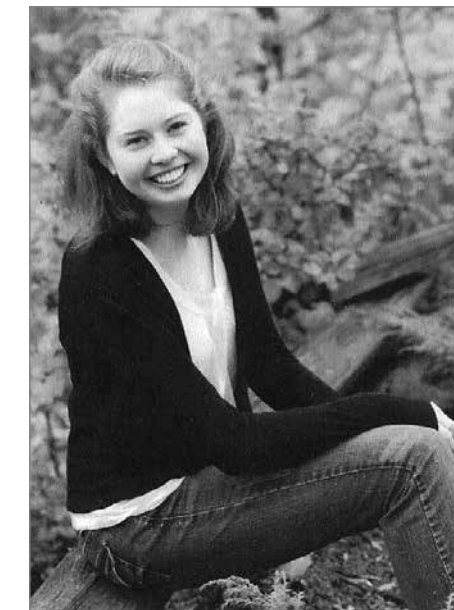
He stumbled a bit his first semester at Alma College, only earning a 2.864 grade average while playing on their football team. He made up for it his second semester, achieving a 3.5 grade average and making the Dean’s Honor List. And he did this while competing on the wrestling squad.

His essay on “Why I Believe we should Honor our Veterans” was excellent, well thought out and organized with perfect grammar, punctuation, and spelling.

Joe plans to major in education and become a teacher and coach upon graduation.



Josef Perry



Haley Carter

Haley Carter is the granddaughter of Lt. Col. Frank Slovik. She is presently attending Marquette University, going into her senior year. So far, she has earned a 3.72 grade point average and is currently in the College of Communication. She began in Business Administration, but changed her major after an unrewarding first semester. Since then, she has been almost a straight “A” student, making the Dean’s List every semester since. One professor commented on her “passion for excellence,” and that she has outstanding writing and speaking skills. Another instructor wrote: “Haley is one of the best students I have encountered in my role as an assistant professor.” He describes her as always willing to step forward and assume a leadership role in class discussions.

Her essay on “Why I Believe we should Honor America’s Veterans” was well written and especially thought provoking. She has a career in journalism ahead of her if she so chooses. She is currently Dorm Council President at school and tutors at the Milwaukee Secure Detention Facility helping male offenders prepare for the GED. Haley is aiming for graduation with honors when spring of 2015 rolls around; then, she wants to pursue a career in public relations.

Please note that we intend to reprint the two winning essays in a future issue of the Sponson Box.

Are We Ready to Learn From the Vietnam War? Soldiers Who Said “No”

Published: September 11, 1988
The New York Times

Editor’s Note: As most of you know, we don’t get a lot of volunteers sharing their stories of how they felt about their service during the War in Vietnam. Several times we have “threatened” to discontinue this feature for lack of participation. We currently do not have any stories waiting in the wings for publication but in searching the internet, I found this Letter to the Editor that was written 26 years ago. Personally, it makes me sick to my stomach but it is part of the legacy of our war.

Letters to the Editor:

You left me and many others out when you categorized the stances young men took on the Vietnam War (“Enough on the Guard, More on Quayle,” editorial, Aug. 24). Yes, some men went to war however they felt; some opposed the war and discovered “bad backs” or fled, and others took Senator Dan Quayle’s alternative.

But you fail to mention those who took their duties as citizens seriously in another way. Some of us who opposed the war made our opposition public and stayed to take the consequences. Some of us refused military duty, were sentenced, and went to prison. Some, like me, turned in their draft cards, refused our deferments to teach and went into the military. Then we refused to fight in what we thought was an unjust and illegal war. This is not to say that other forms of opposition to the war were any less valid.

I refused to go to Vietnam with A Troop, Fourth Battalion of the 12th Cavalry Division, Fifth Mechanized Army, in the summer of 1968. I was first reassigned, then after getting legal advice from the Judge Advocate, was finally courts-martialed and sentenced to six months hard labor and other penalties.

In a democracy, that can be a patriotic and responsible choice: to say “no” to your Government when you think it wrong and to take the consequences. I look forward to the day when not only military valor but these kinds of conscientious actions will be seen as a measure of one who is ready for high public office.

If we have learned anything from the Nazi experience, it is that sometimes disobedience is not only an option of a citizen-soldier called to war; it may be a duty. Those of us who refused to fight in Vietnam did our duty to our country too.

In my opinion, a young Dan Quayle took an easy way out. Now he’s for a tough United States military posture that may put other men’s lives at risk. When his was at risk, he took his privileges and was safe. That’s O.K., but it doesn’t recommend him for high office.

JOE VOLK,
Philadelphia, Aug. 24, 1988



Frederick R. Cunningham
Home of record: Glen Ellyn, Illinois

Silver Star Citation

The President of the United States of America takes pleasure in presenting the Silver Star to First Lieutenant Frederick R. Cunningham (MCSN: 0-100158), United States Marine Corps, for conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity in action while serving as a Platoon Commander with Company M, Third Battalion, First Marines, Ninth Marine Amphibious Brigade, in connection with operations against the enemy in the Republic of Vietnam. On 2 February 1968, during Operation SALINE, First Lieutenant Cunningham’s platoon was embarked aboard three tanks assigned to assist a Marine company under attack by a battalion-size North Vietnamese Army force near the village of Lam Xuan in Quang Tri Province. Throughout the night, he directed tank fire against the enemy and, with the arrival of the remainder of his company at dawn, participated in a counterattack across 800 meters of open rice paddy. Riding atop the command tank, he relayed instructions to the tank platoon commander, skillfully maneuvering the tanks across the inundated paddies toward the enemy’s entrenched positions in the village. Although twice knocked from the tank by the concussion from exploding rounds, he disregarded his own safety and resolutely returned to his hazardous position to direct accurate tank cannon and machine gun fire against the hostile emplacements. As his unit advanced, he directed artillery and mortar fire missions against the enemy and was personally responsible for the capture of six North Vietnamese soldiers, several automatic weapons and a 60-mm. mortar. By his heroic actions, bold leadership and loyal devotion to duty at great personal risk, First Lieutenant Cunningham was instrumental in the defeat of the enemy and upheld the highest traditions of the Marine Corps and of the United States Naval Service. Action Date: 2-Feb-68 Service: Marine Corps Rank: First Lieutenant Company: Company M Battalion: 3d Battalion Regiment: 1st Marines, 9th Marine Amphibious Brigade.

Reprinted from the Khe Sahn Veterans website

THE VTA HISTORY PHOTO PROJECT

Please gather up all of your Vietnam photos and pick out as many clear (in focus) photos as you want. Then, please give Greg Martin a phone call at (360) 480-1206 (Pacific time zone) to discuss your photos and to coordinate sending them to him for posting on the VTA website. All photos will be copied and the originals returned to you.

EVERYONE HAS A STORY!

If your story is good enough to reminisce about with your buddies, it’s good enough to write down and send it for the Sponson Box and for the VTA website. Your story can be about the war or about the home front. It can be about something that happened to you or to a buddy. It can be grim or it can be funny. Just write it the same way that you tell it and send it to John Wear. We’d love to share your story with the membership.

THE VTA HISTORICAL INTERVIEWS NOW AVAILABLE ON LINE

If you will log on to the USMC Vietnam Tankers website (<http://www.usmcvt.org>) there are 16 hours of recorded personal history interviews that the VTA conducted during the San Antonio reunion. They are housed in the “Members Stories” section of the website. If you do not have a home computer, you can probably visit a public library in your town and log on there.

V. A. News & Updates

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

VA Healthcare Stories What's Yours?

The VFW wants VA-enrolled veterans to call the toll-free 1-800-VFW-1899 telephone line and tell them if your VA medical facility is properly serving you. According to VFW National Commander Bill Thien, recent allegations about improper care in Arizona, Colorado, Texas and elsewhere have made it difficult to separate truth from conjecture. "Veterans die every day, but veterans dying due to wrong diagnoses, unsterilized equipment, or while awaiting treatment, is a failure of leadership and management both in Washington and out in the field," he said. "We need to hear real life stories, good or bad, not hearsay. Only then can we hold VA officials properly accountable for their actions or inactions." The toll-free number was rolled out in 1996 as the VA was transforming from primarily a hospital-based system into an integrated healthcare system that now includes 820 outpatient clinics that serve veterans closer to where they actually reside. Call 1-800-VFW-1899 to voice your VA healthcare experiences. [Source: VFW Action Corps Weekly, May 9, 2014 ++]

PTSD Update 161 Why Some and Not Others

Why do post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) symptoms persist in some people and not others? An experiment performed more than 100 years ago is helping us find answers. The team and researchers of the Division of Military Internal Medicine at Uniformed Services University (USU) and those at other top universities are learning more about PTSD using Russian scientist Ivan Pavlov's famous "conditioned response" experiment. Working with service members with and without PTSD, they hope to better understand the disorder to improve diagnosis and treatment.

One experiment, based on Pavlov's discovery, involves observing how someone with PTSD experiences fear. The feeling of fear is an important cue to deciding if our surroundings are safe or dangerous. It also prepares us to respond. A part of the brain known as the amygdala plays a big role in deciding whether to stay where we are or run away, the "fight or flight" response. In this experiment, they show individuals colored shapes on a computer screen. One pattern of shapes is paired with an uncomfortable

puff of air directed to their throats. They show the shapes and then measure their physiological responses, such as heart rate, blood pressure, sweating and eye blinking. Their responses indirectly measure how their brain responds to stimuli. The amygdala and other parts of the brain trigger those responses.

During the experiment, study participants learn that one pattern of shapes signifies danger with the puff of air, while another pattern signifies safety, or no puff of air. Participants with PTSD tend to have a greater physiologic response to the danger cues — increased heart rate, blood pressure, sweat response and eye blinking, than those who don't have PTSD. This holds true even if they've had similar traumatic experiences, such as combat. After study participants have learned whether danger is near or not by the pattern of shapes they see, they're shown the shape that means danger together with the one that means safety. Those with PTSD tend to pay more attention to the danger signal. Those who don't have PTSD focus on the safety signal. This is known by their physiological responses.

From this experiment it was learned that individuals with PTSD find it harder to control their fear response even when danger and safety signals are present at the same time. The danger cue promotes such a fear of something bad happening that they can't believe in the safety cue. This pattern fits with studies of the brain that show that the frontal lobes, which normally control the fear centers of the brain, don't perform as well in individuals with PTSD. To learn more about the relationship between PTSD and the brain, they look at how the brain functions in the same patients who did the shapes experiment. For this, a special tool called functional MRI is used. The tool measures changes in oxygen levels in different parts of the brain. That gives certain types of information, such as how strongly the amygdala responds to fear. New imaging techniques, technologies such as virtual reality, and mobile applications such as smart phone apps can help us understand and treat PTSD. [Source: DcoE Blog | Col. (Dr.) Michael Roy, USA (Ret) | 20 Feb 2014 ++]

PTSD Update 162 USPHS Delaying Marijuana Clinical Study

Thousands of veterans and other medical marijuana patients

nationwide use marijuana to treat symptoms of posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), but the U.S. Public Health Service (PHS) is blocking researchers who are seeking to learn more about the risks and benefits of the treatment. A Food and Drug Administration (FDA) and University of Arizona Institutional Review Board (IRB)-approved protocol for a study of marijuana for symptoms of PTSD in U.S. veterans, sponsored by the non-profit Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS), has been on hold for over 3½ months, as researchers wait for the PHS to respond to their request to purchase marijuana for the study. The study would explore the safety and effectiveness of smoked and/or vaporized marijuana for 50 U.S. veterans with chronic, treatment-resistant PTSD. Animal studies have already shown that marijuana helps quiet an overactive fear system, but no controlled clinical studies have taken place with PTSD patients.

