



Sponson BOX

*Voice of
the USMC
Vietnam Tankers
Association*

Ensuring Our Legacy Through Reunion, Renewal & Remembrance™



Gene Whitehead – May 21, 1966

Featured Stories:

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We'll see you in Providence in September!!!

During the 2021 VTA reunion in Providence we intend to fully comply with any and all of the CDC and State of Rhode Island COVID-19 protocols that will be in place in September: Face masks, social distancing, hand sanitizer, wipes, etc. Whatever is required for gatherings

It's just two month until we meet again!!!



USMC VIETNAM TANKERS ASSOCIATION
2021 PROVIDENCE REUNION
September 15 – 20, 2021
Providence – 2021

Providence 2021

How to Win A Free Hotel Room!

You can win a free 4 night hotel stay for this year's reunion when you fill out and submit the entry coupon that will be provided in your reunion "Welcome Bag" and then you bring and deposit it when you arrive at the Thursday's Opening Meeting no later than 08:59 EST

Rules: The coupon will be your raffle ticket to be surrendered at the door of the meeting room before 08:59 EST for a chance to win a free 4-night stay during the reunion. The prize covers the basic reunion room rate (\$119) plus taxes. **Prize value: \$476.00+.**

The drawing will be held at the conclusion of the same meeting. Tickets will be selected from the people who are in the meeting room prior to 08:59 EST. No latecomers will be permitted to enter in the drawing. Correct time is determined by the President's watch set to atomic clock standards.

Member _____ Room # _____

Letter from the President

A RECENT QUESTION AND COMMENT: We have always made an attempt to encourage members to take an active role in the association including writing their own personal stories ... plus asking questions and making comments that may help the organization move forward in capturing and publishing our legacy as US Marines. The other day we got a hand-written note demanding to know after 8 years, when the member had sent us a photo, why the photo had not yet been published in our magazine. The person's side comment was, "Is there any reason that the picture that I sent to you ... (8 years ago) ... is not good enough to use in the Sponson Box? Or is it that you just use the same old names year after year?"

The only meaningful response that we can offer to this question is that we really try to use virtually all of the publishable material that we receive from the membership. If someone offers a story or a photo and if by chance they do not see it featured in a future magazine ... and probably more importantly, if they do not get an immediate response about the offering directly from us, perhaps waiting 8 years is a bit of a stretch. At this late date, we are sorry but there is no way that we can research this near-ancient issue. In addition the more active participation by more members then the more varied and interesting the Sponson Box will be. And by the way, a timely and friendly reminder sent to us might work a bit better than getting your back up and being hostile. And lastly please do not send unsolicited original photos without a prior conversation with us by telephone or by email.

2021 PROVIDENCE: In a little over two months from now (September 15–20, 2021) we will be gathering for our 12th Biennial Reunion in Providence, Rhode Island. For whatever reason, it seems as if far too many of our membership have other, more important things to do rather than attend our every-two-year reunions. If reunion attendance keeps falling off, we may have to postpone or cancel future gatherings. If you have not registered please do so now since time is of an essence.

We recently got a website link from VTA member, Stan Price that detailed "The World's Fiercest Tank Battle." The story is about Operation Desert Saber (in Iraq) where the American M-1 Abrams tank reigned supreme. The article went into detail about the M-1 and touted the fact that the one and only M-1 that is on public display anywhere in the USA is in the **American Heritage Museum**, which is the armor museum that we will be visiting in September during our reunion in Rhode Island.

THE MILITARY DRAFT: The other day I read an article that stated:

"Ask any male born between 1944 and 1950 where he was on December 1, 1969, and he will be able to tell you. That was the date of the first Vietnam Draft lottery. That night determined the fate of so many, especially those who could not get out of serving."

For me, on that date, I had already returned from Vietnam; I had been released from Active Duty and I was back as a student in college. And since my draft number turned out to be 328 ... (December 2nd), my only (and very slight) regret was that I had enlisted in 1966 instead of finishing college in the spring of 1969 ... since according to the Draft lottery, I would never have been drafted.

THIS ISSUE: For this issue of our magazine, we have a large amount of "Short Stories" since a good number of the membership is starting to write short stories about their time in-country. Thank you!

"The elderly usually don't have regrets for what we did, but rather for things we did not do. The only people who fear death are those with regrets."

-- Rose, an 87 year old college student



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H&S Co, 3rd Tanks, 1965
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DOB: 11/17/43
Wife: Gregoria

Recruited by: Together We Served

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This is a non-veteran who wants to subscribe to the Sponson Box

Our Readers Write

(Formally known as "Letters to the Editor")

Here's Another Reason to Write Your Own Story

Mr. Wear, I was hopeful that you may be a possible way of getting some information about my father, a WW2 Marine tank man. Some of his records were burned in the Service Center fire some years ago. Anyway.... here is my request to see if you know how I can get any possible information.

My father: James Leo Tubbs

Date of Birth: 12 May 1920

USMC #488299

Service: 30 Nov. 1942 to 18 Nov.1945

2nd Ba. 8th Mar. 2nd Mar. Div. FMF

He was wounded (hit 2-3 times) at Saipan when his tank was hit. His gunner was Latino, not sure of his name, was hit 7 times and my father pulled him to safety. I believe his tank was in the first assault group and was hit around 0900-0930. My question is, are there any archived records of names of those who invaded Saipan; names of tank crews? In 1953 this "gunner" and his family came to our house to see my father. I ended up staying with them that summer in Oklahoma. I would very much like to make contact with this man's family if possible. I know this is a long shot, but any suggestions or help is greatly appreciated.

James L. Tubbs (II)

jim.l.tubbs@gmail.com

New USMC VTA website

Bob Skeels writes: What an out-friggin-standing job you-all have done with the new VTA website! The opening explosive website introduction is back to where it was (and then some powerful additional added flare) when I first found our great Marine tanker's organization. All the tank prep fire going on automatically invites one in to take a view of the Marine Corps toughest, most capable and proudest combat unit.

You-all continue to make us all proud to belong to this great organization. See you in September....first three rounds are on me along with an ex-large bowl of New England's finest "chowda."

Elephant Tanks

Kevin Flynn writes: Just opened the latest VTA Sponson Box. I see I received a shout out from you. I must say in my time in the Corps I never heard the expression "Elephant Tank!" For the sinking of C-23, I gave a ration of shit to the T.C. and received the same from "State's Rights" when we were back at the tank park!!

One thing I will never forget about the Elephant Tank, took place on the firing range at 29 Palms. We were firing down range with the main gun, when there was a "misfire".

We waited about 15 minutes to see if there was going to be a "cook off." No such luck. We checked the breech block to see if the firing pin had dented the cartridge and it had, which meant the round might fire at any time. The crew removed a long rod (in many parts) from the sponson box and handed them to the platoon sergeant and me. We assembled the many sections and began pushing them down the gun tube from the front and then tapped the projectile gently hoping to dislodge the projectile and cartridge. Meanwhile the T.C. was inside the turret hoping to catch the round if and when it came loose. It took about 15 minutes to break it loose. A very scary procedure. (I wonder I they still do it this way). The Gunny and I had a few beers that night!

Joe Vernon writes:

Amigo, on the back of the last issue was a "YOU ARE MARINES" photo of a saying I would like to have, know where I can get one. Hope to see ya in September.

Richard Cecil writes:

That was a great article in the Sponson Box on Lou Rota's experience in the M103. Sending him a copy of the magazine was a class act. It made his day. Unfortunately, I have a conflict on the dates of the reunion. We are having a family activity scheduled 9 months in advance with reservations. Also, I have been thinking about something you said about stories and have a couple plus I'd have to round up some pictures. How do I do this? Take care.

Update on Gene Whitehead

We received your letter in the mail and wanted to make sure you got a response in a timely fashion. My husband, Gene's son, is a full-time student and is juggling a lot. I'm Gene's daughter-in-law and after I spoke with Gene, he said to give you any info that you requested. Also, could we get two copies of the publication—one for my husband and one for Gene?

His new address in Thailand is:

Kenneth Whitehead

112 Moo

1 Ban Phatub

Myeong Nan

Thailand

55000

Gene is also on Facebook: Kenneth Eugene Whitehead

All of his mail gets sent to our address, and we send a package to him, so his copy of the publication could be sent to our address. I hope that this helps!

Amber Whitehead

>>

ON THE COVER: An exhausted Gene Whitehead on 21 May '66

Gene Replies Himself

Thanks John. It would be less stressful if I didn't have to deal with Thai builders, however having said that it is a lot less a pain in the butt not having to deal with the drama in the USA. The US has gone buggy. I thought I would move to Thailand and let the idiots have my beloved country.

Concerning the cover story, I believe it is extremely important for all American to understand what took place in Vietnam and the sacrifices that were made by its young men on the battle field which changed the course of their lives forever. A lot of us gave up the previous normal existence to live out our lives with horrible memories that never leave our thoughts but for few a moments ... and to have affected our families as well.

Anyway, continue to share our stories so in some way will give relief to some poor soul. Hopefully, they can make peace with their past experiences and come home for real.

Semper Fi,

Kenneth (Gene) Whitehead
669.247.67674
Thailand

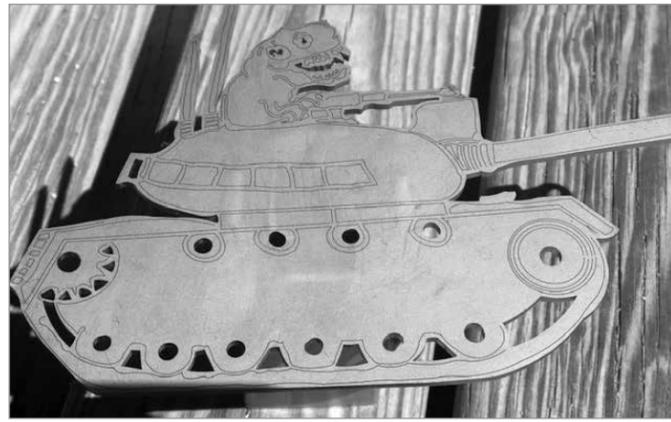
USMC Wedding



A US Marine grunt Vietnam veteran buddy of mine sent me this photo. It is a photo of another buddy of his, Gene McQueen during his wedding to a really nice looking "BAM" when he was in between tours in 1968. The two grunts were together in Golf 2/7 in-country 52 years ago.

Tank Trailer Hitch Cover

Dave Turner writes: This is a token of my respect and honor to be a member of the USMC VTA. I am sending this to all of the brothers who gave me and my wife the greatest gift, finding my tank commander, Frank "Tree"



Remkiewicz and being told that my crew all made it home. I vow to forever honor all in our association.

Getting Tats

Rick Lewis and John Wear were discussing on email the merits and downfalls of getting a tattoo while serving in the USMC.

Rick wrote: There is something about being in a unit that is in training and preparing to go to war. Having been in Charlie Company, 1st Tanks stateside loading the tanks on the ships, packing your gear, the old Korean vets talking it up, getting morning updates about Vietnam, thinking about our fathers that fought in WWII, and now it's our turn. It's an unbelievable feeling to the point you almost believe you can't lose or be killed. It all makes it very easy to get motivated to be brothers together and get a tat. It's a feeling all Marines missed as they did not come over as a company but as individual replacements for the rest of Vietnam. I know going back for my third tour it was very different feeling, Marines all round but a much different feeling.