"This groundbreaking research could assist doctors in how to recommend treatment for PTSD patients who have been unresponsive to traditional therapies," according to MAPS' Executive Director Rick Doblin, Ph.D. The PHS marijuana review process exists only because the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) has a Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA)-protected monopoly on the supply of marijuana legal for use in FDA-regulated research. This additional review is not required for research on any other Schedule I drug. MAPS resubmitted a revised protocol on Oct. 24, 2013, after the original protocol was rejected by the PHS in September, 2011. Unfortunately, unlike the FDA, which must respond to submissions within 30 days of receiving them, the PHS has no such time limit. Meanwhile, the PHS is successfully preventing FDA and IRB-approved research from taking place.

PTSD is considered a life-threatening illness, as people suffering from PTSD are at increased risk of homelessness, drug abuse and alcoholism, and are more likely to commit suicide. "If the PHS review requirement was removed," says Dr. Sue Sisley, who would lead the study, "we would gather information that could help veterans today. The stifling of medical research on marijuana stands in the way of our vets returning to a normal life." Founded in 1986, the Multidisciplinary Association for Psychedelic Studies (MAPS) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit research and educational organization that develops medical, legal, and cultural contexts for people to benefit from the careful uses of psychedelics and marijuana. MAPS is the only organization working to evaluate the safety and efficacy of botanical marijuana as a prescription medicine for specific medical uses approved by the FDA. [Source: MAPS | Brad Burge | 21 Feb 2014 ++]

Medical Marijuana Health Insurers Won't Be Paying For It

Just say no. That's health insurance companies' response to paying for medical marijuana. The Associated Press said medical marijuana treatments can cost upward of \$1,000 a month, an unwanted hit that patients have to cover themselves. Marijuana has gained acceptance for its ability

to dull pain and other chronic symptoms of conditions ranging from epilepsy to cancer. Despite medical marijuana being legal in 21 states, health insurers won't be paying for the treatment anytime soon, in part because of conflicting laws. Pot is still illegal under federal law and in 29 states. And, according to AP: Perhaps the biggest hurdle for insurers is the U.S. Food and Drug Administration hasn't approved it. Major insurers generally don't cover treatments that are not approved by the FDA, and that approval depends on big clinical studies that measure safety, effectiveness and side effects.

Clinical research costs millions of dollars and can take years to complete. The FDA has approved treatments that contain a synthetic version of an ingredient in marijuana. But at this point there's been no approval for a treatment that uses a real marijuana plant. Clinical studies for marijuana are also a challenge because pot is classified as a Schedule I drug. That classification of drug, which includes heroin, is deemed to have a significant potential for abuse and no accepted medical use, according to LifeHealthPro, a life and health insurance adviser site. "Because health care plans and insurance policies typically exclude coverage for experimental treatments, insurers may continue to decline payment for marijuana as long as it remains on Schedule I," LifeHealthPro said.

Says the AP: The American Medical Association has called for a change in marijuana's classification to one that makes it easier for research to be conducted. The current classification prevents physicians from even prescribing it in states where medical use is permitted. Instead, they can only recommend it to patients. The AP added: Even if the FDA approves medicinal marijuana, there's no guarantee that insurance coverage will become widespread. Big companies that pay medical bills for their workers and dependents decide what items their insurance plans cover. They may not be eager to add the expense. —Source: MoneyTalksNews | Krystal Steinmetz | May 12, 2014 ++]

SSA Disability Claims Update 04 Expediting Vet Disability Claims

Acting Commissioner of Social Security, along with Congressman John Sarbanes (D-MD) on 19 FEB unveiled a new initiative to expedite disability claims by veterans with a Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) disability compensation rating of 100% Permanent & Total (P&T). Under the new process, Social Security will treat these veterans' applications as high priority and issue expedited decisions, similar to the way the agency currently handles disability claims from Wounded Warriors. "Our veterans have sacrificed so much for our country and it is only right

that we ensure they have timely access to the disability benefits they may be eligible for and deserve," said Acting Commissioner Colvin. "Social Security worked with Veterans Affairs to identify those veterans with disabilities who have a high probability of also meeting our definition of

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disability. I am proud of our collaboration and happy to announce this new service for America's vets."

In order to receive the expedited service, veterans must tell Social Security they have a VA disability compensation rating of 100% P&T and show proof of their disability rating with their VA Notification Letter. The

Hepatitis C Update 03 Disease Progression Preventable

An estimated 3 million to 4 million persons in the United States are chronically infected with HCV, and approximately half are unaware of their status. These individuals may ultimately progress to advanced liver disease and/or hepatocellular cancer. However, those outcomes can be prevented by treatment, which is rapidly improving and offers the potential of a cure to more patients than has been previously possible. New direct-acting oral agents capable of curing hepatitis C virus (HCV) infection have been approved for use in the United States. The initial direct-acting agents were approved in 2011, and many more oral drugs are expected to be approved in the next few years.

As new information is presented at scientific conferences and published in peer-reviewed journals, health care practitioners have expressed a need for a credible source of unbiased guidance on how best to treat their patients with HCV infection. To provide healthcare professionals with timely guidance, the American Association for the Study of Liver Diseases (AASLD) and the Infectious Diseases Society of America (IDSA) in collaboration with the International Antiviral Society-USA (IAS-USA) have developed a web-based process for the rapid formulation and dissemination of evidence-based, expert-developed recommendations for hepatitis C management. New sections will be added, and the recommendations will be updated on a regular basis as new information becomes available.

An ongoing summary of "recent changes" will also be available for readers who want to be directed to updates and changes. To access the full Recommendations for Testing, Managing, and Treating Hepatitis C report go to <http://hcvguidelines.org/full-report-view>. [Source: Vietnam Veterans Web Weekly 21 Feb 2014 ++]

VA Pension Scams Veterans Beware

As a veteran, beware of pension advance products that offer to pay military retirees a lump-sum payout in return for their monthly retirement payments. The products may amount to payment of only pennies on the dollar and the advances are reported to carry interest rates from 27 percent to 106 percent, which can threaten a safe retirement. There are many pension advance companies on the Internet, often with patriotic-sounding names and logos. If you're offered a pension advance, stay away from arrangements that allow a creditor to access the account where you get your benefits. Instead, get trusted financial expert advice if you need emergency funds.

Additionally, some individuals and companies use VA's Aid & Attendance pension benefit as a hook to sell services. The Aid & Attendance benefit is for eligible disabled veterans who require the aid and attendance of another person, or who are housebound. Individuals or companies looking to sell their services may offer to help veterans obtain Aid & Attendance benefits, but they often require customers to sign up for financial services first, then they move assets into irrevocable trusts for qualification. When being solicited, watch out for:

- A lawyer or veteran advisor who offers to get the Aid & Attendance benefit for a fee. Federal law prohibits VA accredited advisors from charging to assist with VA claims. However, at times a "consultation fee" is charged up front.
- A claim from a paid advisor stating that they can get the benefit for you more quickly than anyone else. All VA claims must go through the standard evaluation process, which no one can bypass to get it done faster.
- An offer to help a financially secured veteran qualify for Aid and Attendance by taking control of their finances and moving assets into an inaccessible trust. This may disqualify a veteran from other benefits.
- Retirement homes using the lure of Aid & Attendance to get veterans to move in on the implied promise that they will get the benefit. If the claim is denied, the veteran may not be able to afford to remain in the facility.

[Source: American Legion | Cajun Comeau NC VSO | 1Apr 2014 ++]

Vet Suicide Update 04 Rates Cited Misleading I 1.5 vs. 22 Daily

Almost 22 veterans are thought to commit suicide each day, according to a 2012 VA report. That statistic is tragic, but it doesn't really represent current veterans returning from Iraq and Afghanistan, the Los Angeles Times reports. Close to 72% of veterans are over 50, with this group accounting for 69% of veteran suicides. The majority of veteran suicides are thought to have little to do with military service, according to the LA Times. Alan Zarembo, of the Los Angeles Times, notes: Many experts believe that the farther a veteran is from military service, the less likely it is that his or her suicide has anything to do with his or her time in uniform. In other words, many older veterans are killing themselves for the same reasons that other civilians in the same age group kill themselves: depression and other mental health problems coupled with difficult life circumstances. The Los Angeles Times, extrapolating from the suicide rate of veterans under 35 in California, estimates that roughly 1.5 returning veterans commit suicide daily nationwide. To be sure, more can be done to address mental illness among veterans. Sen. John

Walsh (D-MT the first Iraq war veteran to serve in the senate, has introduced legislation called the Suicide Prevention for American Veterans Act to increase mental health care for veterans.

[Source: Business Insider | Jeremany Bender | 8 Apr 2014 ++]

VA Audiology Care H.R.3508 Would Enhance Services

More veterans seek help from the Department of Veterans Affairs for hearing loss than any other disability facing them today. The demand for audiology services is growing at nearly 10 percent per year. But with limited resources, the VA is struggling to keep up. Veterans across the country are being forced to wait weeks, even months, for an appointment. In Marshfield, Wis., Roger, a 70-year-old Vietnam War veteran, sought help from the VA for his hearing loss. He was informed he could not get an appointment for six months. Unfortunately, Roger couldn't wait that long, so he went to his local hearing aid specialist and was seen that day. Roger was willing to pay out of pocket for his hearing aids, but that is not an option for many of our veterans — nor should it have to be. Currently, the VA is only allowed to use audiologists to provide hearing services to veterans. While audiology doctors are a great resource for the VA and provide adequate service for veterans, there are not enough to keep up with the demand and needs of veterans like Roger.

H.R.3508 to amend title 38, United States Code, to clarify the qualifications of hearing aid specialists of the Veterans Health Administration of the Department of Veterans Affairs, and for other purposes provides another option. Hearing aid specialists go through a one to two year apprenticeship training period, complete a comprehensive written exam, and are certified by the state to fit and sell hearing aids. They are more than qualified to support the specialized services of audiology doctors by fitting, adjusting, and making minor repairs to hearing aids. This legislation would give both our veterans and audiologists much needed relief while conserving resources at the VA. If the provisions of this bill are implemented, VA audiologists can turn their attention to specialized cases and complex conditions, and people like Roger won't have to wait six months for simple appointments to get hearing aids. A recent report from the Office of Inspector General supported these findings: Forty-two percent of veterans wait more than 30 days from the time the medical facility receives the hearing aids to the time they are mailed back to the veteran, and often the delay in repairs is blamed on staff vacancies and an increase in workload. H.R.3508 would allow the VA to fill those vacancies with specialists certified for adjusting and repairing hearing aids. It has the support of the Iraq and Afghanistan Veterans of America (IAVA), the International Hearing Society, Vets First, Blinded Veterans Association, and American Veterans. As Americans we can never repay our debt to veterans like Roger and Dilbert, but Congress can pass common-sense measures like H.R.3508 to help make their lives, and the lives of those who care for them, a little easier. [Source: The Hill | Reps. Sean Duffy (R-WI) and Tim Walz (D - MN) | 2 Apr 2014 ++]

Priority Groups Table

The number of Veterans who can be enrolled in the health care program is determined by the amount of money Congress gives VA each year. Since funds are limited, VA

set up Priority Groups to make sure that certain groups of Veterans are able to be enrolled before others.

Once you apply for enrollment, your eligibility will be verified. Based on your specific eligibility status, you will be assigned a Priority Group. The Priority Groups range from 1-8 with 1 being the highest priority for enrollment. Some Veterans may have to agree to pay copay to be placed in certain Priority Groups. You may be eligible for more than one Enrollment Priority Group. In that case, VA will always place you in the highest Priority Group that you are eligible for. Under the Medical Benefits Package, the same services are generally available to all enrolled Veterans. VA determines your eligibility for VA's comprehensive medical benefits package through our patient enrollment system, which is based on Priority Groups from 1 through 8.