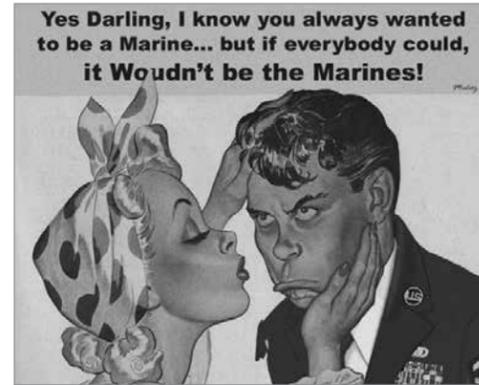
John replied: Since I went to WESPAC on individual orders without another tanker in my replacement group, I never had the feelings of "belonging" that other tankers may have had early on. When I did see any of my fellow 5th Tanks buddies coming back to O-side with body ink, my comment was, "When you sober up, you'll be sorry,"

Another member comes back

We got a phone call the other day from a David Wallace from Wisconsin. Dave had been reading the current issue of Leatherneck magazine and noted the USMC VTA 2021 Providence reunion announcement. Dave said that when he read the ad, he realized that his VTA membership had expired long ago and he wanted to re-enlist. "Welcome back home Dave!!!"

Working Parties without End

John Wear writes: I graduated from USMC boot camp on November 1, 1966. My MCRD SD series then reported to ITR at Camp Pendleton and after a few weeks at ITR we all went home for Thanksgiving. Sometime in early December, we all reported (en mass) back to Schools Battalion for our assign-



ments to MOS training. We were told that due to the 1966 Christmas holidays, new classes would not start until after the New Year. There must have been 150 or more brand new Marines who spent the next four weeks living in assorted temporary barracks all over Camp Pendleton and serving on daily working parties, guard duty and/or just sitting around on our butts in the barracks. Yes, we went to morning chow and then formed up for morning roll call to be assigned to working parties. Later we went to noon chow and then formed up for a mid-day formation. Those of us who were not assigned to mindless and menial working parties or to pointless guard duty usually sat on the barracks playing grab ass until the next meal and formation. We were all "slick sleeve" privates earning around \$97 per month so going to the PX or Slopchute were out of the question. I remember the elation that we all felt when our Tank School class was formed and we reported to Camp Del Mar. About 18 months later, I was deployed to Vietnam. When I got in-country I was amazed how many of my fellow tankers had not attended any previous formal tank training at Schools Battalion and that they went directly from ITR to Vietnam for on-the-job training.

Tom Hayes writes

Me: "Hey babe, I parked my new gun in the barn."

Babe: "What do you mean, parked?"



In the last issue of the Sponson Box, John Hunter writes about our hero Dale Dye when he said that he didn't want to be promoted because he was a grunt (0311) and if promoted he would be taken out of the field and away from his troops. I thought that in his novel, "Citadel" he was a combat correspondent like the other ass wipe in the other totally accurate "Full Metal Jacket." Don't combat correspondents have a different MOS? Is Dale Dye just another bull shitter, like Brian Dennehy who said that he landed with 3/9 at Da Nang in March '65...and we later found out that he never did? And by the by, the only truthful part of "Full Metal Jacket" was Gunny R Lee Ermy's portrayal of a DI.

And thank you for posting my last letter asking ALL Marine MOS's in a tank battalion to write a story. Come on! Share some stories!

Cpl Tom Hayes
C Co, 3rd Tanks '67 - '68

Update on Jay Miller

Gunnar Askeland writes: Last Wednesday Jay Miller and I drove to Moffett Cancer Center in Tampa for radiation treatment on spine and neck and shoulder areas which has caused a lot of pain. He had radiation on 1,2 and 3 thru Friday. We stayed at his daughter house on Tampa. Jay has had considerable pain and is on heavy drugs. Yesterday and today he got his 4th and 5th radiation treatments. Jay found out yesterday from the main cancer doctor that he has Stage 4 pancreatic cancer which has metastasized to the spine and neck and shoulder areas and possibly in lymph glands. Today they are putting a port in so he can take chemo maybe starting next week. He has opted to fight this with aggressive chemo in order to get rid of cancer and extend his quality of life. He is a fighter and this is his choice. It will be a tough road without a lot of pain and possible sick side effects.

Keep him in your thoughts and prayers. You can always text or call him. He may not answer his phone because he is tired and confused from drugs and lack of sleep.

Jay related all of this to me last night. It is not a secret. The battle begins. Feel free to pass the word to people I may have missed.

Aloha and feel free to text or call me about any of this....

Wal-Mart Tank



Tracked ATV Chair



(Continued on page 34)

A Letter Home

Editor's Note: Perhaps 30 years ago I purchased a book entitled, "Dear America, Letters Home from Vietnam." Back then, I had a new found interest in reading anything and everything that was published about "our war." After reading this particular book, I put it on my book shelf and have not referred to it until now. For whatever reason, I had forgotten that one of the many letters included in the book was one from Captain Michael Wunsch, Company Commander of Alpha Co, 3rd Tanks who was KIA on 28 July, 1969 while leading one of his tank platoons on Operation Idaho Canyon. The day that Capt. Wunsch was KIA, he was 25 years old and it was just ten days before he was to return home to Feasterville, PA. The letter was written to his friend, Brian Baker.

Dear Brian,

Well, I'm still here in Vietnam, but should be home by mid-August, barring something out of the ordinary.

Hope you did well in your bar exam, but you probably do not have the result yet. Best of luck anyhow.

Diane has been doing outstanding at West Chester. She'll be looking forward to my return so she can vacation for a while prior to returning to school this fall. She'll probably be going to University of Maryland in that I received my orders to return to the Naval Academy to teach Chinese to first-semester students. That'll prove to be a ball for me and work into a lot of plans that I have.

I am glad the Army satisfied your desires and is giving you until January 20 before they take you away. Don't fret Vietnam, that is, seeing it. The thing will be over before you'd ever have the opportunity to come.

I've got many plans and none. You know how it is; I'll probably stay in the Marine Corps and rest well in security and hope for another war somewhere to do "my thing." It is all the time an experience. I couldn't have done it any other way, and will never regret the past 13 months. Your not desiring to come is rather immaterial in that if you're assigned, you go, or if you feel strongly against doing so, resist. At either rate, you are definitely the man of decision if dictated so by your principles. Yet if you came as a lawyer you'd never be faced with killing, or defending those who have done so in excess. Really it isn't all that bad - war, I mean. In the large sense disgusting, but in the smaller sphere, combat is a happening. At least we know that this is the last "the war to end all..."

I really have no perspective.

When I get home next month, maybe you and I can "tune me in" and perhaps, just perhaps, "turn me on." Until later ...

Your Friend,

Michael

Marine Corps Deactivates its Final Active-duty Tank Battalion

BY PHILIP ATHEY



The last tanks assigned to 1st Tank Battalion depart Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twenty Nine Palms, California, July 6, 2020

The Marine Corps deactivated the historic 1st Tanks Battalion on Friday in a ceremony celebrating the storied unit's historic past and "complicated relationship" with the wider Marine Corps. The battalion was deactivated as part of Marine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger's larger restructuring of the Corps. With the deactivation at the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center Twenty Nine Palms, California, the Marine Corps officially shut down its final battalion of active-duty tankers.

Even though the Corps' needs led to the deactivation of its tanks, the final commander of 1st Tanks said during the deactivation ceremony that he hopes the armored community will someday return and be ready to take on the mission — much like the first tankers did at the beginning of World War II.

"My solemn hope is that, should the need for armor ever arise again, that spirit that has guided this battalion for the better part of a century, although asleep, will rise again and support that next generation of Marines just like it did on 1 November 1941," Lt. Col. Benjamin Adams said during the ceremony.

Commandant Gen. David H. Berger has said that should armor be needed by Marines, he would look to the Army to provide that capability. The commandant wants the smallest U.S. service branch to get lighter, faster and more heavily armed in preparation for a potential future war with a near-peer, like China or Russia. Since taking over as the top Marine, Berger has been very open about the Marine Corps' need to make cuts to afford new technologies, like ship-sinking missiles.

In March of 2020, Berger made it official that Marine tanks would be one of those cuts.

In the 14 months since the announcement the Marine Corps has shipped nearly all its tanks to the Army, with plans to complete the transfer by 2023, Marine Corps Times previously reported.

The 2nd Tanks Battalion was deactivated earlier in May at a ceremony on Camp Lejeune, North Carolina. "From Iceland to Helmand,

from 1941 to now, 2nd Tanks has been the spearhead for the 2nd Marine Division, every clime and place," Maj. Gen. Francis Donovan, commander of the 2nd Marine Division, said at the 2nd tanks deactivation ceremony on May 5. The 1st Tanks deactivation also glorified the battalion's past.

The Twenty Nine Palms, California, based battalion originally was activated at the onset of World War II and first saw action as it deployed alongside the 1st Marine Division at Guadalcanal in the Solomon Islands.

"Ten months after we were activated, company Able and company Baker landed on Guadalcanal, 7th of August 1942, and our legend was born," Adams said during the ceremony, which was available to watch online.

"Infantry company commanders and battalion commanders would soon realize the power of the tank, infantry team," he added.

Adams said the Corps had a "complicated relationship" with the battalion but wanted to focus the deactivation ceremony on the successes of the unit, not its deactivation.

Marine tankers have been given three options going forward: They can continue manning tanks by transferring to the Army, they can leave the Marine Corps early or they can change their military occupational specialty within the Marine Corps. On the enlisted side, a total of 151 Marine tankers or tank repairers have requested a lateral move to a different MOS, 12 have requested early retirement, 121 have submitted a package for the Voluntary Enlisted Early Release Program, or VERP, 72 have requested a transfer to the Army and 230 are eligible for "force shaping," Maj. Jordan Cochran, a spokesman for Marine Corps Manpower and Reserve Affairs, told Marine Corps Times. On the officer end, 89 have requested a lateral move, two have requested early retirement, two have requested early release, none have requested a transfer to the Army, while 23 remain eligible for "force shaping," Cochran said. ■

To the Great Tank Park in the Sky

“America’s fighting men and women sacrifice much to ensure that our great nation stays free.”

Fred Allen Boyd Jr., American politician

David William Walters

October 26, 1945 – February 15, 2021



David William Walters, 75, resident of Prattville Alabama, went home to be with the Lord on Monday, February 15, 2021. David proudly served in the U.S. Marines during in the Vietnam War. He retired from The Western Railroad (CSX-T) after 36 years. He enjoyed camping, riding his golf-cart, hunting, fishing, and spending time with his dear family. He was also a long time member of the USMC VTA.

He was preceded in death by his parents, Lorenzo Dowell and Gladys Foley Walters; by his son, David William Walters Jr.; by his sister, Edna Hall; three brothers, James Wilson, Lorenzo Dowell Walters Jr., and Robert Bryant Walters. He is survived by his loving and devoted wife of 53 years, Dorothy Ann Walters; three children, Kimberly Walters Morton (Scott), Jennifer Walters Skinner (Kenneth), Michael Walters (Kelli); five grandchildren, Jessica Shirosky, Chase Walters, Kourtney Grier (Dustin), Kaitlyn McBrayer, and Trace Walters; one great-grandchild, LilliAnne Grier; three sisters, Nancy Wilson McCloud, Leslie Gibbons, and Ann Lukker; numerous nieces, nephews, cousins, and friends.

Please see the accompany story written by Dave’s platoon leader, “Lt Fuzz” Henderson.

Robert L Lynch

1939–2021



Mr. Robert L. “Bob” Lynch, of Weymouth, passed away surrounded by his loving family on April 7, 2021.

Born in Boston, a son of the late Joseph and Katherine (Strain) Lynch, Bob worked for the Town of Weymouth for the Weymouth Highway Department until his retirement in 2002.

After retiring, Bob enjoyed and worked at Immaculate Conception Church helping with various maintenance duties. He was a member of the Weymouth Lodge of Elks, as well as the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association.

In his spare time, Bob enjoyed fishing, camping, gardening, collecting baseball cards and following the Boston Red Sox. He was a proud Vietnam veteran serving with the United States Marines. Bob will be deeply missed by all those that knew and loved him.

Beloved husband of Frances A. “Fran” (Conway) Lynch. Loving father of Robert Kinney and his wife, Jenn, of New Hampshire, Marion “Marnie” O’Keefe of Plymouth, the late James Kinney and his wife, Susan, of Weymouth, and Peter Kinney and his wife, Siobhan, of E. Bridgewater. Brother of Barbara DeChiara of Billerica, and the late Lorraine Toohey. Grampa and Bumpa to Justin, Tiffany, Montana, Peter, Mitchell, Ryan, Kory, and Abby. Also survived by several nieces and nephews.