Priority Group 1

- Veterans with VA Service-connected disabilities rated 50% or more.
- Veterans assigned a total disability rating for compensation based on unemployability.

Priority Group 2

- Veterans with VA Service-connected disabilities rated 30% or 40%.

Priority Group 3

- Veterans who are former POWs.
- Veterans awarded the Purple Heart Medal.
- Veterans awarded the Medal of Honor.
- Veterans whose discharge was for a disability incurred or aggravated in the line of duty.
- Veterans with VA Service-connected disabilities rated 10% or 20%.
- Veterans awarded special eligibility classification under Title 38, U.S.C., § 1151, "benefits for individuals disabled by treatment or vocational rehabilitation."

Priority Group 4

- Veterans receiving increased compensation or pension based on their need for regular Aid and Attendance or by reason of being permanently Housebound.
- Veterans determined by VA to be catastrophically disabled.

Priority Group 5

- Nonservice-connected Veterans and noncompensable Service-connected Veterans rated 0%, whose annual income and/or net worth are not greater than the VA financial thresholds.
- Veterans receiving VA Pension benefits.
- Veterans eligible for Medicaid benefits.

Priority Group 6

- Compensable 0% Service-connected Veterans.

(Continued on page 33)

JOKES

A Marine pilot woke up in a hospital's ICU. Tubes up his nose and down his throat; wires monitoring every function... and a drop dead gorgeous Navy nurse hovering over him. It was obvious he'd been in a serious aircraft accident. The nurse worried about a spinal injury looked deep and steady into his eyes, and he heard her slowly say, "I'm sorry but you may not feel anything from the waist down"

He managed to mumble in reply, "Can I feel your tits then?"

Which Military Service Is the Best?

A Soldier, a Sailor, an Airman and a Marine got into an argument about which branch of the service was The Best. The arguing became so heated the four servicemen failed to see an oncoming truck as they crossed the street. They were hit by the truck and killed instantly. Soon, the four servicemen found themselves at the Pearly Gates. They met Saint Peter and decided that only he could be the ultimate source of truth and honesty...So, the four servicemen asked him, "Saint Peter, which branch of the United States Armed Forces is the best?"

Saint Peter replied, "I can't answer that. However, I will ask God what He thinks the next time I see Him. Meanwhile, thank you for your service on Earth and welcome to Heaven."

Sometime later the four servicemen see Saint Peter and remind him of the question they had asked when first entering Heaven and asked Saint Peter if he was able to ask God for the answer to their question? Suddenly, a sparkling white dove lands on Saint Peter's shoulder. In the dove's beak is a note glistening with gold dust. Saint Peter opens the note, trumpets blare, gold dust drifts into the air, harps play crescendos, and Saint Peter begins to read the note aloud to the four servicemen:

MEMORANDUM FROM THE DESK OF THE ALMIGHTY

TO: All Former Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, and Marines

SUBJECT: Which Military Service Is the Best

1. All branches of the United States Armed Forces are honorable and noble.
2. Each serves America well and with distinction.
3. Serving in the United States military represents a great honor warranting special respect, tribute, and dedication from your fellow man.
4. Always be proud of that.

Warm Regards,

GOD, USMC, Ret.

Flight Over Iwo Jima

by BILL KNOWLES
Green Valley News & Sun

Off and on during my adult years I have associated with members of the United States Marine Corps, and these short interludes have been worthwhile in all respects. Most recently I have shared a mutual volunteer chore with a retired member of the Marines, a local guy by the name of Master Gunny Bob Duerden--another great member of the "Corps." For Bob and the rest of our local retired Marines, here is a story about 165 Marines on their way to war!

During the years 1963 to 1971, I had the privilege of managing the flight operation of a 13-plane fleet of Boeing 320C aircraft carrying troops and/or cargo from United State's shores to SE Asia and the war known as Vietnam. When carrying Marines, our flights progressed from the USMC base at Camp Pendleton, in Southern California, to Honolulu; thence to the Marine base in Okinawa; and then to Da Nang in Vietnam, where the Marines would board their own helicopters to proceed to their in-country posts.

It was a typical lovely Sunday that we departed Honolulu bound for Okinawa; there were three cockpit crew members, eight cabin flight attendants and 165 members of the USMC in this gold-tailed Boeing 320C Intercontinental jet capable of flying nonstop some 13 hours and more than 6,000 miles.

Over the Pacific Ocean the skies were clear and the ride was smooth ... most of our passengers quickly fell asleep. Some seven hours later, a smidgen of light coming up on our tail suggested the arrival of the morning sunrise. I called the first flight attendant to the cockpit and asked about the well-being of the passengers and when she was planning to awaken them for their breakfast.

"We have a small gift for the Marines coming up in 20 minutes, but I need them all to be awake."

She answered that she would awaken them now and serve breakfast when I advised her.

During flight planning, before departure from Honolulu, the en route winds and weather suggested a route that took us directly over the islands of Iwo Jima — these islands were deeply etched in the history of the USMC in World War II — and forecast winds would result in a flight faster than the normal for this route.

I called the first flight attendant on the intercom and advised her that I would be making a PA to the passengers in about 10 minutes and that, after that, please do not serve any beverages until we had passed Iwo Jima. A short time later our weather radar picked up the Iwo Jima Islands on the nose, 40 miles ahead. I made the following PA to the passengers: "Gentlemen, I hope that you have been comfortable ... we are ahead of schedule and we have a small gift for you this morning ... in about 12 minutes we will pass directly over the islands of Iwo Jima where earlier members of your Marines fought so gallantly in World War II. We will circle the islands two ways so that all of you will have a great view of the islands."

The Pacific Ocean six miles below was glassy smooth and deep blue, it was an outstanding morning. As we started our circle of the islands below, the first flight attendant came into the cockpit saying, "Captain, look back through the cockpit door at the passengers." She opened wide the cockpit door.

The First Sergeant had every Marine aboard standing up, at attention and these 165 proud warriors were singing the Marines' Hymn as we passed over these Iwo Jima Islands where so many of their brothers had earlier fallen.

The cabin of the aircraft had taken on all those qualities of a land-based church; I really do not think that, including the cockpit, there was a dry eye aboard this >>

The Amish Connection

by COL EV TUNGENT

flight on this morning so far from home. The hymn from 165 Marine voices reached every nook and cranny of this largest of Boeing aircraft on this peaceful morning ... never to be forgotten.

Later, arriving at Okinawa where the Marines would spend a week or so before heading for Da Nang to join their fellow Marines, as our crew descended the steps after the passengers had proceeded us, we heard a great "Thank you, crew" from 165 proud Marines. It was a gratifying moment!

Of 157 flights across the Pacific, that particular trip -- with 165 of the nation's finest -- will live forever in the memory of this flight crew member.

While serving on recruiting duty at RS Cleveland, OH in late 1965 as the Assistant officer in Charge, I personally interviewed virtually each applicant for enlistment. I had a very unique experience interviewing an applicant brought in from our Recruiting Sub-Station (RSS) in Erie, PA.

I received a call from our recruiter at RSS Erie telling me he was bringing in an 18-year-old young man with an unusual background. He requested that, rather than try to explain the circumstances over the phone, I agree to let him talk to me in person about it. Having the utmost faith in this recruiter's judgment, I said OK, but he had really piqued my curiosity and I was anxious to hear his story.

I was not prepared to learn that the young man in question was Amish! My recruiter quickly assured me that he knew the Amish were classified as Conscientious Objectors (CO's) but that this young man did not adhere to that belief and wanted to be a Marine and serve his country. I was very skeptical but agreed to interview the young man.

When the young man entered my office, he was very "plain" in the Amish sense of the word, complete with long hair and wearing a hook and eye jacket. The very first question I asked him was his reason for wanting to be a Marine considering the Amish faith's CO beliefs. He explained that his societal experiences had raised some serious doubts in his mind about those beliefs. When I questioned him further about his family's feelings on his decision, he told me the following story.

As he neared his 18th birthday, his father had said they were going to the Selective Service Office to register him as a CO. He said he told his father that he did not want to do that and felt he needed to serve his country. His father told him that he would be "shunned" and would no longer be recognized by his family and the Amish community. He then turned so that I could see the back of his head. It was shaved from the nape of his neck to the crown of his head as a mark of being "shunned".

I must have talked to him for over an hour trying to find a "caution flag" which could negate his commitment, and found none. He had passed his physical with flying colors and scored high on the Armed Forces Qualification Test (AFQT) even though he only had a 10th grade education. After conferring with the Officer in Charge, we cleared the young man for enlistment. We know that he successfully completed recruit Training at Parris Island, as we were always notified of any who did not.

I don't remember his name, but over the years I wondered many times how his life as a Marine worked out for him, such as: "What was his MOS; did he serve in Nam; did he make the Marine Corps a career, etc?"

As a final note, I did ask him if he could ever return and be accepted back into his family and the Amish community. He said that he could but he would have to go before the Elders of his church and convince them that he was prepared to once again abide by the tenets of their faith. I would be interested if anyone reading this ever served with someone I have described.

The 12th General Order

by KEN ZEBAL

In the early 1960s, 2nd Tank Bn. had a well-established fire watch program at the tank park. Generally speaking, two lower-ranking Marines from the flames platoon and each gun company were posted at the tank park inside their respective tool sheds from about 1800 to 0600. I was a PFC at the time and was assigned fire watch for Charlie Company along with Pat Rogers. Pat and I went to boot camp at Parris Island together (Aug-Nov 63) and then to ITR at Camp Geiger (Nov-Dec 63) before reporting into Co "C", 2TkBn (Dec 63) and then going on boot leave. This was my first fire watch and may also have been Pat's. We were nominated by our Platoon Sergeant, S/Sgt "Gunny" Jandrozits, and then hand-selected by the Company Gunny, GySgt Sam Fullerton, whose sea bag read like a WWII war novel.

After everyone else went on liberty call, Pat and I were briefed by the Company Gunny, went to Mess Hall 207 across the street and were issued mid-rats. In those days it was a brown paper sack filled with a sandwich, hard-boiled egg, apple, container of milk and a napkin, all lovingly prepared by one of the cooks. Along with the other fire watches, we reported to the Battalion CP and the Officer of the Day. The OD that day was a WWII and Korea vintage Master Sergeant in Winter Service Alphas. The fire watches were in utilities, green wool shirts, field jackets, gloves and had mid-rats. We received our instructions from the OD and took that short 15-minute walk to the tank park. After getting settled in and looking around, we lit the kerosene stove and hung out with nothing else to do for the next 11 hours and 30 minutes. Oh, there was the occasional snapping of an M-103 torsion bar, but other than that it was quiet. Pat may have had a portable radio so we could listen to WCBS and KDKA, but I don't recall us being quite that salty yet.

Every now and again, we would take turns walking around the tank ramp just to get some fresh air, but it was really boring. About 2200 or so the OD (M/Sgt what's-his-name) came to check post. Pat and I popped to attention and reported "Charlie Company all secure with nothing unusual to report." The M/Sgt comes up to me and asks if I knew my 10th General Order. I responded, "To salute all officers and all colors and standards not cased." So then he asked why I didn't salute him since he was the OD. Well, that was easy; I said, "because you're enlisted." I thought it was a trick question. He seemed a bit put off by my response so we went through a brief question and answer session with him asking the questions

and me providing seemingly unsatisfactory answers. In the meantime, Pat was edging towards the hatch, tank ramp, and safety. It didn't take long for the OD to leave and for me and Pat to review the situation. Pat kept saying: "If you would have just saluted him, he would have gone away happy."

After morning formation the next day, I got to meet the 1st Sgt and for some unknown reason he seemed a bit grumpy. I attributed it to him being old but really did admire his herringbone utilities -- what we used to call dungarees. Being a PFC with about 6 months in the Corps, I admired everything salty. He jumped right to business without even asking how I was doing and whether or not I liked the Marine Corps or what he could do to make my enlistment a more pleasant experience. He also really didn't seem all that interested in my perspective of things -- maybe he had other things on his mind. However, he did seem

fixated on the rank structure and my position at the bottom which he kept mentioning over and over. All in all, I guess that didn't go as well as it could have. About a week later I was once again nominated and hand-selected, but this time it was for 30 days of mess duty, clearly a sign that my fledgling career was progressing.



Christmas Party Charlie Company, 2nd Tank Battalion Squad Bay - 1964

The USS New Jersey

During my tour in '68, we were doing a sweep (I think) on Go Noi Island south and west of Dan Nang. We were out of our normal TAOR so it was unfamiliar territory for us. We started getting sniper fire from this tree line and the only support (arty) that we could get was an Army unit near Da Nang. They radioed back that the USS New Jersey was in the harbor / bay and that they could fire for us if we wished. GREAT! DUH? But they added that we had to pull back a click. Well, we said we did ... and we probably only pulled back 100 yards. Shit! After all, we had to stay in contact with the gooks! Right? Well, here comes a salvo; don't know how many rounds it was but we had our



heads down and tight to the ground. They really sounded more like a phantom coming in for a bombing run! They fired twice.

When we went in to the affected area we found nothing, but the terrain was really chewed up--one tangled up, plowed up mess. It wasn't a big tree line anyway, but now it doesn't exist. We really thought that was super cool.

Later I was told that one salvo from her three 16" guns weighed 2,000 pounds and they would level anything inside of a grid square!!!

Brian Gage
Mike Co, 3/7
RVN '68 - '69

The Cow That Gave Her Life For Charlie Company

The time was the last quarter of the year 1968 and Charlie Company, 3rd Tank Battalion, (Reinforced), was in position on the north bank of the Cua Viet River, not too far south of the DMZ.

The company, at this time, was operating with all of its tanks, twenty-five gun tanks, one flame tank and one tank recovery vehicle, together one location for one of the few times that it had happened during the entire war. We were reinforced with nineteen amtracs and six Ontos, plus engineers, a Bulk Fuel Section and artillery & air forward observers.

Our defensive line was anchored on the river to our back and extended to a depth of one hundred meters at the deepest point in a semi-circle three hundred meters from side to side. The land portion was covered with concertina wire ten meters deep and three meters high, interspersed with Claymore mines covering likely avenues of approach. Instead of building bunkers, we used alternating tanks and amtracs, with the amtracs acting as bunkers. We also had foxholes for teams of rifle shooters.

The tanks were loaded with flachette rounds, as we did not expect the North Vietnamese Army (NVA) to use armor. The Ontos were spaced evenly along the defensive line and were also loaded with flachette rounds. We had a battery of 105's in direct support and had pre-registered their fires.

Our normal operating procedure was to send out our own tank crewmen, acting as infantry, on foot patrols for reconnaissance and to establish ambushes. Periodically, we

(Continued on page 32)

An Hoa Tanks

by EV TUNGETT

Lt Col Ev. Tungett, USMC (Ret.) who was at the time the CO of Bravo Co., 3rd Tanks, and he writes about Bill "Lurch" Lockridge's "command presence":

When I assumed command of Bravo in April '66, while we were still at Marble Mountain, I recall being impressed with the mess hall we had. It was a "strong back tent", just like the many ones next door to us in the Cantonment Area used to temporarily house units awaiting assignment. Well, it used to be one of the Cantonment Area "strong backs", and Cowboy Smith felt they had so many that one wouldn't be missed. As the story goes, one day Cowboy took the 2nd Platoon over to the Cantonment Area, placed everyone at strategic points around the frame, then bellowed out to "Pick it up!" They then proceeded to walk it quite some distance into our area, and, "Voila", we had a "strong back" mess hall!



That mess hall gained some additional fame when 2/4, commanded by Lt. Col "P. X." Kelly (later CMC General Kelly), was moved up north from Chu Lai and staged in the Cantonment Area awaiting further assignment from Division. They had been moved up by ship and all their garrison equipment was sitting aboard the ship in Da Nang Harbor. Our company cook, Sgt. Gladden, came to me and said that if 2/4 would give him their cooks and some mess-men, he could feed them hot chow in our mess hall while they were there. I said, "You know you're talking about feeding some 1,100 men, don't you?" He vowed he could draw the rations from Navy Supply in Da Nang and, with 2/4's help, could pull it off. I went over and presented the offer to Lt. Col Kelly and his XO, Major Ernie DeFazio. They happily agreed and we fed that Battalion three meals per day (and

night) for over a week. Lt. Col Kelly wrote Sgt. Gladden up for a Navy Achievement Medal which I gladly forwarded to 3rd Tk Bn Hdqs.

In regard to Bill's Silver Star, he might never have received it, at least for his actions in the An Hoa Basin Area, if we hadn't gotten tanks across the Song Thu Bon a few weeks earlier. When I was asked by the new CO of 9th marines, Col. D.J. Barrett, if we could get tanks across the river to support operations out of An Hoa, I told him there was a possible fording site I wanted to check out. Long story short, I took Bill with me and we waded the river, poking the gravel bottom with tank bars for over 200 meters from the north bank to the south bank, learning that we indeed did have a good fording site. As an aside, I always felt that Bill and I should have received a separate award for that little escapade. We were walking across a river whose south bank was a bit unfriendly and

(Continued on page 33)

The Cow That Gave Her Life...
(Continued from page 30)

would send out mechanized patrols for longer-range work and these usually consisted of a mixture of tanks and amtracs. We exercised extreme caution in exiting the defensive area, as we did not want to establish patterns of departures, which could be noticed by the NVA and lead to enemy ambushes.

As First Sergeant of the company, and the only 0311 grunt in the entire unit, I made it a practice to frequently check our line positions. On one of these excursions, I heard a loud noise that sounded like an explosion of some sort. Taking one of my office clerks with me, I reconned the entire line but found nothing. Several of the Marines on the line, however, also had heard the explosion and pointed out the area from which they thought it had come. This area was outside of the perimeter so I increased my patrol size and we left the perimeter.

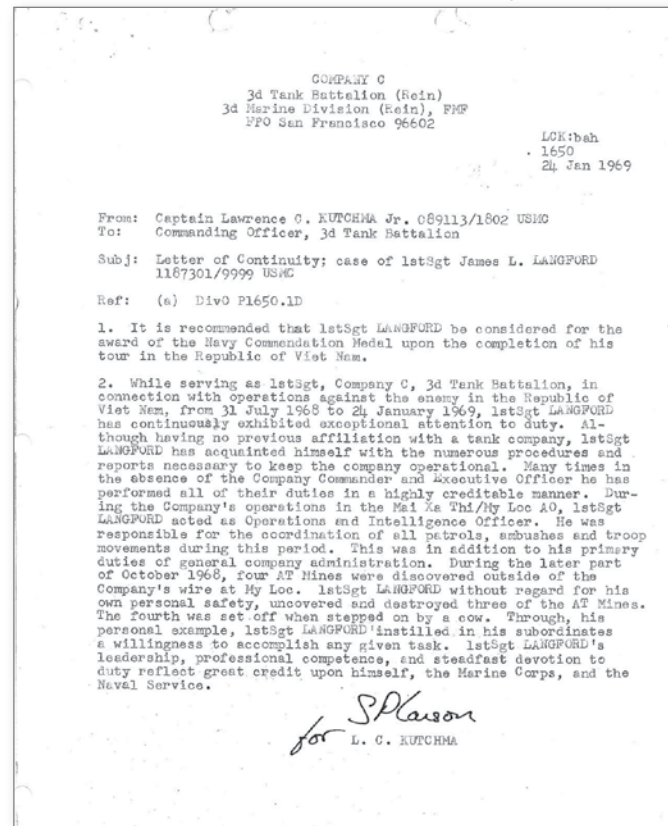
Approximately one hundred meters in front of our wire I saw a cow with its head blown off laying in the tracks of the last tanks we had sent out on patrol. I stopped my patrol and looked the terrain over very carefully for I was pretty sure what had killed the cow. I discovered that we had walked into the middle of a minefield of, fortunately for me, anti-tank mines. Nineteen of which I could see from where I was standing. Staying in place, I sent "Tail-End Charlie" back to the lines for the engineers.

In a short period of time the Marine mine experts had cleared me and my patrol from the mine field and then they detonated the mines in place to ensure that sympathetic detonation would set off any mine they might have missed.

I changed our operating procedures for future operations so that engineer mine clearing details would precede the tank patrols for a minimum of one hundred meters in front of our lines, after which the tanks could disperse to whatever direction they wished to go.

As an added benefit to this event, some of the Marines were able to have fresh meat for a day or two.

Submitted By
1stSgt James L. Langford
Charlie Company, Third Tanks,
Third Marine Division (Reinforced)



VA News & Updates
(Continued from page 25)

- Veterans exposed to ionizing radiation during atmospheric testing or during the occupation of Hiroshima and Nagasaki.
- Project 112/SHAD participants.
- Veterans who served in the Republic of Vietnam between January 9, 1962 and May 7, 1975.
- Veterans who served in the Southwest Asia theater of operations from August 2, 1990, through November 11, 1998.
- Veterans who served in a theater of combat operations after November 11, 1998, as follows:
- Veterans discharged from active duty on or after January 28, 2003, for five years post discharge

Priority Group 7

- Veterans with incomes below the geographic means test (GMT) income thresholds and who agree to pay the applicable copayment.

Priority Group 8

- Veterans with gross household incomes above the VA national income threshold and the geographically-adjusted income threshold for their resident location and who agrees to pay copays

Veterans eligibility for enrollment: Noncompensable 0% service-connected and:

- Subpriority a: Enrolled as of January 16, 2003, and who have remained enrolled since that date and/ or placed in this subpriority due to changed eligibility status.
- Subpriority b: Enrolled on or after June 15, 2009 whose income exceeds the current VA National Income Thresholds or VA National Geographic Income Thresholds by 10% or less

Veterans eligible for enrollment: Nonservice-connected and:

- Subpriority c: Enrolled as January 16, 2003, and who remained enrolled since that date and/ or placed in this subpriority due to changed eligibility status
- Subpriority d: Enrolled on or after June 15, 2009 whose income exceeds the current VA National Income Thresholds or VA National Geographic Income Thresholds by 10% or less

Veterans not eligible for enrollment: Veterans not meeting the criteria above:

- Subpriority e: Noncompensable 0% service-connected
- Subpriority g: Nonservice-connected ■

An Hoa Tanks
(Continued from page 31)

from which we did receive small arms fire on our way back to the north bank! Oh well!

Not long after our fording site recon, we crossed the Song Thu Bon with four tanks of Bill's 2nd Plt, the Hdqs. tanks, including the Flames and the Retriever, some Amtracs with an infantry company from 1/9, and met 1/3, which had been heli-lifted into the eastern portion of the An Hoa area to conduct a sweep of the area toward Hoi An, an operation called Macon. Not much of a successful operation, but we did have tanks across the river. When we got back to the fording site, I left the four tanks of Bill's 2nd Plt. on the south bank and recrossed the river with everything and everyone else. As I remember, Tom's tank was back at the Hill 55 CP being repaired. I told Bill that we would get his other tank to him as soon as possible. When the tank was ready, I contacted Bill by radio and arranged for him to be at the fording site on the south bank to receive Tom's tank and be up to full strength.