DANIEL MCCARTHY

1946–2021



Retired Senior Master Sergeant Daniel Patrick “Doc” McCarthy passed away New Year’s Eve, 2020, peacefully, in his sleep while the world was celebrating, drinking, and lighting off fireworks.

Daniel was born on August 5th, 1946 in Sacramento, California to Leroy and Catherine McCarthy. After high school, he enlisted in the United States Navy where he trained in the healthcare profession. After becoming a Navy Corpsman, Daniel was stationed with the Second Battalion, Seventh Marines in Vietnam from June, 1965 to August, 1966. During his tour in Vietnam, Daniel was involved in Operations Harvest Moon, Utah, Indiana, Hot Springs, and Montgomery. He was awarded two Purple Hearts.

After a four-year hiatus from military service, Daniel enlisted in the United States Air Force in 1971 and then retired in 1994, boasting a 27-year military career. His postwar years were filled with political activism. He devoted his time to aiding fellow veterans by championing for veterans’ rights and benefits. Daniel was a motorcycle enthusiast and he used this passion to honor veterans by participating in the “Run for the Wall” in 1998, 2000, and 2003. In 2005, he rode the entire route from California to the Vietnam War Memorial in Washington, D.C. Those who rode with him knew him as Little Mac.

Daniel is survived by his wife of 43 years, Lori McCarthy, son, William Patrick McCarthy, daughter, Kelly Kathleen “KK” McCarthy, son-in-law, Soren Gaiser, grandson, Felix Gaiser, sister, Mary Veerkamp, brother-in-law, Cleo Veerkamp, niece, Tracy Lynch, nephews, Jeremy and Colin Veerkamp, many other friends and family, and countless lives he’s influenced. Semper Fi!

Douglas Eddie Hightshoe

Sept 14, 1945 – March 18, 2021

From Janet Hightshoe: My dear husband, Douglas Eddie Hightshoe (“Shoes”) who had been with C Co, 3rd Tanks from 1966 – 1967, passed away on March 18, 2021. He was interred with full military honors at Fort Snelling National Cemetery and is now is guarding Heaven Gates. His survivors are his wife Jan, of 53–1/2 years and his four children and 8 grandchildren. We loved him so very much and are very sad at his passing.

Cpl Leon Spinks

Spinks, 67, of Las Vegas, Nevada. Before making a career as one of boxing’s greats, he served in the Marine Corps. After boot camp in MCRD San Diego in 1973, he stepped

into the ring at MCB Camp Le Jeune and onto the All-Marine boxing team. After he was discharged, he made headlines in 1978, when he won a split decision over heavy weight boxing champion Mohammed Ali in a 15-round fight in Las Vegas. Posted in Leatherneck magazine

Russell M Walters

1945–2020



Jason Walters writes: My dad died five days before last Christmas and he wanted me to reach out to you guys. He was a Marine to the end. He had five different cancers in his body at the end. Back in 1966, he was stationed in Da Nang. I hope you guys have found peace and happiness that he never found.

Russell M Walters
3rd Tank Battalion

Home town: Portland, Oregon USA

Died: Tura Beach NSW Australia

Love you dad

Posted on Facebook

Walters, David “Alabama”

February 15, 2021



It is with great sadness that the “3rd Herd” of Bravo Co, 1st Tanks, sends another ‘Mighty Fine Marine’ to the Great Tank Park in the Sky. Sgt David ‘Alabama’ Walters made the journey on February 15, 2021. Both David and his wife Dorothy had contracted COVID-19 in early January. Dorothy has been able to recover from it, but not David. As our nation, and the world, combats this virus, many have and will be lost to it. Our hopes and prayers are that we find relief and an end to it with the vaccines and treatments being made.

I first met ‘Alabama’ in November ‘66, out at Namo Bridge, north of Da Nang. He was the driver of B-31 and John Beck was the TC. They prepared a fish fry in my honor (or so they said), using M-26 grenades as the means to catch fish! In January of ‘67 the 3rd Herd was assigned to Hill 41 and

surrounding areas. Our trip from the Company CP took us thru some rather unfriendly territories. My opinion was the quicker one travels from point A to point B, the less time there is for something bad to happen.

The speed, and the fact that the roads were somewhat dry, produced a lot of dust. Evidently, somewhere along the route, Alabama got a little too close to a parked 3 wheeled van and sort of side swiped it—no real damage, no worse than the van already was! When we reached Hill 41, Beck jumped off the tank with a big wrench in hand and yelled at Alabama, ‘Do you know what this is?’ To which Alabama, with a slight smile on his face and still in the driver’s seat, answered, ‘That there looks like an Alabamian beatin’ tool!’ Beck just shook his head, turned around and said to me, ‘How can I be mad at that!’

As a story teller, Alabama could hold his own with the best. He could get on a roll and keep it going, having everyone in tears. I’m sure not half of what he would say could be true but that didn’t matter—he would never admit it. At our reunions, it never stopped. It was like a trip back in memory lane, of the good times, listening to the wit and humor of ole’ Alabama. The only thing I can think is, it must have been what he had for breakfast—if he had his grits then he could continue to roll. So, roll on, Marine. Semper Fi.

Submitted by Rod Henderson (Lt Fuzz) ■

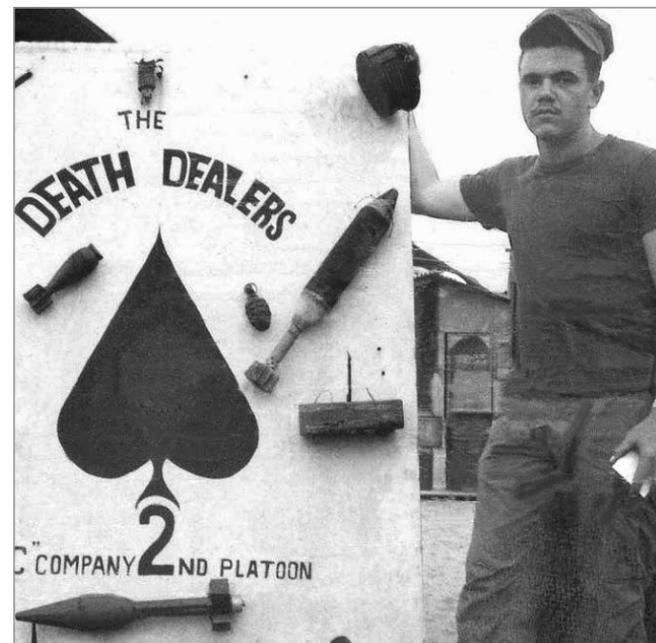
GUESS WHO Photo Contest

Can you guess who the Marine is in this photo? The first person to contact John Wear at 719-495-5998 with the right answer will have his name entered in a contest for a chance to win a yet un-named mediocre prize.



Last Issue Winner

There was no winner from our last issue's "Guess who?" to correctly identified Doug Scrivner



Tanks & Medals of Valor

Grant F Timmerman

Sergeant USMC - Word War II

Medal of Honor citation

The President of the United States takes pride in presenting the MEDAL OF HONOR posthumously to:

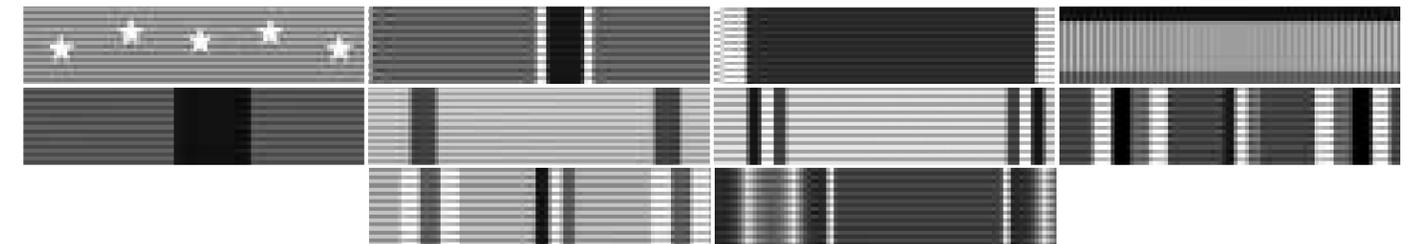
SERGEANT GRANT F. TIMMERMAN
UNITED STATES MARINE CORPS

For service as set forth in the following CITATION:

For conspicuous gallantry and intrepidity at the risk of his life above and beyond the call of duty as Tank Commander serving with the Second Battalion, Sixth Marines, Second Marine Division, during action against enemy Japanese forces on Saipan, Marianas Islands, on 8 July 1944. Advancing with his tank a few yards ahead of the infantry in support of a vigorous attack on hostile positions, Sergeant Timmerman maintained steady fire from his antiaircraft sky mount machine gun until progress was impeded by a series of enemy trenches and pillboxes. Observing a target of opportunity, he immediately ordered the tank stopped and, mindful of the danger from the muzzle blast as he prepared

to open fire with the 75-mm., fearlessly stood up in the exposed turret and ordered the infantry to hit the deck. Quick to act as a grenade, hurled by the Japanese, was about to drop into the open turret hatch, Sergeant Timmerman unhesitatingly blocked the opening with his body, holding the grenade against his chest and taking the brunt of the explosion. His exceptional valor and loyalty in saving his men at the cost of his own life reflect the highest credit upon Sergeant Timmerman and the United States Naval Service. He gallantly gave his live in the service of country.

/S/ HARRY S. TRUMAN



Sgt Grant F Timmerman



USS Timmerman DD-828

Maryland Mini-reunion



Ed Hiltz and Chet Ruby enjoying a couple cold beers at a local hang out in Maryland. Chet was in Bravo Company 3rd Tanks and Ed Bravo Company 1st Tanks.

Dicky Pee Then and Now

Dick Peksens writes: Note that's me in the ROK camos on my in 1967.

Today I have a bald chemo head.... my Stage IV prostate cancer on year 10 turned into a neuroendocrine tumor and invaded the bladder. I just finished 5 rounds of chemo and feel pretty good. I'm trying to get some things accomplished... sucks to be an old dude but I look and feel pretty good considering.... The third photo is nothing an old Southern Officer can't handle. ■



Tracking Our History – Podcasts

Do you have writer's cramp? Are you camera shy? You Say It – We Write It!!!

Out of the approximately 500 USMC Vietnam Tankers Association members, roughly 50 have put a pen to paper and have written one, two or more stories of their time in-country Vietnam. Of which, virtually every single story has been ... or is about to be ... published in our Sponson Box magazine.

And out of the same 500 USMC VTA members, roughly 75 have faced the video camera during one of our reunions and have conducted a personal interview. Of which, every single one of them are available for viewing online at the USMC VTA website and/or on You Tube.

We have fairly recently discovered another far simpler, far easier and almost fool proof way to have members be able to tell their story in their own words ... and that is on our "Tracking Our History" Podcast program. How it works is that we schedule a

telephone interview with you and on that appointed day "Tree" gives you a call and begins a discussion of your tour in Vietnam. For the most part the program is totally up to you. The story is whatever you want to say. Then Tree can put music, sounds and other enhancements to your story and make it available to listen to on the USMC VTA website.

And once your story is recorded, we have a transcription program that is able to convert your spoken words into a written document. Once the project is complete, you have the author's rights to approve or disapprove the story for publication.