I was in my tank intending to "talk" Tom across the river to keep him properly aligned, since his driver would be "buttoned up". Under the heading of "best laid plans", Bill jumped on the platoon net before I was able to come up and proceeded to "cheer lead" Tom's tank across and I couldn't get a word in edgewise, as the saying goes! Then, to make matters worse, when the tank got to the other bank, they pulled it up on a sand dune to drain water out of the bottom, which had leaked in through the "water-tight" seals of the driver's hatch. At this point, all of a sudden, Bill and everyone else decided that radio contact with the "Skipper" was not a priority, and they were ALL gathered around Tom's tank to oversee the draining operation.

Let's stop here for a moment. If I could have gotten my hands on Bill right about then, he would NOT have eventually earned the Silver Star, because I would have killed him on the spot! However, all's well that end's well and the 2nd Platoon of Bravo Company, 3rd Tank Bn., 3rd MarDiv went on to achieve great things, along with all the other tankers I was privileged to command. ■

Many of us saw lots of Chieu Hoi or "open arms" leaflets that implored the NVA and the VC to surrender and to change sides. The message was that the turn coats would be greeted with open arms. During the San Antonio reunion, Andy Anderson brought this NVA surrender card that the NVA had left in the field for Americans to consider changing sides.





Task Force Robbie 1968

by DAN "JOCKO" PAWLAK

In January 1968, Camp Carroll was almost cut off from Route 9 due to an ambush. B-52s; the company blade tank; F-22, my flame tank; and two doggie "Sky dusters", along with a squad of Marine grunts, were sent out the north gate to help. Our company commanding officer, Capt. Kent, was TC of the blade tank and, unfortunately, he was KIA. Our small task force was ordered to hold a position at the junction of Route 9 and the road that went up to Camp Carroll. It turned out to be a really bad day, and when we got back to Carroll, after we had to tow a disabled duster, I was debriefed by the most "brass" I had ever seen in one place. After that, things kind of got back to normal.

In the middle of February, we were doing PM on our tank. My crew was Dave Twitchell, the gunner and Joe Medina, the driver while I was the TC. Some of the dates in this story might be off a little, but it's because of the time passed.

Anyway, as we were doing our work at Camp Carroll, we dropped the escape hatch when, all of a sudden, we got orders to mount up and to go immediately to Cam Lo Hill. When we got onto Route 9 and the road north to the village of Cam Lo, we started taking incoming. Of course, we had no escape hatch and the air inside of the tank got really dusty. When we got to the Cam Lo Bridge and the river, I had Medina gun it, with the great hope that we wouldn't stall out while fording the water. We made the crossing a little bit wet but okay. When we arrived at Cam Lo Hill, we were told to hang loose. In the meantime we got another escape hatch and all of us were a lot happier.

As time went by, a Marine named Joe Irizarry joined us. Then, another flame tank that had been in Hue with the TC named Charlie West, gunner John Wear, and driver Brad "Goodie" Goodin, joined us. Then Tom Yax and his flame tank joined us. All the while, more gun tanks from both Charlie and Alpha companies joined us. One of the tankers from Charlie Co. informed me that my good buddy, Anthony Bennett, had been KIA from a 500-pound bomb that was booby-trapped and his tank ran over it. Anthony had been a good friend and a good Marine.

As March ended, we would go on road sweeps to Dong Ha and Camp Carroll. There were rumors all of the time that we were going to clear the road to Khe Sahn and help to end the siege.

In April, there was also a lot of fighting around Cam Lo. A Combined Action Platoon (CAP unit) was hit late one day and we went out after dark. A few tanks hit mines and the rest of the night was pretty hairy. On April 29th or 30th (my parents' telegram said the 29th), we went out the back gate of Cam Lo Hill with Tom Yax and several gun tanks. Loaded on our tanks were grunts from the 9th Marines. We were heading northeast, with all of the tanks in line, when we started taking heavy incoming small arms fire. We got to a small rise when Tom Yax came over the radio saying that he was wounded in the hand and he pulled his tank back. My tank moved forward and we shot our load of napalm. It was a good mix with no lumps! Everything was very chaotic, as I was up in the cupola trying to tell the grunts to move away from the tank so we wouldn't run over them. About that time, we hit a mine. I got wounded pretty badly so we moved back. Dave Twitchell and Joe Medina saved my life that day and I will love them like brothers forever. Like I said, it could have been April 29th or 30th. Tom Yax would know, but he has since passed away.

Well that's my story of Task Force Robbie. I am pretty sure it is as accurate as memory serves me. I wanted to relay this, since there are not many stories or articles about TFR and its activities.

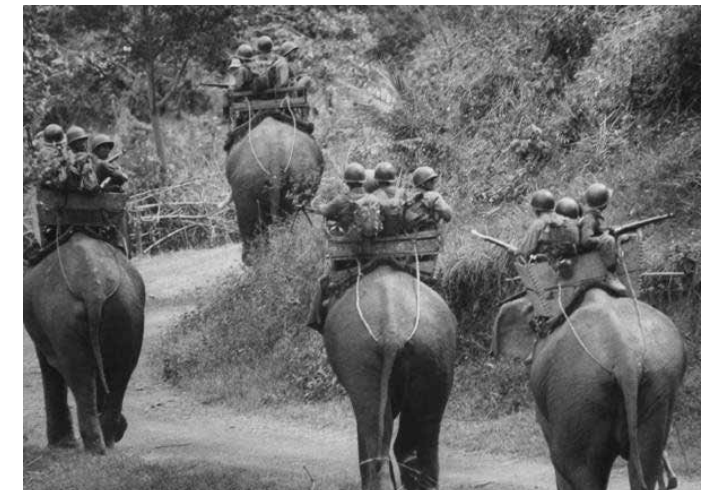
Dan "Jacko" Pawlak
F-22, Bravo Co, 3rd Tanks
Mokena, Illinois
Phone: (815) 485-4476

Editor's Note: If you served with Task Force Robbie, please give John Wear a heads up on an email or a phone call at (215) 794-9052. He'd like to record and document some of our TFR stories.

Shots from Nam



This photo shows a Marine (center) filling his canteen from a stream while another Marine (right) is relieving himself into the same water.



This photo shows a ARVN armor column performing a morning road sweep.

USMCVTA History Project Interview

with Mike Fischer April 2014

As part of the USMCVTA History Project, member interviews were conducted at our 2013 Reunion in San Antonio, Texas. Unfortunately, we were unable to interview all of the members who signed up for the interviews. The purpose of the VTA History Project is to capture the stories and experiences of Marine Tankers in Combat Operations in the Republic of Vietnam.

The following interview with Mike Fischer, USMCVTA member since 2005, was conducted on April 2, 2014 by Pete Ritch. The interview will be published in the VTA Sponson Box Magazine and posted on the VTA web site.

Pete: Thank you Mike for taking the time to complete this interview.

Mike: My pleasure.

Pete: When did you arrive in Vietnam?



In the photo: Mike's platoon getting ready to leave Okinawa

Mike: I was part of Battalion Landing Team 3/9 3rd Marine Division (Rein) FMF. We left Okinawa in January 1967 and arriving in Vietnam in Mid-February 1967 and spending my first night at Cam Lo. My MOS was 1811. I was first assigned to H&S Co 3/9 then Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks. I spent my entire tour in and around "Leatherneck Square" consisting of Con Thien, Gio Lin, Cam Lo, and Dong Ha. This was the DMZ - I Corps area.

Pete: What units did you operate with?

Mike: Most frequently, I was with a heavy section of tanks, supporting elements of 1/9, 3/9, 1/4 Marines, and ARVN infantry units to name a few.

Pete: Do you remember your tanks name and some of the Tankers you served with?

Mike: My Tank was named "Thor" which Don Gehl chose. Some of the Tankers I served with were 2nd Lt. J. Anderson, Gunnery Sgt. B. Person, Staff Sgt. G. Cummings, Sgt. C.

Schaefer, Cpl. S. Soto, Pfc. C. Thatcher, Pfc. J. Young, Pfc. J. Lester, Pfc. D. Gehrman to name a few.



In the photo: Mike and Don Gehl,

Pete: What Operations did you participate in?

Mike: I participated in direct Support of U.S. MILOP RVN, Prairie II, Prairie III, Prairie IV and some others that I cannot remember.

Pete: Do you have a particular story that you'd like to share?

Mike: I have two. The first one occurred early in my tour and took place in Quang Tri Province. Our heavy section of tanks was supporting an infantry platoon on a sweep just south of Gio Linh. We were passing through a small village when we were ambushed. My tank was hit by an RPG killing our Tank Commander, Lt. Jack Anderson and wounding me, S. Soto and C. Thatcher our driver was not hit. I was the gunner at the time and remember hearing auto fire then, the smoke, blood and confusion when we were hit. A Corpsman took S. Soto out of the tank and patched me up. C. Thatcher then became the Tank Commander and I the driver. As we maneuvered north, we hit a land mine and I was thrown from the tank. An infantry platoon from Gio Linh arrived and set up a perimeter around

our disabled tank and other wounded and called in medevac choppers. While waiting for the choppers we started taking in mortar fire that I heard later might have been from our mortars. When the chopper arrived, were loaded on board and as we lifted off, I remember the Door Gunner firing his machine gun all around the as we lifted off.

As an aside, I met up with Sgt. Soto (that's what he still likes to be called) at our Reunion in San Antonio, in November, 2013, I said to him "the last time I saw you was you were lying on the bottom of the tank bleeding from the head!" He responded "the last time I saw you; you were holding your chest and bleeding!"

The other story that I would like to share took place on May 8th, 1967. After being released from the hospital in Da Nang, I returned to Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks in Dong Ha. Once again, our heavy section of tanks was assigned to support Marine infantry units and this time at Con Thien. The following incident is also chronicled in Jim Coan's book, "Hill of Angels" on pages 65 thru 68.

That night while manning the perimeter of the Con Thien Combat base, we came under attack by a large NVA force that breached our lines and was engaged with the Marine infantry in hand to hand combat. There were 3 tanks on that side of the hill and 2 of them were disabled at the very start. Our tank manned by Gunnery Sgt. Barnett Person, Donald Gehl and myself "we only had three of us manning the tank" moved out along the entire line and opened fire on the oncoming NVA. We took a couple of RPG'S but not in a critical area. Unknown to us 2 NVA had climbed onto our tank and Charles Thatcher shot both of them off. Later Thatcher was awarded the Navy Cross for his actions that morning but that's another story.

Later that day Gunnery Sgt. Person was hurt and medevac

leaving Don Gehl and me as I remember the only two on the tank. We spent the night at 100% watch waiting for another NVA counter attack. At some point during the night, we heard a terrible scream from the LP out in front of our tank. We heard later that a grunt just lost it.

For some reason the NVA did not attack the base again that night. I am not sure why but I'd like to believe that they just did not want to get their asses kicked again by a Marine tank.

We long two (2) tanks that night and many brave Marines were killed or wounded. Con Thien did not feel like the Hill of Angels. **Pete:** You received two (2) Purple Hearts, how did you get the second one?

Mike: In September 1967, I was wounded at C-2 during a mortar attack. After healing up I returned to Dong Ha and was assigned to a rear position and put in charge of Special Services.

Pete: When did you leave Vietnam?

Mike: In December 1967, I went on emergency leave due my father's serious illness. I arrived home and was able to spend some time with him during his last days. Since I had spent about eleven months in country I did not return to Vietnam.

Pete: During your time in-country what tank duties did you perform?

Mike: I was a driver, loader, gunner and tank commander and was promoted to Corporal.

Pete: That was a lot of responsibility.

Mike: In a lot of cases Corporals with enough time in grade and experience were given the responsibility.