CONTACT:

Frank "Tree" Remkiewicz

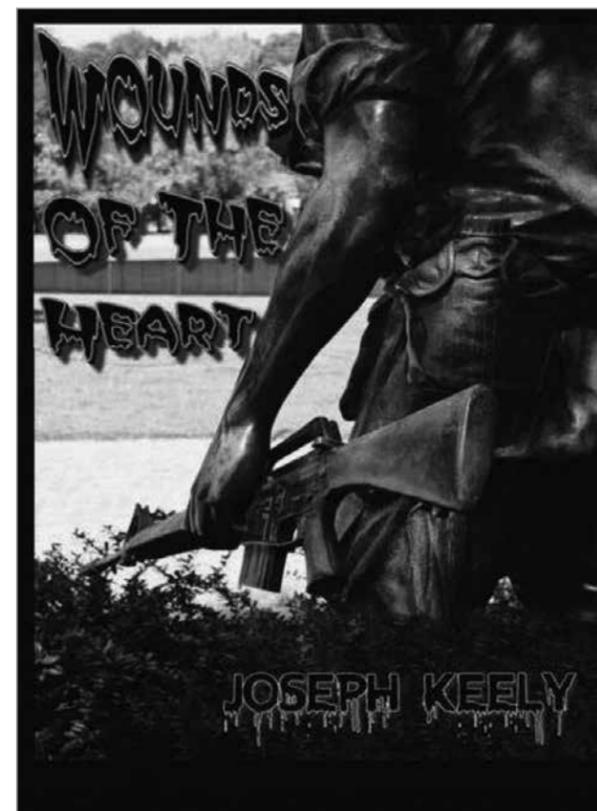
Email: fremkiewicz@gmail.com

Phone: 209.996.8887

Book Review

The author writes: This is for my children and my children's children so that they may know that their father/grandfather served his country along with 2,909,918 other men and women in uniform in Vietnam. Most of these men and woman remained loyal to their oath as military personnel and served with honor and distinction. I want them to know that our efforts and sacrifices were undermined at every turn of the events by the American people, the American press, and self-centered politicians through lies, propaganda, and treason on a scale so large it was unstoppable. Then finally forced the government to abandon its troops on the field of battle to fend for ourselves. That they may also see the real truth surrounding the Vietnam War and the war that has raged within me these past fifty-plus years.

These words were engendered by a comment



WOUNDS OF THE HEART

BY Joseph Kelley
USMC VTA Member

I heard on television. It angered me enough to conduct a personal investigation to see if the nine lines written above were just a figment of my imagination or what I felt to be true in my heart. This investigation has culminated with mixed feelings. It saddens me that what I felt in my heart is true; however, I am elated that my investigation serves as a vindication of all the Vietnam veterans, both men and women, who remained loyal to their oath as soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines. I am elated that there is finally a book that countermands the lies and propaganda that have carried on from the '60s to this very day and that it shows the Vietnam veterans

as the loyal and honorable men and women they have proven themselves to be.

Paperback-592 Pages

Available at: Amazon, Barnes and Noble, I-Book and

Google Play ■

Vet Burials – The Bottom Line on Your Free Entitlement

The Veterans Affairs National Cemetery Administration wants veterans to know the bottom line upfront: Many veterans don't realize that their military service entitles them to be interred in a national cemetery at no cost. Even if a veteran never received disability or any other benefit from the VA, if they served on active duty and were discharged under conditions other than dishonorable, they are eligible. If they served in the Reserve Component and were mobilized or served long enough to earn a retirement, they are eligible. Yet only 20% of all eligible veterans living in the United States take advantage of this benefit which would save their families thousands of dollars.

The best, most effective way to ensure veterans get the burial or memorial benefits they and their spouse have earned through military service is through a VA program called Pre-Need Eligibility, or Pre-Need. Pre-Need establishes eligibility for VA burial and memorial benefits before death, so the family doesn't have to go searching for documentation after the veteran's death. Simply fill out a VA form 40-10007 and mail it in to the St. Louis office indicated on the top of the form. Veterans can print out a form or fill it out online. The form and more information is available at <https://www.cem.va.gov/pre-need>.

VA officials will review each application and send a letter confirming or denying eligibility. If approved, safely store the letter and inform someone of its location. Pre-Need provides veterans and families with peace of mind. This information is particularly important for Guard and Reserve members, many of whom don't realize that their service entitles them to burial benefits. There are some nuances for reservists who may have to provide additional paperwork if a mobilization isn't documented on their DD Form 214, so it is even more important for them to apply for Pre-Need. Waiting to establish eligibility at the time of death can sometimes result in a non-eligible decision with little or no time to provide additional information.

If a VA national, state or tribal veteran cemetery is selected as the final resting place, a veteran will receive the following: gravesite, opening and closing of the grave, grave liner, and perpetual care of the gravesite. Also included are memorial benefits such as a headstone, marker or cover for a columbarium niche. All are absolutely free, which means a savings of thousands of dollars to the veteran's family. At many VA national cemeteries, NCA partners with local military units or volunteer service organizations to provide deceased veterans with military funeral honors, including the playing of taps and presentation of the burial flag. The veteran's spouse as well as minor children and unmarried adult children who legally rely on the veteran for support are also eligible for interment free of charge, typically in the same grave or columbarium niche as the veteran.

If veterans choose to be interred in a private cemetery, they can still have a free government-furnished headstone, marker or niche cover. If a veteran chooses burial in a private cemetery with a privately purchased headstone, marker or niche cover, their family may request a free bronze medallion with the word "veteran" and the appropriate branch of service to attach to the headstone. Families also receive a burial flag.

Finally, upon request, the veteran's family will receive a Presidential Memorial Certificate signed by the current U.S. president. Multiple copies can be requested so that all family members can have one. For more information about VA burial and memorial benefits, visit www.cem.va.gov or call 800.697.6947.

[Source: National Cemetery Administration | Office of Engagement and Memorial Innovations | October 2020 ++]

Dementia—Increased Risk Tied to AO Exposed Vietnam Vets

Exposure to the herbicide Agent Orange has been tied to a significantly increased risk for dementia in Vietnam War veterans, new research shows. Investigators at the University of California, San Francisco, found that veterans who had been exposed to Agent Orange had nearly a twofold increased risk of developing dementia compared to veterans who had not been exposed. "This is important because the risk of dementia increases with age, and Vietnam veterans are now getting old enough to start developing dementia," study investigator Deborah Barnes, PhD, MPH, University of California, San Francisco, and the San Francisco VA Health Care System, told Medscape Medical News. The study was published online January 25 in JAMA Neurology.

Agent Orange is a powerful herbicide that contains the toxin dioxin. It was used during the Vietnam War by US forces to defoliate trees, shrubs, and crops that provided cover and food to opposition forces. Exposure has previously been linked to neurologic disorders, including Parkinson's disease, and metabolic disorders, including type 2 diabetes and systemic amyloidosis. The investigators note that the link between Agent Orange exposure and incident dementia diagnosis is unclear. To investigate, the researchers analyzed Veterans Health Administration data on 316,351 veterans (mean age, 62 years), including 38,121 (12.1%) who were presumed to have been exposed to Agent Orange. The prevalence of most conditions, including Parkinson's disease, diabetes, and amyloidosis, was similar at baseline among veterans with and those without Agent Orange exposure.

After adjusting for demographic variables and comorbid conditions, veterans who had been exposed to the defoliant were nearly twice as likely as unexposed peers to be diagnosed with dementia during follow-up (5.0% vs 2.5%), with an adjusted hazard ratio of 1.68 (95% CI, 1.59 – 1.77). In addition, veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange were about 15 months younger when they were diagnosed with dementia than unexposed veterans (mean age at dementia onset, 67.5 years vs 68.8 years). Previous reports have found that Agent Orange exposure may be associated with increased risk for a variety of medical conditions, including some cancers, Parkinson disease, hypertension, and diabetes mellitus, Barnes said. "This study does not show that the cause of dementia is related to Agent Orange, but further research should continue," she told Medscape Medical News.

Commenting on the findings for Medscape Medical News, Paul Rosenberg, MD, Division of Geriatric Psychiatry and Neuropsychiatry, Johns Hopkins University School of Medicine, Baltimore, Maryland, said, "The methods are robust, and the study is very large," and it does show a "meaningful increase" in dementia risk associated with Agent Orange exposure. However, Rosenberg also noted that dementia risk is

"notably affected by healthy lifestyle factors, including exercise, diet, stress management, involvement in cognitively stimulating activities, and sleep. None of these can be well assessed by these databases, and it is possible that veterans exposed to Agent Orange also have less healthy habits later in life.

"The mechanisms by which Agent Orange might affect dementia risk are really interesting," Rosenberg said. They include long-lasting stores of dioxin in fat, affecting diabetes risk; direct effects on pituitary hormones and neurotransmitters, including dopamine; and enhancement of oxidative stress. "The authors did an excellent job outlining these possibilities," he added. The association with Agent Orange is "particularly interesting because, in general, there aren't many environmental exposures associated with any dementia except Parkinson's," Rosenberg said. The take-home lesson, he said, is that veterans who were exposed to Agent Orange "should be extra vigilant about early signs of cognitive impairment" and should see their primary care clinician if they think they have them.

Also weighing in on the study for Medscape Medical News, Heather Snyder, PhD, vice president of medical and scientific operations for the Alzheimer's Association, noted that earlier data reported by Barnes and her colleagues at the 2019 Alzheimer's Association International Conference found similar associations, "but a notably lesser effect size." "In that report, veterans with Agent Orange exposure documented in their health records were found to be 20% more likely to be diagnosed with dementia," Snyder said.

Snyder said one limitation of the current study is that Agent Orange exposure is treated as a "yes/no consideration, whereas exposure level would have varied between individuals, depending on location, duties, and duration in Vietnam. "It's also important to note that the study population was 98% men, and all were Vietnam-era veterans. Therefore, these data aren't generalizable to the general public and may only have implications for veterans who served in Vietnam and were exposed to Agent Orange," said Snyder.

[Source: Medscape | Megan Brooks | February 1, 2021 ++]

Top 10 Reasons Veterans Don't Pursue Benefits

1. I don't trust the Government.

Many veterans have indicated that they don't trust their Government in matters of confidentiality and privacy, and therefore, have no interest in pursuing benefits. Veterans from the Vietnam era are particularly sensitive regarding their distrust of the Government. One veteran said, "The Government did me wrong while I was in Vietnam, and I am sure they'll do me wrong again."

2. I didn't know I was eligible.

Far too many veterans are unaware of their eligibility status. Many veterans assume that since they aren't registered to use VA services, they are automatically ineligible for benefits. One veteran said, "I never retired from the military so I always believed I was ineligible for benefits."

3. I am not eligible.

Military discharge status plays a big role in determining if a veteran is potentially eligible for benefits. Honorably Discharged veterans are 100% eligible for benefits if they meet the criteria. Veterans with a Bad Conduct Discharge are not eligible for benefits. However, some veterans fall some place between an Honorable Discharge and a Bad Conduct Discharge. For instance, a veteran with a General Discharge is oftentimes eligible for benefits. Best to visit with a Veterans Service

Officer (VSO) to find out if you qualify. One veteran said, "My discharge papers show that I was forced out of the military due to the needs of the Government and my bad foot. I have a General Discharge with medical stipulations. I always thought that made me ineligible for future benefits."

4. I don't want to go through the "red tape."

Many veterans are of the belief that pursuing benefits from the VA is a matter of navigating a very complex and confusing system that involves mounds of documentation. While it may be true that there is a lot of paperwork, most, if not all is handled by a competent VSO and not the veteran. The VSO is trained to work with the bureaucracy, not the veteran, and takes much the complexity away from the veteran. One veteran said, "It's just too confusing to get started."

5. I don't know how.

While there are many veterans service organizations in existence, many veterans do not understand how those organizations can truly help them apply for benefits. Also, many veterans don't know where to begin. One veteran said, "I always thought a VFW was a bar for veterans, and they sit around and swap war stories. I never knew they had staff on board that could help me apply for benefits."

6. I make too much money.

There are many veterans who make over one hundred thousand dollars annually, and are receiving compensation for a service-connected disability. A veterans' disability is independent from their income from other sources, and is not a factor to determine eligibility.