Pete: Thank you Mike for your service and willingness to share your experiences with us as part of the USMCVTA History Project. Semper Fi.

Mike: Again, my pleasure. ■

Photos From Richard Peksens

I took the photo at 1st Tank Battalion in 1969 while visiting a crew that had come to Battalion to work on a few damaged tanks from An Hoa. During that time, the Ammo Dump blew up in Da Nang and a few of the crew were wounded when they were sent to help evacuate trapped Marines trapped near the dump.

This was not too long after the Ammo Dump blew up at An Hoa. In both cases ammo "cooked off" for close to a day in each case...

The tank in the second photo was also taken at Battalion and represents a tank guarding both Battalion and the western extent of the Da Nang Airstrip.



1st Tank Bn Repair Facility



Da Nang air strip "guard dog"

I Remember Manual M. Garcia

by SERGEANT MAJOR BILL "JJ" CARROLL USMC (RET.)

Bill "JJ" Carroll writes: I saw a boot camp picture of Manuel M. Garcia posted on the "Virtual Wall" website, so I sent an email to the site owner and asked for information on who had posted the picture. When I got the email address of the person who had posted the picture, I sent him an e-mail note stating that I had served in Manuel's platoon in Vietnam and did he want some pictures I had of him. Below is the e-mail reply that I received.

Yes, please! I don't want anybody to ever forget him. He will always be my hero. We grew up as kids together and I don't have to tell you what a good guy he was. I was one of the pallbearers when he came home and there were over 100 cars in the funeral procession. Everybody liked Manuel. Thank you, Bill, for being a friend to Manuel and for your service. Your friend now, Bill Tinsley

Ric Langley wrote: If I remember correctly, Garcia had enlisted at 17 years of age and he was not even 19 when he was in Vietnam. Garcia was the loader on one of the tanks that I was TC. His one and only mission in life was to be the tank's driver. Since we already had a driver, Garcia would beg me to drive our tank, when we'd move out to the perimeter wire for night guard duty. I also remember that he loved music, so much so that he had a portable record player and he only had a few records ... but he played them endlessly. I happened to be in Dong Ha on July 27th awaiting my orders to rotate back to the World. The next day, the company commander told me to round up two tank crewmen, who had just come in-country (FNG's), and load up on a dead-lined tank (the turret motor was broken); we took the tank up to Con Thien to help relieve the beleaguered platoon that lost so many men on the 27th. I stayed out in the field for another ten or twelve days, before they allowed me to go back to Dong Ha and go home.

RB English wrote: We had taken the tanks out to the Market Place east of Con Thien to support the grunts that were on a sweep of the area. When the grunts stirred up some NVA troops, they were receiving small arms and mortar fire. All of a sudden, several NVA 152 mm artillery rounds came screaming in and hit two of our tanks. It was like a freight train had crashed. Three tankers were killed outright and seven tankers were wounded, including the platoon leader, Lt Brock, and me, the platoon sergeant. One of the WIAs,



Gunny RB English

Bill "JJ" Carroll writes: I was not with the platoon at the time. I was home on leave for extending my tour in Vietnam 6 months. If I had been there, I probably would have been killed or wounded myself. I was on the tank crew with Garcia. A new Marine, Private Ludwig, joined our platoon while I was gone. He may have replaced me on my tank. He was from my home town of Wilmington, Delaware. His body was returned to Wilmington before I went back to Vietnam. I went to his service and was in the firing squad at his funeral.

The below roster was given to me by Sergeant Major R.B. English when I was the First Sergeant of Delta Company, 1st Tanks at Camp Pendleton.

We were originally the 1st Platoon, Charlie Company, 3rd Tanks, and then we became the 4th Platoon of Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks. As you can see, July 27th was a very bad day for our platoon.

Name	City	State	Remarks
Brock, John B.	Belmont	MA	WIA July 27, 1967
Buchmann, Henry O	Globe	AZ	
Carroll, William F. ("J.J.")	Oakdale	MN	WIA Sept 2, 1967 - Retired Sergeant Major
Clark, L. A.	Memphis	TN	
English, Richard B. ("R.B.")	Joshua Tree	CA	WIA July 27, 1967 - Retired Sergeant Major
Flanigan, David	Rockford	IL	KIA July 27, 1967
French, Johnny R.	Loveland	CO	WIA July 27, 1967 (deceased)
Garcia, Manuel	Los Angeles	CA	WIA July 27, 1967 DOW July 28, 1967
George, Carroll M.	Las Vegas	NV	WIA July 10, 1967
Hahn, John S.		FL	WIA July 27, 1967
Hamby, Alvin L. ("Leroy")	Channelview	TX	WIA March 6, 1967
Herbold, Edward J.	Linesville	PA	WIA July 27, 1967
Holmes, Johnny L.	Darlington	SC	
Hullings, Walter		MD	KIA March 6, 1967
Jansen, Miles E.	St. Paul	MN	KIA July 27, 1967
Johnson, Michael M.		CA	
Knosky, Ronald W.	Elizbeth	NJ	KIA May 14, 1967
Kyser, Warren D.	Oregon City	OR	WIA July 27, 1967
Langley, Richard G.	Lompoc	CA	WIA March 6, 1967
Ludwig, Raymond J.	Wilmington	DE	KIA July 27, 1967
Milos, Joseph Louis		NY	KIA March 6, 1967
Otto, Dale L.	Ellensdale	MN	KIA May 14, 1967

>>

Operation Lam Son 250

Poteete, Charles M. Jr.	Franklin	TN	WIA July 8, 1967
Rigsby, Robert M.	Simi Valley	CA	
Ritter, William E.		NY	WIA July 10, 1967
Roberts, Roger W.	St. Marys	GA	Retired Master Sergeant
Sellers, Robert B.	West Union	WV	WIA May 17, 1967
Semon, Lee B.	Lake Wales	FL	
Siva, T.J.		CA	WIA March 6, 1967 (Deceased)
Sutherlin, Carl H.	Oceanside	CA	
Vaughn, Michael B.	Grand Prairie	TX	
Waicak, John P.	Mogadore	OH	WIA Sept 1967

Two of the members of our platoon that were killed in action, Dale Otto and Miles Jensen, were from here in Minnesota. I had the pleasure of meeting both of their mothers when I was the Recruiting Station Sergeant Major of Twin Cities in the 80's. Both R.B. English and I visited their graves together during his visit to Minnesota. I also visit both of their gravesites annually around Memorial Day.

During the 1999 USMCVTA reunion in Washington, D.C., we visited the Vietnam Memorial Wall. On the trip to the Wall, I was talking with Howard Blum, who was also with Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks (Flames) at the same time as me. He was carrying a small bag. I asked him what was in the bag. He pulled a small battery operated record player that had belonged to Manuel. I remember Manuel playing the song "Dry Your Eyes" by Brenda and the Tabulations on it. Howard informed me that he was going to leave the record player under the panel with Manuel's name. He accomplished his mission.

I hope to one day meet with Bill Tinsley, the childhood friend of Manuel's, when I visit Los Angeles. I'd like to learn more about Manuel and to visit his gravesite.

Please visit the USMCVTA photo section for 3rd Tanks. Ric Langley has posted some great photos of our platoon on the site.

Alpha Co, 4th Platoon, summer 1967

(Left to Right)

1st Row: John French, Robert M Rigby,
Manuel Garcia, Lee B Semon.

2nd Row:

William Ritter(?), Charles H Sutherlin,
LA Clark, Charles M Poteete, Jr and John Hahn

3rd Row:

Carroll George, William F (JJ) Carroll.

Back Row:

Edward Herbold



The crew of C-12, June – July '67

(L to R)

Manual Garcia, Bill "JJ" Carroll,
John French and Ric Langley



Breakfast at the Ben Hai River

BY VIRGIL MELTON, JR.

1st Platoon, Alpha Co., 3rd Tanks – '67/ '68/ '69

In the early morning of August 15, 1968, the 1st Platoon, Company A, and the 3rd Platoon, Company B, 3rd Tank Battalion, one Army tank retriever, and two ARVN Regiments departed from Gio Linh on Operation Lam Son 250. The Operation was under the command of Capt. R. J. Patterson, CO, Company A. We departed Gio Linh at 0400 hours and traveled north up the coastline of the South China Sea.

All ten tanks moved slowly up the coast by the light of the moon in a single file formation so as to sustain minimum mine damage. As the sun began to rise, we turned northwest and made our way on top of a sand dune ridge and then turned back north on the ridge. At daybreak, we arrived at the end of the sand ridge which split in two directions, one ridge running east and the other west.

I was the tank commander of A-15 and my tank was the lead tank. Capt. Patterson was aboard my tank which he used as his command post. From our observation point we could see the Ben Hai River. Between us and the river was what appeared to be an old plantation. Camped out on the plantation was an estimated 600 to 800 NVA eating breakfast. We were so close you could smell the food.

We had completely surprised the NVA and we took full advantage of it. I ordered my gunner, L/Cpl. Ronald Floyd, to fire at will using the 90 mm main gun; all ten tanks began to fire in unison at the same time. Capt. Patterson ordered the two ARVN Regiments of APC's to flank the NVA on the west side. With all tanks now spread out and firing from the ridge, we clearly had the advantage.

The NVA had no time to use their light artillery. Our tanks destroyed it quickly. The NVA begin to return fire with RPG's, mortars and machine guns; however, we took most of them out. We called in air support and, shortly, a Huey Gunship showed up and began spraying the enemy with machine-gun fire.

The ARVN had flanked the NVA on the left and were pushing them east to the coast as our tanks were moving forward, pushing them to the north. Many of the NVA panicked, breaking formation, and began to retreat north on foot towards the Ben Hai River and East to the coast. Our tanks pursued the NVA all the way to the mouth of the Ben Hai River, destroying two enemy boats, one truck, and many NVA bunkers and fortifications.

Late in the evening, Capt. Patterson gave the order to head back to Gio Linh. Many of our tanks had suffered minor damage and A-13 hit a mine on the way back, which we repaired in less than 15 minutes to get it back to Gio Linh. An Army tank retriever had hit two mines, leaving it inoperable. We fired a couple of HE into it and called in for a napalm strike to burn it, so the enemy could not use it. The four man Army retriever crew rode back on our tanks. I saved three rounds of HE, just in case we ran into trouble on the way back and, sure enough, we did. We took some machine-gun fire from the sand dunes to the west and we returned fire on those positions.

Sgt. Eddie Miers, tank commander of A-14, spotted an NVA soldier trying to hide in some bushes on top of a sand dune. He headed toward the soldier and the soldier ran toward Sgt. Miers' tank with his hands up and surrendered. Sgt. Miers blindfolded the prisoner and took him back to Gio Linh, turning him over to the authorities. We arrived back at Gio Linh around 2100 hours.

Some of the Marines I remember that participated in the operation were Ronald

Floyd, Eddie Miers, Rich, Dan Colkosky, and William "Bill" Swisher (Swisher was KIA 1-10-69) and many other faces I can see, but cannot remember their names.

Our tanks inflicted heavy damage to the enemy, being credited with 189 KIA confirmed and 70 KIA probables out of a total confirmed count of 421 KIA's. Our tanks fired 126 plus rounds of HE, 34 rounds of beehive, 20 rounds of canister, 21,675 rounds of .30 caliber, and 2,000 rounds of .50 caliber. These figures are conservative because all tanks came back empty or with just a few rounds of ammo left.

Operation Lam Son 250 received little or no recognition, but you wouldn't know that by the Marine tankers that accomplished their mission that night. I've never seen such happy, excited, and thrilled gung-ho Marines. We could hardly believe what we had achieved. Operation Lam Son 250 may always be a mere footnote in history, but that didn't matter to us.