7. I was denied after the war.

Sure, many veterans are denied after first applying for benefits, whether a few months after serving in a war zone or years later. Bottom line, sometimes it takes a few tries to get it right. One veteran said, "I applied for compensation after being diagnosed with PTSD and was quickly denied. I decided it wasn't worth my time to try again."

8. Don't know what to apply for.

Some veterans have many post war ailments and aren't sure which ones to submit for service-connected compensation, while other veterans appear healthy, except for a few nagging conditions, and aren't sure if their condition would be considered for compensation. Discussing your issue with a respected and competent VSO is very important. They often know what is potentially eligible for compensation and what is not and most importantly, how to get your benefits package started.

9. I can't prove my health problems are related to my time in the military.

Finding a good VSO is very important in securing disability compensation for a service-connected condition. Some VSOs are very innovative in helping veterans find the appropriate proof needed for their claims. While other VSOs have great "inside connections" that may be able to locate documents needed to show proof for a veteran.

10. Other veterans are more deserving.

Too many veterans take this stance to keep themselves from attempting to apply for benefits they may be eligible to receive. One veteran said, "It took guys in my group one year to convince me that I should apply for compensation. I did, and six months later I was 80% service-connected for PTSD, depression, and diabetes. I never would have put in for benefits if they didn't talk me into it."

[Source: Compiled from data from many sources] ■

WIN THE BATTLE, BUT LOSE THE WAR

BY ROGER HELLE

As a US Marine Vietnam veteran, I understand the concept of winning the battle but losing the war. I have been returning to Vietnam for 32 years now. On every trip, our organization (Vets with a Mission) hosts a "Reconciliation Dinner." We invite the local communist soldiers that we once fought against to dinner. In fact, our first dinner in 1989 was attended by none other than Morley Safer of "60 Minutes" fame.

Our media was never in favor of America's involvement (anyone surprised?) in Vietnam. Our first trip was also Safer's first trip back since the communist takeover in 1975. Our team of returning veterans was interviewed by "60 Minutes" on three separate occasions. One of them was at the first dinner we hosted in Saigon.

As a Christian group, we were interested in how Safer would view us. During two tapings without him, the film crew wept as we shared stories of our Vietnam experiences and God's redeeming grace in our lives. When the episode aired three months later (on my wife's birthday), we were not surprised when all Safer said was, "We met these veterans in Vietnam." One team member's story of his best friend dying

in his arms at Khe Sanh was included. I'm "shocked — shocked" that Safer neglected to say anything good about our involvement!

Our dinners were always interesting, as former enemies sat together across the table from each other, talking about our shared experiences during the war. One former North Vietnamese soldier told me, "When they would tell us, 'Tomorrow we fight the Marines,' I would cry." I told him no one ever told us that. We sat together, no longer enemies, but as men who had lost much during the war, and each respected the other as a worthy adversary.

But the most interesting aspect of every dinner together was the opinion of our former adversary as to why America lost the war. High-ranking officers admitted the Vietnamese couldn't defeat America on the battlefield. They won because they knew our politicians lacked the resolve to see the war through to victory. Yet they won the war and lost the peace.

The cost? After one million soldiers died in the fighting, over 2.5 million died in Vietnam, Cambodia, and Laos in the aftermath. Amazingly, many of the soldiers we met admitted it was a

hollow victory, because what they won was not what they were told they would win. They won a repressive communist regime. The anti-war protesters who rallied against the war in America were referred to as "useful idiots." Jane Fonda, call home!

The point is, too many in our country today want the type of government that has resulted in untold millions dead and oppression that continues to this day. The South Vietnamese government did not get serious about the fight until it was too late. I pray we do not do the same here.

Many think it matters little which party is in power because things will go along as usual. They're wrong. Each day we see more and more of our freedoms being threatened.

The battle for the soul of our country is going to be fought two ways: at the ballot box and on our knees. This battle is not for the fainthearted. We need to heed the words of Winston Churchill during World War II: "Never give up! Never give up! Never, never, never give up!"

Something to pray about! ■

JOKE

WORDS THAT ARE DIFFICULT FOR A MARINE TO SAY WHEN DRUNK:

1. Innovative
2. Preliminary
3. Proliferation
4. Cinnamon

WORDS THAT ARE VERY DIFFICULT FOR A MARINE TO SAY WHEN DRUNK:

1. Specificity
2. Anti-constitutionally
3. Passive-aggressive disorder
4. Transubstantiate

WORDS THAT ARE DOWNRIGHT IMPOSSIBLE FOR A MARINE TO SAY WHEN DRUNK:

1. No thanks, I'm married.
2. Nope, no more booze for me!
3. Sorry, but you're not really my type.
4. No thanks, I'm not hungry.
5. I'm not interested in fighting you.
6. Thank you, but I won't make any attempt to dance. I have no coordination and would hate to look like a real fool!
7. Oh no, I must be going home now as I have to work in the morning.

Photo from Vietnam

Ben Cole: I shot this from the back of my tank at Con Thien in November 1967. This chopper had been hit at the LZ and was being hauled out. We were under constant NVA observation and fire from big guns in the DMZ and North Vietnam. Every few days during that period we would have to take the tank out to an impromptu LZ on the southern slope of the hill where our guys would drop off a water trailer out of sight of the NVA forward observer long enough get in and out. Our tank would rush out and hitch and tow our battalions water supply for a couple of days back through the mud that nothing else could drive through as the NVA by that time tried to find our range and drop rounds on us. Apparently they must have zeroed in on this old bird.



Bustin' Heavies – Bob Haller sent these to the Sponson Box



Cam Lo Village 1968



"Modern" Cam Lo Village

NO MORE

BY PETE RITCH, USMC VTA MEMBER

VIETNAM '68 - '69 B CO, 3RD TANKS, 3RD MAR DIV

With the elimination of Tracked Vehicles in the Marine Corps, there will be:

- No More- Iron Horses, Dragon Tanks and "Bodacious Bastards"
- No More- 1800 MOS's, TC's, Drivers, Loaders or Gunners
- No More-Turrets, Copula's, Hulls or Engine Compartments
- No more-90 MM cannons, sky or cupola mounted 50 Cal or 30 Cal machine guns
- No more- Com helmets, radio antenna or radio checks

- No more gypsy racks, sponson boxes, Loader, TC and Drivers hatches or cupola clam shells
- No more napalm mixing or fuel tank pressurizing
- No more- track, end connectors, center line, road wheels, sprockets, idler wheels or track jacks
- No more towing cables, ort tracking or neutral steering
- No More- traditions like qualifying with a sledgehammer or sending a FNG to the maintenance shed for a can of muzzle blast

- No More- pry bars, C4 for testy torsion bars
- No more- grease guns, shoulder holsters, and grenade launchers
- No more- ground guiding, brass tossing, asbestos gloves
- No More- HE, Willy Peter, Beehive, or flchette rounds
- No More- names painted on gun barrels or spotlight covers
- No More-breech block clearing, jamming or cleaning

My Drill Instructors

BY JOHN "HUGHIE" HUGHES

Here's the story that I conveyed to you earlier today. My drill instructors were Sr DI SSgt Chester Dobies, who, after he retired from the USMC became the chief magistrate of Durham, N.C. and later he passed away in 2007. One of the Jr DIs was Cpl Garrison. He was the "heavy third" as the new guys call them. He was called the "Thumper." And he certainly earned that name for "thumping" on all of us recruits. I have not found any further record for him ... though I haven't checked any prison records. My other two Jr DIs were SSgt C.E. Jones and Sgt George McClelland.

SSgt Jones had been on and off of the drill field since 1963 and had come to our boot camp platoon when one of our other DIs got relieved. I don't remember the relieved DI's name. I lat-

er found out that Sgt Jones was KIA in Sept 1968 with Golf 2/7. You may notice that he was a Sgt when he was KIA. I have no idea when or why he lost his rocker.

Sgt. George McClelland was promoted to SSgt and went to Nam late Dec '67 or early Jan '68. He was assigned to Bravo 1/26 and they were up at Khe Sanh before the siege. On Feb 25 a boot LT. Platoon Leader ("Mac" was the platoon sergeant) led them out on a recon in order to get some idea of the NVA strength and activity in the area. The LT got them almost 400 meters beyond where they were supposed to stop the patrol. As you may imagine, they got hit really hard. They took heavy casualties from the get go and the young LT ... (he was only 20 years old) sent one squad on an end run to

try and flank the enemy. SSgt McClelland went with them. The squad went around where they thought the flank of the NVA might be and found instead that they immediately and most were killed outright. One Marine was badly wounded but managed to drag himself out of the kill zone.

The LT was hit and although they got him out of the line of fire, he died before they got back inside of the wire. They managed to bring in some wounded with them but they had to leave their dead. It was almost 8 weeks before McClelland's remains were charging almost directly into the center of the ambush. All hands were hit almost were recovered. That ambush is generally considered the beginning of the siege of Khe Sahn.

The Commandant on My Hangar Deck

MGYSGT BRAD GOODIN (USMC RETIRED)

After returning from Vietnam in February 1969. I was assigned to 5th Tanks at Las Flores Camp Pendleton,

Ca. With only a few months left on my enlistment. I was looking forward to getting out of the Marine Corps when

SSGT Dover Randolph, the career planner, convinced me to reenlist for Marine Aviation. Fast forward to 1987.

I was the Aircraft Maintenance Chief in F/A-18 Marine Fighter Squadron VMFA-531 at MCAS El Toro, CA. One afternoon my CO Lt. Col Jim Cieslak summoned me to his office to inform me that the new Commandant and Sgt Major of the Marine Corps were coming to El Toro next week for an inspection tour. Our squadron had been selected by CG Third Marine Aircraft Wing to give General Gray and SGT Major Sommers a tour of our hangar and flight line.

The CO told me that he and the XO would be escorting General Gray around the area and that I would escort SGT Major Sommers. Then he said, "By the way Top, lets spiff up the area."

"Aye sir," and off I went. Gathered all my SNCO's in the Maintenance Department and assigned each one an area of the maintenance spaces to clean up. I assigned one of my Gunny's to

take charge of cleaning up the hangar.

A few months earlier under a hangar modification program. Our hangar deck had been painted gloss white. With the overhead lights on it sparkled. However, with ongoing daily aircraft maintenance activities. The hangar deck was showing signs of wear and tear. Oil, hydraulic fluid, and jet fuel spills were evident. By the day General Gray and SGT Maj Sommers were to arrive that hangar deck was spic and span. You could have eaten off it.

General Gray had a reputation of being outspoken and very colorful. And, a tobacco chewer. As they arrived, the CO and I started our show and tell as planned. I showed SGT Maj Sommers around the flight line explaining the various systems and capabilities of the F/A-18. And introducing him to several of the maintenance crew. General Gray was on the flight line laughing and having a good old time with some

of my maintenance folks. One of the women Marines asked if she could get a photo with him. He seemed delighted to accommodate her. He called the base photo guy over and started posing for pictures with everyone in sight. He would put is arm around the females and give them a big hug while smiling with that big smile of his. The troops loved him.

The tour was only supposed to last for a half hour or so. But it turned into two hours. As they were departing. We were all on the hangar deck saying our goodbyes. When General Gray spit tobacco juice on my sparkling white hangar deck. Typical Al Gray. One of a kind.

Editor's note: "Goodie" was the most excellent driver of the tank that we both served on in Hue City during the Tet '68 "celebration." He is a long time member of the USMC VTA.

After Nam

BY BOB SKEELS

In 1970 upon arrival back to the World from 'Nam, I asked for more choices if they were available other than Camp Le Jeune or Pendleton ... and I lucked out with my last year in the crotch to be assigned to El Toro MCAS, in suburban Los Angeles, CA.

At night I had a second job at "Cisco's" beachside (red hot) tavern in Manhattan Beach, as one of the bouncers. On three occasions, I would catch Hollywood actor Clint Eastwood sitting on top of the cigarette machine. He would just sit and watch the girls

dance to the great disco music of the 70's. And he would always go home with a different girl on each occasion. At the time he wasn't yet the big star, but he always looked like a cool guy that you would want to meet and get to know. I am glad that I never had to throw this "Easy Rider" out of the bar or have to kick his butt like I did Jay Miller's in the 'Nam a few times even though he had rank on me.