Capt. Patterson put me up for a medal for taking out an RPG team preparing to fire on A-13. However, that day, every Marine tanker was a hero and deserved a medal. All of our tanks suffered minor damage from mortars, machine gun fire and mines, yet we had no casualties.

There is no doubt in my mind that the Lord was with us on this journey.

Semper Fidelis.

Turkey Shoot at the DMZ

BY JIM COAN

One of the most devastating defeats ever inflicted upon the NVA by U. S. Marine tankers occurred on August 15, 1968, in the coastal sand dunes northeast of Gio Linh and on the south bank of the Ben Hai River dividing the Demilitarized Zone separating North from South Vietnam. According

to the USMC publication, U. S. Marines in Vietnam: The Defining Year, 1968, by Shulimson, et. al. (p. 387), ten tanks from Companies A and B, 3d Tank Battalion, surprised an enemy battalion at dawn while they were still eating breakfast among the dunes. In conjunction with elements of the 2d ARVN Regiment aboard APCs, the Marine tankers opened fire and attacked, overrunning an enemy command post. Shulimson goes on to state: "The Marine tankers, who described the day's action as a 'turkey shoot,' were credited with 198 killed and 70 probables out of a total of 421 reported enemy dead." They also sank two boats and destroyed a truck. The book states further that there were no Marine casualties, but two tanks and a tank retriever were damaged by mines on the return trip. [I learned subsequently that the mine-damaged tanks were A-11 and A-13, and the retriever was C-43. All were quickly repaired and able to leave the area.]

I was the XO of Alpha Company, 3d Tanks at the time, but was only a few days from rotating "back to the World" when this operation occurred. I was glued to the company radio net while this battle took place. To this day, I can still recall the tremendous relief we all felt when we learned of that "hairy" operation's total victory. Unfortunately, the operation called Lam Son 250 by the ARVN received zero recognition in the American Press.

While doing research several years ago with the intent of writing an article on Lam Son 250, I was contacted by Bob Dougherty who told me that S/Sgt Kent Baldwin was the platoon sergeant of Bravo's 3d Platoon. Dougherty was the TC of his tank but moved to the gunner's seat to make room for Baldwin. He recalled that they moved north all night, being led by artillery flares being fired to their right. The tanks carried five ARVN per tank. At first light they could not believe their eyes. The NVA were cooking breakfast in the sand dunes. Besides S/Sgt Baldwin, he remembered Sgt. Soto, Larry Basko, and a guy named Riggs.

Sgt. Soto related that he was the TC of B-33. He mentioned Jim Jewell as being one of the other tank commanders.

He said at dawn they came upon the NVA battalion and opened fire. He recalled the beehive rounds tearing the clothes and flesh off the backs of the fleeing NVA.

Kent Baldwin said that Sgt. Waggle was the Alpha Company platoon sergeant; 2/Lt. Frank Blakemore was their platoon leader. He recalls Jim Spalsbury and Capt. McQueary as being on the tank retriever. He remembered the beehive and canister doing a number on the NVA in the open as they were just getting their breakfast fires going. He saw whole groups of NVA practically disappear. The tankers could see boats in the Ben Hai and they took them under fire. He learned later that they were in an area where our planes unloaded their excess ordnance before returning to their carrier, and the area was filled with unexploded bombs. Coming back, they wandered into a minefield outside of Gio Linh. The grunts there were frantically signaling them, but it was too late as two tanks and the retriever hit mines.

Captain Dan McQueary, USMC (Ret.)

wrote me a long letter in 2003 describing the operation from his perspective aboard the USMC retriever, C-43. He described an enemy sapper camp that was set up on the north side of the river. It was determined that this was a training camp for underwater sapper teams. The tankers destroyed it. He mentioned that, on the return trip, he came across an Army tank retriever that had been abandoned. It was blown in place after being determined unsalvageable.

Captain McQueary stated that Lam Son 250 was a tanker's dream. All tank and retriever crews were awarded the Vietnam Cross of Gallantry w/Palm by an ARVN colonel upon their return [this was not the case according to information received at the San Antonio Reunion].

All tank and retriever crewmen on Lam Son 250 are authorized to wear the Meritorious Unit Commendation ribbon. Those Marine tankers may not have been recognized in the Press, but their actions on 15 August, 1968, shall never be forgotten. ■

Under Fire

Editor's Note: This article is 15 yrs. old but as meaningful now as it was then.

IT WAS 30 YEARS AGO THAT THE SHOTS WERE HEARD 'ROUND THE WORLD. THE TET OFFENSIVE IN VIETNAM CHANGED LIVES, INCLUDING THOSE OF ONE FUTURE NEWSPAPER REPORTER AND HIS 5 TEAM MEMBERS.

February 06, 1998 | H.G. REZA | TIMES STAFF WRITER

The voice, mocking and taunting, came through loud and clear on the field radio: "You die, GI."

The enemy soldier's jeering comment added to the confusion and fear that gripped us that day, three decades ago in Vietnam.

Nobody on our six-man team of U.S. Army advisors, nor the Vietnamese troops we fought and lived with, had a clue about what was going on. We were under attack. Highway I was cut off; all communications were severed between our headquarters in Hue and our outpost at Phong Dien, 25 miles north.

We did not learn, until later, how completely our world had been turned upside down Jan. 31, 1968, the first day of Tet, the Vietnamese Lunar New Year. Accustomed to being the hunters, we were the hunted, isolated and cornered. It was to be like that for the next four weeks in 100 of South Vietnam's provincial and district capitals, including Saigon, Dalat, Pleiku, Da Nang, Nha Trang and Hue.

All Americans were threatened by the Vietnam War, in some form. For those of us "in country," the Tet offensive was the watershed event of our lives. When I returned home to San Benito, Texas, in May, I was shocked to learn that Tet, clearly a military victory for us--58,000 Viet Cong were dead, compared with 3,893 American and 4,954 South

Vietnamese--was viewed in the United States as a political defeat, and public protests against the war grew louder.

Tet turned out to be the first in a string of cataclysmic events in 1968 that altered U.S. history. In March, Lyndon Johnson announced that he would not run for another term. The following month saw the assassination of the Rev. Martin Luther King Jr., followed by Robert F. Kennedy's murder in June.

In August, the Democratic National Convention in Chicago showed the world the deep fissures that the Vietnam experience had left in American society. It was that bitter division that led to Richard M. Nixon's resurrection. Nixon's "secret plan" in 1968 to end the war took five long years to come together.

The men I fought alongside during Tet were all professional soldiers, members of Team 3, Military Assistance Command, Vietnam (MACV): Don Rampanelli was a sergeant first class and senior noncommissioned officer. He is now a business consultant in Phoenix. "I really didn't think that any of us were going to get out alive," recalled "Ramp." "I was scared. I wrote a letter to my family that, fortunately, was never mailed. It was going to be my goodbye to them. I hoped that someone would find it in the rubble and mail it, if we got overrun."

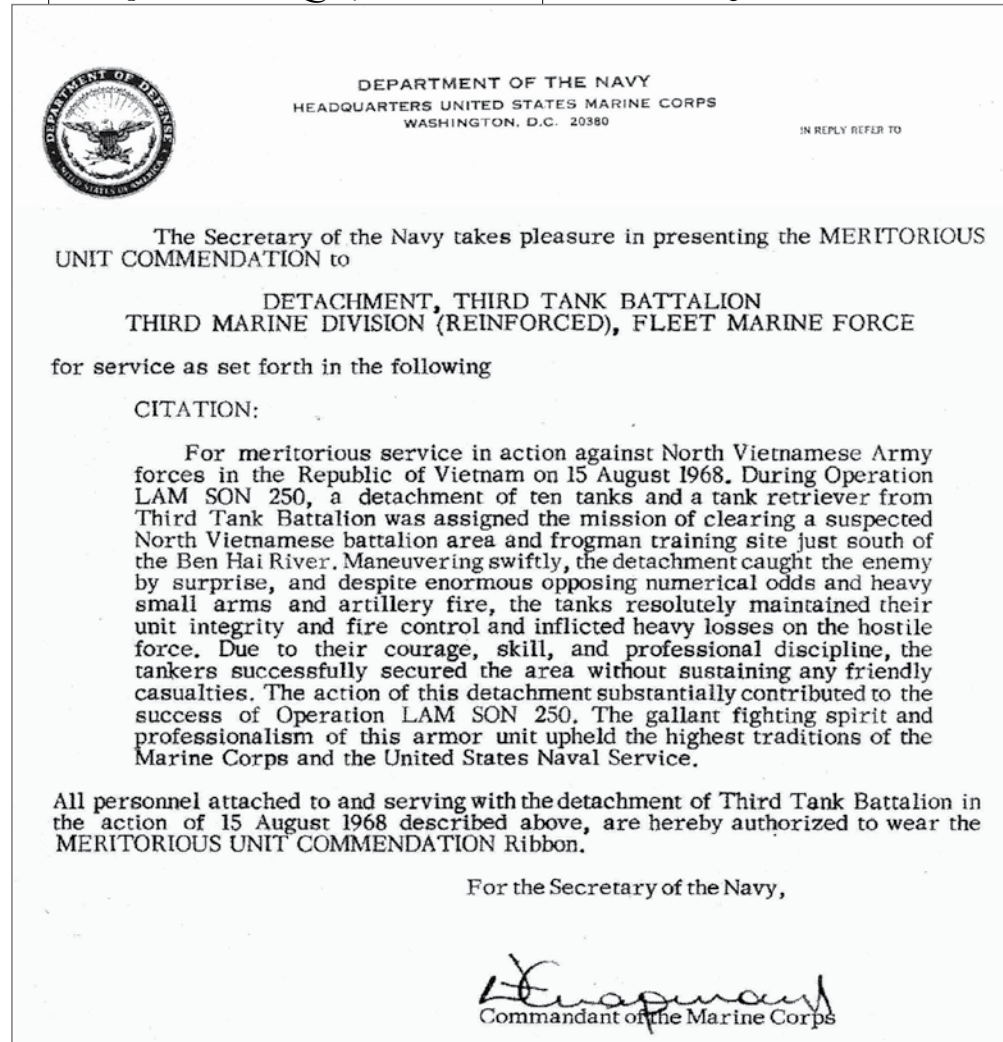
Thomas O. Richardson was a sergeant

first class and a member of the Army's elite Ranger forces. "Rich" did a second tour in Vietnam, as an advisor to a Vietnamese Ranger battalion. After retiring from the Army, he returned to college and earned a teaching credential. Rich taught fifth-graders for 10 years before retiring a second time and settling in Columbus, Ga.

Rich recalled that "we were hurting them, and they made us pay. It seemed like we were getting hit three times a day and three times at night," he said. "An experience like that brings you closer together. We stood together, and that's why we survived."

Dick Powell was our warrant officer. An Australian Army advisor assigned to our team, he was scheduled to rotate home in February and had been reminding us that he was "short." He is retired and lives in the Australian outback. Powell, who was anchored in the bunker during the offensive, recalled, "Until Tet came along, it hadn't been a bad war." Powell had also fought in the jungles of Malaysia in the 1950s when the British and Australian armies battled Communist guerrillas.

Nick Goersch, our team leader, joined us a few weeks before Tet. After a rocky start with the team, the low-key captain proved himself in combat and was accepted as our commanding officer. We lost track of him after Vietnam. >>



Cornelius Johnson was a sergeant first class and our team medic. Johnson, a San Francisco native, was sent back to the rear days before the offensive began because his tour of duty was almost over. His return trip home was delayed several weeks because he was trapped in Hue. We have also lost track of Johnson.

I was a junior enlisted man and the team's radioman. At 19, I was also the youngest of the group and not a professional soldier. After the war, I returned to college and began working as a newspaper reporter. I met the woman who was to be my wife exactly one year after the Tet offensive erupted; we have been married for almost 29 years.

On that first day of Tet, I tried to call our headquarters in Hue to alert them that our outpost was under intense mortar attack. Except for that threat from the enemy radioman, the calls went unanswered. What we did not know, then, was that Hue was occupied by North Vietnamese Army troops. Our headquarters in the city, which had been a relatively safe rear area, was hanging on despite repeated ground attacks.

Before ducking into a bunker that afternoon, I watched in disbelief as exploding mortar rounds "walked" through the wire defensive perimeter. The enemy usually attacked at night in such strength, rarely striking in the daytime, unless they knew they had the advantage.

A special concern, at the time, was that, if we fell, we would go down under South Vietnamese colors. Phong Dien was a Vietnamese camp, under the command of a Vietnamese captain, and the yellow and red South Vietnamese flag flew over our outpost. "That never would've happened," Rampanelli said. "If it came to that, I would've taken the American flag I kept in my footlocker and draped it over the command bunker, where we planned to make our stand. There was no way we were going to go down under South Vietnamese colors."

As scary as the situation was, it became more frightening when we began to question the loyalty of the Vietnamese troops we were fighting with. One day after the offensive began; we learned that five of our troops were missing, including a teenage soldier named Lieu, whom we liked. Three days later, three of the missing soldiers, including Lieu, were killed when their Viet Cong patrol was ambushed by our troops.

Although we patrolled aggressively and led numerous combat operations, we were never under any illusions about who controlled the countryside around us. Saigon's influence did not extend beyond our camp's defensive perimeter.

A nearby area known as the Street Without Joy was designated a "free fire zone," where anything living was a "target of opportunity." The Street had been a Communist stronghold since the French Indochina War, which ended in 1954.

A week after the offensive began, we picked up a weak radio transmission from our advisory team at Phu Loc, a coastal village about 50 miles south of us. A team of five Americans was at the outpost when it was overrun by the enemy. The Americans escaped unharmed through a trench that led to a cave on the beach, where they had hidden a boat. They paddled it out into the South China Sea. At first we were skeptical of their plea for help. The picture of five U.S. infantrymen adrift in a small boat in the South China Sea seemed too pathetic to be true. The five bobbing grunts symbolized the chaotic and unreal turn of events in America's longest war. We convinced the 1st Cavalry Division at nearby LZ Evans to launch an ocean rescue, and the seasick Americans were flown by helicopter back to our outpost. Although we were hunkered down, their presence boosted our morale.

By this time, several of our friends had been killed and wounded in Hue, including Frank Doezema, a close friend,

who was mortally wounded in the first minutes of the offensive. Doezema, a Michigan farm boy, killed more than two dozen North Vietnamese soldiers before losing his legs in a rocket-propelled grenade explosion. I did not learn of his death until the middle of March. The MACV compound in Hue, which Doezema died defending, was named in his honor.

At our outpost, a young trooper from the 1st Cavalry died in one of the attacks. The Cav had placed a three-man team with radar at one end of our camp in order to detect the location of the mortar tubes that were hitting us.

Our team was spared any casualties during most of the offensive, but our luck ran out on Feb. 25, in the waning days of the enemy drive. Rampanelli and Goersch were on patrol with two squads of our troops when they were ambushed. The Vietnamese teenager, carrying the radio for Goersch, took the brunt of the explosion from a remote-controlled mine. Goersch was unhurt, but Ramp took several pieces of shrapnel in both thighs. When Ramp was brought back to the outpost, we showed our concern for him by asking the most important question: "Are the family jewels all right?" They were fine, he assured us. Ramp refused to be medevaced to the rear and was still recuperating when I rotated home in May.

Despite the constant fear, there were moments of laughter. We were low on ammunition and food, except for 200 pounds of pinto beans and dozens of cans of asparagus. We ate both for a month, supplemented by rice. Before the offensive began, Ramp had scrounged up several cans of cherry pie filling and bags of flour. Ever resourceful, he taught Ba, an old woman, who weathered the offensive with us and did our cooking, to bake a cherry pie. We had pie and C-ration fruitcake for breakfast every morning. Thirty years later, I still don't like the taste of cherry pie. ■

A Healing in Sharing War Experiences

by BERNARD E. TRAINOR
Published: November 29, 2011

Note: Bernard E. ("Red") Trainor is a retired Marine lieutenant general who served in tanks during the wars in Korea and Vietnam.

I was recently invited to be a panelist at a veterans' symposium on post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). I sought to decline, saying that I never had PTSD and had no qualifications to talk about it. I was told that I represented an earlier generation of combat veterans and that my views and experience would be interesting. So I accepted. Three other panelists had personal family experience with the traumatic aspects of the recent wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. I restricted myself to the Korean War. As background for my views, I explained the generational context of my experience as follows: I grew up in a working-class neighborhood of the Bronx, during the Depression. Sympathy was not a hallmark of the time; stoicism was. Whenever I complained to my mother about a hurt, she told me to offer up my suffering to "the poor souls in Purgatory." In short, facing life as it was, was characteristic of my generation. Just get on with it.

All of the neighborhood kids, a year or more older than I, went into the service during World War II, including my brother. Many were in direct combat. They were coming home just as I was going into the Marines as a 17-year-old. I envied their wartime experience. To me, the returning neighborhood boys were normal, just as crazy as they were before they went to war. Very little was known of what was called "battle fatigue," although it was widespread. Audie Murphy, the most decorated soldier of the war, suffered the rest of his life from what today is PTSD.

When discharged, veterans received \$20 a week for 52 weeks, as they transitioned to the civilian job market.

It became known as the "52-20 Club." In my neighborhood, the 20 bucks were spent on Friday nights in a gathering at Manion's Bar & Grill on 164th Street and Ogden Avenue. There, the "boys" would drink 10-cent beers and tell lies and war stories to one another. I digested their wild stories, most of them outlandish and funny, though there were a few grim ones. Over time, the ritual waned. They got the war out of their system with the telling. They went on to jobs, wives and new lives.

A few years later, it was my turn to go to war and experience combat as an infantry platoon leader of 40 Marines in Korea. Nothing really surprised me. I internalized my experience and got on with it. As far as I know, my contemporary Marine friends were equally unaffected. Passive acceptance of life, as it was dealt, had its merits. Of course, I had "willies" when I came back to the States. I experienced apprehension when, on homecoming leave, I was playing center field in a pick-up softball game. I felt uncomfortably exposed in the open field and subconsciously feared land mines beyond second base. But, my anxiety lasted only about two weeks.

I knew the war was behind me when I drove past a serious automobile accident. Police were pulling bloody victims from the wreck as I went by. It shook me up for the next hundred or so miles. A few weeks earlier, in the outposts of Korea, the sight of carnage wouldn't have bothered me. But I was back in the civilized world, where such things were not expected.

I continued my Marine Corps career as an infantry officer with two more years at war in Vietnam. Maybe deep inside me, there is a malevolent-memory genie, wanting to get out but, for a lifetime, I have kept him corked up without any trouble. It was with that background that I responded to the panel

moderator's question about my views on how today's combat veterans can deal with the PTSD "genie." To some degree, the genie probably exists in all of them. As Homer wrote in the Iliad, "Even the bravest cannot fight beyond his strength." Acknowledging that, I drew on the experience of my generation and my Marine band-of-brothers culture. It took the form of compare and contrast.

When we went to Korea, all ties with home were cut except for mail, which we usually received weeks after it had been posted. We lacked the questionable benefit of the Internet, Skype or telephone contact with loved ones. As much as we would have cherished today's instant communications, there was nothing to distract us from the job at hand. What happened at home was history by the time we learned of it. We were submerged in the war and the companionship it engendered. We were isolated from the world we had known.

Another difference is how we returned from war. Most troops of the Greatest Generation and Korea came home by ship. It was a slow journey with others with shared experiences and nothing to do but look at the sea. The long voyage home allowed all hands to talk with one another and decompress. Today, troops fly home with the smell of the field still on them. They are plopped down into an unfamiliar environment with loved ones who had learned to live without them. It is often an uncomfortable and strained experience for both parties.

In the days of the draft, home turf was replete with others who had served. Today's all-volunteer soldier is alone; very few of his peers have served in the military, much less gone to war. Rarely are there guys to hang out with at a Manion's. Earlier, the American Legion, the VFW and reunions were a refuge >>

of comradeship. But those are dying institutions, and today's veteran is not a joiner anyway. He is largely isolated, with only his iPhone as a comrade. Wounded or whole, modern veterans speak of yearning to be back with their units, no matter how unpleasant it would be. Many feel alone, no longer a member of Henry V's "band of brothers."

All of this adds up to companionship. Medications, therapy and counselors are important for those who suffer from the

visible and invisible effects of war. But as earlier generations know, often the best medicine for bruised bodies and psyches is communion with those who have sipped from the same bitter cup. From the dawn of civilization, hunters and warriors shared danger in packs. Through the ages, comrades have sustained each other through the heat of battle. Comrades play the same role when the war is done.

Read more about this issue--Sebastian Junger: "For society and themselves,

veterans need to share the moral burden of war"; Gen. Martin E. Dempsey: "The military needs to reach out to civilians"; Brian van Reet: "Troubled veterans may suffer from something other than PTSD"; Jodi Jones Smith: "What to say to 'Thank you for your service'"; Rebecca Sinclair: "When the strains of war lead to infidelity."

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Poems

WAR STORY

By Donald "Sandy" Sanders
Alpha Company, 3rd Tanks
Viet Nam '67 - '68



Walking along the paddy dike
M-16 in hand
Chilled by wind... soaked by rain
Alone in a distant land
Fog shrouded mornings
brought fear without warning
With fire and steel in the air
Hugging the ground...
Not making a sound...
Not wanting to die over there
Flies in the daytime
Mosquitoes at night
And keeping the rats away
Were part of the lifestyle
Part of the plight
We had to endure every day
The stifling heat
Wiping sweat from the brow
Put many a man to the test

And on every patrol
One man somehow
Could find his eternal rest
Soaked with blood and caked with mud
Who said there is glory in war
Probably someone without a son
Who's never been in one before
Somber faces soon replaced
The laughter and smiles that were there
Hard to make friends cause friendship ends
With a bullet that doesn't care
Living in holes half filled with mud
And drinking from a can
Cringing when rockets came down with a thud
And watching your trembling hand
Thirteen months... no sweat... they said
Before they sent us there
So we all did the dirty job
For a nation that didn't care

Coins Left on a Veteran's Headstones

While visiting some cemeteries you may notice that headstones marking certain graves have coins on them, left by previous visitors to the grave.

These coins have distinct meanings when left on the headstones of those who gave their life while serving in America's military, and these meanings vary depending on the denomination of coin.

A coin left on a headstone or at the grave site is meant as a message to the deceased soldier's family that someone else has visited the grave to pay respect. Leaving a penny at the grave means simply that you visited.

A nickel indicates that you and the deceased trained at boot camp together, while a dime means you served with him in some capacity. By leaving a quarter at the grave, you are telling the family that you were with the soldier when he was killed.



According to tradition, the money left at graves in national cemeteries and state veterans cemeteries is eventually collected, and the funds are put toward maintaining the cemetery or paying burial costs for indigent veterans.

In the U.S., this practice became common during the Vietnam War. Due to the political divide in the country over the war, leaving a coin was seen as a more practical way to communicate that you had visited the grave than contacting the soldier's family, which could evolve into an uncomfortable argument over politics relating to the war.

Some Vietnam veterans would leave coins as a "down payment" to buy their fallen comrades a beer or play a hand of cards when they would finally be reunited.

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

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USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 73 Stanton Street, Rochester, NY 14611-2837

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