This is a very true story and in hindsight I wished I had gotten to know Clint instead of just telling him to get

off the cigarette machine. After I quit that side job, I used to go in to Cisco's and sit on the machine as the caper seemed to pay off for Clint with the ladies. But maybe it was my Marine Corps high & tight haircut that wasn't so cool in the long hair, bell bottom jeans 70's. I should have told the ladies that I was a 'Nam Marine tanker for a guaranteed score each visit.

This true story should go in the 5 star Sponson Box as he is looking for a good Marine tale.

My Introduction to Tanks, the Marine Corps Way

BY CLYDE HOCH

Four of us, Gary Young, Robert Alexander, Donald May and myself came out of infantry training and were sent to 2nd Tanks at Camp Lejeune, NC. There we stood in front of the platoon we were assigned.

One TC pointed at me and said. "You are going to be a driver." He

skipped over the loader position, which at the time I didn't know what that position entailed. One of our guys asked when we would go to Tank School. The reply was, "You are not. You will be on-the-job-trained." Later I asked why I was chosen as driver and the reply was. "Because you were the tallest."

I was told to get into the driver's compartment and put the comm. helmet on. I did as I was told and over the intercom came, "Start it up, put the shift lever to high and step on the throttle." And away we went. At first, we drove around the tank park and later through tank trails and through the

woods. It was fun and exciting. When I enlisted the very last thing on my mind was to be in tanks. I wanted to be a grunt. I thought you had to be something very special to be in tanks.

Once I was sitting in the driver's compartment waiting to be told what to do when our platoon commander and our platoon sergeant both got into the turret and were discussing the best way to bore sight the main gun. Soon they started to yell at each other. Being a new private I was as quiet as a church mouse. I don't know if they even knew I was there. I knew if they noticed me, I would most likely receive their anger.

Another time our platoon sergeant and our platoon commander decided they were going to race tank against tank. I was the platoon sergeant's driver and he was my tank commander. On the signal, I floored it. We were going half speed. I could not understand what I was doing wrong. Our tank was the laughingstock of the platoon plus all of the maintenance people watching the race. The platoon sergeant unloaded a raft of his disappointment on me the Marine Corps way. Then a maintenance man jumped onto the back of the tank and opened the armor plate. He found a linkage arm that had come loose and was not connected. Sabotage?

We were told we were very lucky because we are going on a Med Cruise. What the hell is a Med. Cruise? We loaded the tanks on to railroad cars. I remember being told the

tracks hang over the railroad cars so make sure you are lined up correctly or you will go off the side of the railcar. The ramp leading up to the railroad cars was a very steep concrete ramp. Now remember that I'm a private just out of boot camp and infantry training. This driver thing was all new to me. I got to the ramp and started moving our tank up it. As I went up, I saw nothing but sky. I had no idea what would happen. I kept inching forward until the front of the tank came crashing down on the railroad car. What a relief, a perfect landing.

Next came backing onto a Mike boat. The Navy Mike boats came onto the beach. With a ground guide, I backed onto the Mike boat. The Mike boat raised the ramp and away we went headed for the LSD ship. The ship had a large tailgate that was dropped. After the tailgate dropped the well deck had water in it and the Mike boats drove right into the back of the ship. The ship raised the tail gate and pumped the water out. We chained the tanks to the Mike boat; the Mike boat was chained to the ship and away we went for the Mediterranean Sea.

Driving off the Mike boats was exciting. At times the Mike boats will hit a sand bar and then the water after the sand bar is deep. Many times, driving off the Mike boats we encountered deep water.

Here we were barely 18 and our chance to drink in bars and to "date" cheap women in so many different countries. What a great life the USMC has provided us!!!

One Click

BY LEE DILL

This story is not about me—it's about something I witnessed. Normally after tank school, you went directly to Staging at Pendleton. A few of us lucked out. We went to Twenty-Nine Palms Marine Corps base for 50 caliber training. It was a one week class and it covered the 50 caliber completely. When we left the class, we could assemble and disassemble that life changing weapon in the dark.

The class was more than just tankers; there were Motor T guys there too. The base was terrific, the barracks were air-conditioned, good food, no duties and all I had to do is learn the 50. There was one guy there, I think his name was Tom, I don't know his last name, and it's been so long ago. But he was a Motor T guy. My buddy Tim Hanks was also in this class and we partnered up, just like tank school. After a week, we graduated, went to staging, and then went to Vietnam.

It was four months later and I saw Tom again. But he is no longer Motor T; he is a grunt. It seems that when he landed in Da Nang there were slots open for grunts, and he became a Grunt.

In August, 1968. I was the loader on Moose's tank, A51, "Mad Harlot"! We were somewhere on Route One, below Hue City and above Da Nang. We were on a hill, one of

those hills where you could reach out and anything you could touch, you could kill. Kind of an awesome free fire zone.

Toward evening, I was standing by 51, just waiting for the sun to go down and start watches. A killer team was assembled and prepared for the night's ambush. If you remember correctly, these are not SEAL teams as they would have you believe. They are basically four Marines with varying experience somehow selected to go into the enemy's backyard and ambush them. As they walked by, I saw Tom the Motor T guy. They stopped by the tank and waited for dark.

Tom told me when he arrived in country, he was assigned a grunt outfit, and he wasn't happy about it either. Apparently, he complained too much, giving him a spot on tonight's killer team.

After dark, they went out and we monitored the net to see how they were doing. Moose and Whitaker had done their homework and knew where the team was supposed to set up. We would then supply supporting fire if needed.

They were not doing well. From what I could understand, they got hit either before they set up, or shortly thereafter. Out of four Marines, only Tom was left alive, and he had the radio. Since they had no idea how many gooks (NVA

or VC) were in the area, they could not send out a rescue quick response team. Since no one knew exactly where he was our Tank supporting fire was not going to happen either. Tom was basically on his own to survive until morning.

You heard him talking on the radio sometimes when the gooks were not near him. I believe they searched for him for a couple hours. The worst

It was March or April 1968 and I have the rank of corporal and currently I am the gunner on a US Marine flame-thrower tank assigned to "Task Force Robbie" at Cam Lo Hill in the northern part of I Corps in Vietnam. A month earlier I had been involved in the fighting in Hue City during Tet of '68 so I had already been exposed to some of the "heavy" combat that year. At our current assignment, we were pretty bored just sitting around waiting for something to happen so the tanks and other armored vehicles of the armored task force could be deployed.

While trolling the internet looking for info about me, the name Jeremy R. Glover appeared. When I saw the name, remembering 2nd Lt Glover from my first tour in RVN ('65-'66) I opened up the link and Holy Smoke – was I ever surprised!!!

Here in living color was an illegal utility shirt with my name stenciled on it. The inscription read that it was from the collection of Jeremy R. Glover (V2007.54.2) and it was donated to the Wisconsin Veterans Museum in Madison.

Year Range 1965–1967.

Event: Viet Nam War.

Description: "Civilian camouflage shirt, made of cotton twill printed in muted and faded brown, khaki and

part was when they were close. The platoon's radio man would say to Tom that if they are too close for to you to talk, just click the hand set once. It was at that time when he clicked the hand-set once. I realized how lucky I was to be on this big ass tank and not stuck out in the bush with no cover except the flak jacket and helmet

Tom survived the night, and the quick response team went out at the

Trying out for a Marine Band

BY JOHN WEAR

One day a call came out for anyone who could play a musical instrument to report to the 3rd Marine Division bandmaster at Quang Tri for a tryout... and for whatever reason, I volunteered. I may have thought that between my current boring assignment and my "exciting" Hue City past that a simple billet in the rear might be preferable. Besides, I had played the clarinet from 3rd grade to 12th grade, so I knew the "licorice stick" pretty well. So, that afternoon I rode a "6 by" truck to Quang Tri, met the band's woodwind section leader and sat down to try out. I was 20 years old at the time and I had not

My Illegal Jungle Utility Shirt

SUBMITTED BY KEN ZEBAL



next morning and brought him in. He walked by A-51 and he didn't look at me, actually he did not look at anyone. He had that thousand yard stare thing and he was being transferred, to the rear. I never saw him again, but I always remember the look in his eyes as he walked by and I thanked God every day after that for making me a tanker.

taken into consideration that I had not touched a clarinet for four or five years. I have to admit that the horrible noise that came out of that instrument while I blew into it was pretty bad. And wouldn't you know it? I ended up back on a "6 by" heading back to Cam Lo Hill with my tail between my legs. But you know? About two weeks later, the H&S Company skipper called me in to his office in Quang Tri and presented me with my very own tank and promoted me to the 3rd flame-tank section leader!!!

green camouflage, short sleeved with five metal buttons down center front, with a flapped patch pocket above each hip, a plain patch pocket on right side of chest and the name "ZEBAL" stenciled in black on proper left side of chest. Tag at interior back of neckline reads "100% Cotton M Genuine KAMO Product MFG. NO. 25334".

History: "This U.S. manufactured civilian "spot/duck hunter" patterned camouflage shirt was acquired by Jeremy R. Glover during the Vietnam War. It originally belonged to Staff Sergeant Kenneth W. Zebal, an M60A1 Tank Crewman from Massachusetts. Early in the Vietnam War camouflage clothing was not standard issue so troops sought it out through various >>

alternative channels, including buying civilian camouflage clothing made for hunters.”

Please Note: Two details struck me as wrong in the above explanation: My

Your hunting dog obeys the commands “halt”, “traverse left/right”, “forward”, and “identified”.

You can sleep through a raging thunderstorm, but wake up when your wristwatch alarm goes off.

When playing football, you never throw a pass before checking wind, barometer reading and the football’s temperature.

You let your kids pee off the porch, but ground them when their rooms aren’t IAW standard load plan.

You laugh at redneck jokes...after they’re explained to you.

You shy away from helping your kids with their math because you don’t have all your fingers.

You giggle uncontrollably when the guys talk about the thrill of firing big bore guns like the .308.

You spend your days off in exotic locales like the Patton Museum.

rank at the time was Corporal and our tanks were M48-A3’s – I’ve never even been in an M-60-A1. 2/Lt Glover was known in the platoon as “Dudley Do Right” or just plain “Dudley” because

You Might be a Tanker if:

You say “On the way!” as you pass gas.

You name your kids Abrams, Sheridan, Patton, Walker, etc...

Your kids’ nicknames are HE, Heat, Canister, Coax, etc...

You consider “4” the perfect number for a family’s size.

You don’t realize that it’s illegal to stick your head out of the sun roof while driving.

You and your wife have a set of his and hers coverall.

You look down to read your weight, and can’t.

You have the high score on TANK BATTLE at every arcade within a ten mile radius.

You remove your headgear and place your hand over your heart before uttering the words “General Patton.”

By “Old Kentucky Home”, you mean Fort Knox.

no matter how hard he tried he just couldn’t seem to do anything right. He’s mentioned in, my previously published article Submarine Pay.

The only scouts you are aware of are Boy Scouts and Girl Scouts.

You believe a hammer can fix anything.

You run up your Sears charge card on 1 1/8” to 4” wrenches.

You find “Tank” starring James Garner, to be a far better movie than “Top Gun,” starring some prissy man.

You stop by every gas station you pass in order to “top-off”.

You invite all your friends over for a barbecue party, and all three show up.

You can never buy a big enough car to drive around in.

Your wife meets you at the door after work with a hose and a bottle of degreaser.

You drive everywhere, including two houses down.

Submitted by Ron Dudek

USMC Retention

Tank Marines Get the Chance to Leave the Corps Early

Marines whose jobs are going away as part of a force-wide reorganization that includes getting rid of tanks will get the option to leave the Corps earlier than planned. Enlisted Marines and officers in tank-related military occupational specialties will be eligible for early-out programs, the service announced this week. The programs will allow those in four specialties to leave the Marine Corps early if they desire: armor Marines; senior-armor staff noncommissioned officers; main battle tank repairer/technicians; and tank officers. The move is part of a 10-year force-wide redesign announced by Commandant Gen. David Berger earlier this year. The Marine Corps is folding its tank battalions and getting rid of the heavy-armor vehicles as it

prepares for lighter, naval-based missions.

The measures are part of a “surgical reduction in personnel and realignment of specific capabilities and units,” Col. Christopher Escamilla, the branch head for Marine Corps Plans, Programs and Budget, said in the announcement. “These redesign efforts will enable the Marine Corps to reinvest time, money, and resources into higher priority areas, which includes emerging technologies and significant changes in force structure to deliver a Marine Corps the nation needs by 2030,” Escamilla added. Officials did not immediately respond to questions about how many Marines will be eligible for the early-out programs. More details are expected in a forthcoming

service-wide message.

Marine officials said in May that about 1,300 personnel would need to move into new fields or other branches of the military if they wished to remain in uniform as their missions are cut. Aside from tankers, some infantry units, bridging companies, law-enforcement missions and aircraft squadrons could also be affected by the changes. Several tank battalions and other units have cased their colors. At least one law enforcement battalion is also preparing to be deactivated this month. The Marine Corps will remain faithful to its personnel and their families by “maximizing opportunities for continued service for those in a military occupation slated for divestment,” Maj. Craig Thomas, a spokesman for

the service told Military.com in May.

Tankers approved for the early-out programs won’t be able to separate sooner than one year out from the end of their current service contracts. They must also be eligible for honorable or

general under honorable conditions discharges. “Marines approved for this program will be considered to have completed their full active service commitment,” the announcement states, adding that they’ll still be responsible

for completing Reserve or Individual Ready Reserve requirements. [Source: Military.com | Gina Harkins | December 6, 2020 ++]

Submitted by Gene “Doc” Hackemack

New in 2021: The Final Year for Marine Tankers

BY TODD SOUTH FOR THE MARINE CORPS TIMES

The year 2021 will go down as the year that the Marine Corps ditched its tank Marines.

Though the official decision came down in March 2020 from Maine Corps Commandant Gen. David Berger, and the tanks rolled away on train cars from 1st Tank Battalion, 2nd Tank Battalion, and 4th Tank Battalion this past summer, the tankers themselves are still in uniform and their units remain at least for a few more months.

The first to go was A Company, 4th Tank Battalion, in July when the unit cased its colors. Then C Company deactivated in August. So, following the announcement, an estimated 800 Marines in a tank-related military occupational specialty were given the option to swap jobs or, if they had 15 years retire early. Then, in December, the Corps posted an official administrative message that allowed enlisted and officer tank MOS holders to end their contracts one year early.

Shortly after the C Company deactivation, 39 of its approximately 80 members transferred from the Marine Corps Reserve to the Idaho Army National Guard, most to continue on in tank jobs. The Corps is axing all of

its tank battalions and cutting grunt units

As part of Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David Berger’s plan to redesign the force to confront China and other peer adversaries by 2030, the Marines are axing all three of its tank battalions, and chucking out all law enforcement battalions and bridging companies, according to a news release from Marine Corps Combat Development Command.

War games from 2018 and 2019 helped Berger and top Marine leaders pull the trigger on ditching tanks and other major force redesign efforts. Those include reducing the size of the Corps by 12,000 Marines in the next decade, increasing training, reducing conventional artillery in favor of rocket systems and pushing funding to more advanced weapons systems.

Former Marine tank mechanic and 2nd Tank Battalion member Sgt. James Webb also held billets as a driver, rigger and vehicle commander with deployments to Greece, Kuwait and Jordan, he said in a statement.

Beginning in October, he started on-the-job training at the Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, headquarters building, running the Marine Mart.

Seabiscuit

BY CLYDE HOCH

My goal in life was never to be famous or wealthy. I have achieved both goals. My goal is to do whatever I can to make other people’s lives a little better. My goal is to help people understand they should never quit. My goal in life is to inspire people.

One bible verse that sticks with me

is the only thing we can take to the afterlife is knowledge and love. You can’t eat fame or wealth. Science tells us wealthy and famous people are less happy than we are. As I have said before most of our needs are met. We have food, clothing and shelter. Our wants will never be met. We want ev-

He offered advice to fellow former tankers, and any Marine looking for a change.

“Don’t base your whole Marine Corps experience on your MOS, on your one duty station, or on one enlistment,” Webb said. “Don’t give up. There are so many MOSs that people don’t know about. Do research and find the one that clicks for you.”

The 2nd Tank Battalion is undergoing steps for formal deactivation, which is scheduled for some time in mid-2021, 2nd Marine Division spokesman 1st Lt. Dan Linfante told Marine Corps Times.

The 1st Tank Battalion is planning its deactivation ceremony for summer 2021, officials with 1st Marine Division said in October.

Fourth Tank Battalion is expected to also be fully deactivated by the end of fiscal year 2021, which concludes at the end of September.

Third Tank Battalion was deactivated in the early 1990s following the Persian Gulf War.

This is an excerpt from “21 Things Marines Need to Know for 2021” in the January edition of Marine Corps Times.

everything. When we have it, it is not that important in a short time.

I watched the movie Seabiscuit. I felt inspired from the movie, which is based on a true story. In the movie the owner purchases a horse that was given up on by other owners. He was small for a racehorse. He was used to >>

train other horses. He was trained by a man whose life revolved around horses who felt every horse can be useful. The trainer was looked down upon by most people. The jockey was passed up by almost every owner. All of these people felt it is best to give someone another chance. Each of these people and the horse had heart. With a whole lot of faith and inspiration from each other Seabiscuit became one of the most famous racehorses ever.

Our lesson from this movie is if we have faith in each other and care and never give up we can accomplish things we never thought of accomplishing. With inspiration and heart,

Bubba the Tiger

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

Here is a re-post on Bubba. We got him in Laos after his mom tramped on a land mine. He was only two days old, but I had him in my jungle jacket wrapped in a towel and when we were extracted we fed him milk and got him on his way. He did well because he got much larger than an Asian Tiger usually grew to.

His weakness was real beer (He had two cans a day) which he slurped down, went to a corner of the hooch, rolled on his back, showed his junk and snored like the last day!

If the Bubster wanted to get in your bunk with you, you just rolled over and dealt with it. It's such a shame so many tigers were killed over there because most were killed for sport and not in human defense. When we cycled out the question was what the hell do with Bubba??? He couldn't survive because he only knew SOG, SF and Seals etc.

Here is where we got creative. We had access to things normal military didn't. So we got creative and a phone call went to a research zoo in Sidney Australia and were asked if they

amazed and never found out why! wanted a free tiger. When the lady at the other end realized we were for real she pissed her pants and said yes, but how do we get him?

we can accomplish more than we ever dreamed of. I write to inspire, motivate, educate, and preserve history. I do whatever I can to help my fellow humans and especially veterans. The more you give the more you get back. I believe God has a reason for each and every one of us. I believe his purpose for us is to live our lives as best we can and get as much pleasure as possible doing it.

Wouldn't life be great if we spent as much time helping each other as we do condemning one another?

Many of us were brought up with the mindset that life is hard. Is it or do we just make it so? The only thing

I don't want to reference Air America, but we flew the bubster to his new home and I got off the airplane with him walking beside me like a dog on a leash. They all went nuts when he walked to the lady and heeled by her side looking at her for instructions. He must have had a very good time and life there because he sired tons of babies. When I was back in Sidney in 87 I saw a bronze plaque telling about the SF Tiger that came to them in 1969 and made lotsa great baby tigers. That part of my life is gone like Bubba who lasted to '85, but every time I hear a Tiger make those special noises my head and heart goes back to a tiny little baby we had found in Laos in 1968. God I miss him!

BTW the Bubster never lived in a cage. He was always shown love from a bunch of very dangerous men whose hearts melted when they met him. To discipline him you grabbed a handful of hair and flesh on his shoulder and simply said "no". He never retaliated he just complied. When I said he never lived in a cage the decision about the zoo where he ended up was a research zoo that was very excited because of gene diversity. It also had the new concept of no animals in cages. People were the ones in cages or behind glass.

holding us back from our accomplishments is ourselves.

In Marine Corps boot camp, we were told by the drill instructors, "There is no such thing as can't." We were forbidden to use that word. The drill instructors made us do things we didn't think we could do. Being a winner or loser is pretty much in our own minds. Each of us has a different definition of a winner and a loser. We all have more potential than we realize. You are made a wonderful human being, make the best of yourself and your life. You don't have to be rich or famous to be a great human being.

It took a bit for him to get back to being a tiger, but after he figured out the male female thing nature took its course and he was off to the races and made a ton of tiger babies who are in zoos around the world. God Bless ... to my knowledge he was the only SF tiger in the history books.

An interesting side note is that SF and MAC V were in many ways involved with the CIA. The coats and ties back in Langley, VA couldn't understand how our Intel was so accurate. Picture a NVA prisoner strapped into a chair and questioned. Also picture the prisoner telling us in multiple languages to go F**K ourselves. So a hood goes back on and the prisoner was told to spill the beans or we were going to feed the zip to our tiger.

They all laughed their asses off and said we were crazy. Enter the bubster and have his head about two feet from the prisoner, pull the hood off at the same time I would pinch the back of Bubba's neck. He roared in the dinks face with his extremely nasty tiger breath and the prisoner pissed his pants or worse while he sang like the Mormon tabernacle choir.

God I miss that stuff. BTW our Intel was so accurate the pencil necks were

IT'S NOT THAT I CAN AND OTHERS CAN'T ... IT'S THAT I DID AND OTHERS DIDN'T

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

There have been some people who, in ignorance have referred to Marines as extremists ... and more than a little dangerous.

To his credit, former Commandant of the Marine Corps, General Charles Krulak has said in our defense: "Citizens from all walks of life have donned the Marine Corps uniform and gone to war to defend this great nation, never to return. Honor, courage, and commitment are not extreme.

From a personal viewpoint, I never knew a Marine who was only a little dangerous. Most of us seemed to be a lot dangerous. That, I believe is supposed to be the idea."

Are Marines extremists?

I personally believe I am a Marine until the day I die, at which time I become a dead Marine;

I believe in God, Jesus Christ as Savior and Lord, the Marine Corps and its creed of Honor, Courage and Commitment, Country, Mom, and Apple Pie, and I apologize to no one for assigning God His rightful place;

I believe that Marines draw the Guard Duty in Heaven because the Marine

Corps Hymn says so;

I believe the Bible to be the finest book ever written, containing the very words of God, with the Marine Corps Guidebook coming in a close second;

I believe that Marines in service today are my direct descendants via the Warrior Spirit;

I believe only two types of people exist within our nation's military; Marines, and those who wished they were;

I believe that the Marines in service today are the finest Marines who have ever served our country;

I believe that Lewis (Chesty) Puller was the greatest American who ever lived, with former Commandant Charles Krulak a close second, and former Secretary of the Navy James Webb (the most decorated Marine of the Vietnam War) coming in third with General Peter Pace, the only Marine to ever serve as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff right on his heels.

I believe that Duty is a Right;

I believe that Service to our country is a God-given opportunity;

I believe that Patriotism is Duty, not to be taken lightly;

I believe in the Brotherhood of the

The below article is so befitting for all of us...

Take time to ponder the last statement since it cannot be refuted.

I first started reading this and was reading fast...until I reached the third sentence. I stopped and started over, reading slower, and thinking about every word. So please read slowly.

AND THEN IT IS WINTER

AUTHOR UNKNOWN

You know time has a way of moving quickly and catching you unaware of the passing years. It seems like yesterday that I was young, just married, and embarking on my new life with my mate. Yet in a way, it seems like eons ago, and I wonder where all those years went.

I know that I lived them all. I have glimpses of how it was back then and of all my hopes and dreams. But, here it is... the winter of my life, and it catches me by surprise... How did I get here

so fast? Where did the years go and where did my youth go? I remember well seeing older people through the years and thinking that those "older people" were years away from me and that winter was so far off that I could not fathom it or imagine fully what it would be like.

But, here it is...my friends are retired and getting grey... they move slower and I see an older person in myself now. Some are in better and some worse shape than me... but, I see

Marine Corps.

We, as Marines believe in the Freedom of the American citizen, and have proved it, tens of thousands of times.

Are United States Marines extremists?

The Chief of Naval Operations would never be called a Sailor.

The General of the Army would never be called a Soldier.

The Chief of Staff of the Air Force would never be called an Airman.

The Commandant of the Marine Corps is PROUD to be called: Marine.

I admit: I am old and gray, and I no longer move as fast as I once did. My active duty service is long behind me, but the memory of those fellow Marines with whom I served is as fresh today as it was so many years ago.

Yes, Marines will always be extreme! We know no other way to live, to serve, to pay back our country for what we have and for what we have earned.

And what we have earned is a title. A name. A right. We have earned, by the service, the sacrifice and the blood of our brothers, the right to be forever known as: UNITED STATES MARINES SEMPER FIDELIS

new season of my life unprepared for all the aches and pains and the loss of strength and ability to go and do things that I wish I had done but never did!! But, at least I know, that though the winter has come, and I'm not sure how long it will last... this I know, that when it's over on this earth... it's over. A new adventure will begin!

Yes, I have regrets. There are things I wish I hadn't done... things I should have done, but indeed, there are also many things I'm happy to have done. It's all in a lifetime.

So, if you're not in your winter yet... let me remind you, that it will be here faster than you think. So, whatever you would like to accomplish in your life, please do it quickly! Don't put things off too long!! Life goes by quickly. So, do what you can TODAY, as you can never be sure whether this is your winter or not!

You have no promise that you will see all the seasons of your life... so,

LIVE FOR TODAY and say all the things that you want your loved ones to remember... and hope that they appreciate and love you for all the things that you have done for them in all the years past!!

"Life" is a GIFT to you. The way you live your life is your gift to those who come after. Make it a fantastic one.

Remember: "It is Health that is real Wealth and not pieces of gold and silver."

~Your kids are becoming you.....but your grandchildren are perfect!

~Going out is good ... coming home is even better!

~You forget names... but it's OK, because other people forgot they even knew you!!!

~You realize you're never going to be really good at anything.... especially golf.

~The things you used to care to do, you no longer care to do, but you really do care that you don't care to do them

anymore.

~You sleep better on a lounge chair with the TV blaring than in bed. It's called "pre-sleep."

~You miss the days when everything worked with just an "ON" and "OFF" switch...

~You tend to use more 4 letter words ... "what?"..."when?"...???

~Now that you can afford expensive jewelry, it's not safe to wear it anywhere.

~You notice everything they sell in stores is "sleeveless?!"

~What used to be freckles are now liver spots.

~Everybody whispers.

~You have 3 sizes of clothes in your closet.... 2 of which you will never wear.

~But "Old" is good in some things: Old Songs, Old movies ...

and best of all, our dear ...OLD FRIENDS!!

Stay well, "OLD FRIEND!" ■

the M-48 (mostly driving) at Camp Lejeune before reporting to Staging Battalion at Camp Pendleton.

I don't recall much about the first full month I was in-country (April '66), other than we did do road sweeps and a couple of search and destroy operations around Hill 55. I do remember it was stifling hot and the red dust got into everything. Oh yes, we also had rats, huge rats that would come out at night and go through the C-Rats if they were left out ... and they'd search your gear for morsels if given the chance. You could hear them but not see them. I heard of Marines being bitten, but I never was. SSgt Thomas would tell us stories about his newly acquired wife and their honeymoon escapades. I am sure he will not admit to that now. We additionally would practice giving haircuts to each other. They did allow me to burn the crappers every now and again. They said it was my God-given right as an FNG. Also, wouldn't you know it? They put me on mess duty for a week, in addition to standing a two-hour watch on the tank at night. I also acquired a respectful taste for C-rat coffee. We needed it to stay awake on night watch.

Pat use to tell me about his previous months in Nam including operations like "Starlite." He stayed on my butt in the beginning with regard to learning all I could and as fast as I could. I really though he was paranoid, but I found out later that he was just a stickler for perfection. And that he wanted me to be able to perform so we could all stay alive. After a while he would reward me with his used books. Not saying what the subject matter was. I learn more from him in two months than I ever learn from anyone else in that span of time.

On the morning of 21 May 1966, the day started quiet and it was heavy with overcast skies. Soon the Company CO from A-1/9 was calling us over for a brief about an operation we were about to participate in. He seemed very serious and there was an urgency to his voice. He had brought a bunch of grunts with him and they started climbing on our section of tanks. Truby told me to fire the tank up. Before I knew it, we were heading in a direction I had not been before. In about 30 minutes we came to a stop in front of a tall thick tree line. As we stop, the grunts quickly jumped off the tank and got on-line checking their weapons. This action got my heart beating rapidly and I felt something big was up. I believe we were only there a short while and Turby told me to move out. As I drove through the first hedge row, I could see movement to the front at about a hundred yards. There were guys with weapons that I saw and they were running around desperately like they were trying to find a place to take a much need dump. I don't think they expected tanks.

Almost instantly, we began to take fire and I mean a lot of fire from these guys. I was told to keep the tank moving at a slow pace forward. There was so much activity going on both on the radios and the noise of the main gun firing while automatic weapons fire caused my anxiety level to go through the roof (scared crapless). After a while I saw a grunt kneeling in a large ditch that I was crossing, firing his M-14 one round then charging his weapon and firing again. At one point we made

eye contact, and I remember thinking you should have oiled that piece before coming out. Maybe it was broken extractor?

While the crew in the turret were busy firing the tank's weapons, I thought I saw a VC in the tall grass crouching toward us at a short distance to our front. I took out my .45 and fired a few rounds in his direction. I'm not sure if I hit him, but I didn't see him again. Someone over the intercom said they were getting shot at from behind. Pat yelled to the grunts for them to take care of the problem.

I am not sure how our tank got into this situation of being so far ahead of the grunts, but we were right next to a trench that was between us and the river. And this trench was plum full of VC. I do remember Pat on top of the tank with an M-14 (that we kept on the top of the turret) firing into the gooks running down the trench. I could see his round impacting in their backs. One of these VC had an automatic rifle and turned and fire at Pat but missed him from about 5 yards away. All the while, I could hear most of the communication between the crew and I knew the 30.cal was not functioning properly (overheated), the breach was full of cannister pellets and the 50. Cal. was empty. All we had was Pat's M-14 and I had my .45.cal pistol in hand. I am not sure if I hit the ones trying to board the tank, but it wasn't for not trying. At one point I heard Pat tell me to move forward slowly and the next thing I know there was an explosion right under the slop plate. Evidently Pat had thrown a frag grenade at the gooks in the trench.

I heard nothing for a moment, but I did see several VC running down the trench. I thought that they were going to get away so I decided to run over them. I drove on top of them quickly and I did a few natural steers over the trench. That did the job. No more gooks ran down the trench. The next thing I saw was a VC come running out in front of the tank from the left and jump into a hole in front of the vehicle. I still feel extremely guilty to this day because if I still had my pistol in my hand, I could have taken him out with no problem. However, as soon as this VC dropped in the hole a grunt ran up to the hole firing his M-14 into it. At that time an explosion went off (a gook grenade) and the grunt was blown on to his back. I found out later that he only received a shrapnel wound in his chest and he was flown out by chopper in stable condition.

Then there was a lull in the fight after this intense close engagement. I had not realized it but about 6-7 hours had elapsed since the fighting began. We all took stock of our situation and prepared to look for more VC with our weapons cleared and loaded. I believe Pat gave me an "at-a-boy" at that time. I was also exceptionally proud of him that day. He gave us all inspiration to do what had to be done to survive. But not only survive but to come out with a huge victory over the same VC unit (RC-20th) that had ambushed and killed 12 Marines and wounded many more that morning. It was the same VC unit that had chopped up a platoon of 1/9 Marines and taken their weapons a couple of weeks earlier. Our tank section in a very big way inflicted revenge on the RC-20th by being credited with 52 VC KIA (BC). Ref: 3rd Tank BN CC May 1966. >>

COVER STORIES

SEMPER FI MY BROTHER

BY GENE WHITEHEAD

23 MARCH 2020

I arrive in Da Nang, Vietnam 29 March 1966 on an aircraft (civilian), with the same welcome every other US serviceman got: heat, humid, strange smells, lot of stares from old guys and being full of uncertainty. Before long, I was checking into 3rd Tank Bn, then to A Co. A few days later I found myself heading out to Hill 55 on a 6X6 truck. Upon arriving at our tanks (A-34) position on the hill which overlooked the water point on the river. The guy I was replacing almost ran over me trying to hop on the truck and at the same time tossing his WP bag on the same. I think he said something like, "Good luck dude, you are going to need it!"

My first few days were being brought up to speed on the M-48 tank (A-34) by SSgt Turby Thomas (TC) and Cpl Pat Rogers (Gunner). They would take turns giving me classes on the fire control system and other turret related components. We would do this at night when it was not so hot. This instruction would come in handy later in my tour of duty in Vietnam. The loader was LCpl Brothers (what a clown—and I say that with charity). He had a huge sense of humor. He was replaced by LCpl Holmes a couple of months later.



The crew on 21 May 1966
(L to R) Cpl Pat Rogers (Gunner), LCpl Gene Whitehead (Driver)
SSgt Turby Thomas (TC) and LCpl Brothers (Loader)

I was assigned the drivers job on A-34 because they found out how little I knew about the inside of the turret at the time of my arrival. I only had a two weeks crash course training on

One further incident which occurred the day after this. As we arrived back on Hill 55, my tank had slipped the left track off of the sprocket directly in front of 1st BN 9th Marines Commanding Officer's bunker. We had to break track to fix it, so I unhooked my pistol and hung it on an end connector of the track. After repairing the track, we took off to our static position on the hill. Only a short time later I got called to report to our platoon Sgt's hooch. GySgt Mullins asked me where my pistol was, and as I checked my person, I had to admit I didn't have a clue. He held a pistol up and said, "Is this yours?" It was mine. The Gunny said that when I drove off after fixing the track, the pistol and holster was flung into the doorway of the 1/9 BN CO bunker. To teach me an unforgettable lesson, I had to dismount the 50 Cal. machinegun w/barrel from the cupola and carry it to the mess hall (several hundred yards away) if I wanted



Gene Whitehead



Dig 'em out of the trench line

to eat hot chow. After one meal and being totally humiliated, I resorted to eating C-rats for the remainder of the week.

I had not seen Pat Rogers since he left Vietnam in 1966 ... until we met coincidentally again at Quantico Va. in July 1998. We both were firing the Virginia State Rifle "Leg Medal" Match.

We had dinner that night and spoke of things in our lives since 1966. Pat had continued his pursuit for perfection and his much needed adrenaline rush as a NYPD Sgt. I was shocked and sadden to hear this week that Pat had died in May of 2016. I wish he had been recognized for his heroics that day in Vietnam, 21 May 1966 along that river. A day I will never forget.

Semper Fi, My Brother. Lord willing, I will see you in Glory

Kenneth (Gene) Whitehead,

MSgt USMC Ret.



Captured weapons



Pat with dead VC

COVER STORIES

From the 3rd Tank Battalion Command Chronologies - May 1966:

On 21 May, 1st platoon tanks from Company "A", while in position on Hill 22 (AT 954665) with elements of Company "C", 1st Battalion, 9th Marines, were called to reinforce a patrol that had become engaged with an estimated VC platoon at (AT 954655). The tanks and an infantry squad departed Hill 22 in a South-easterly direction to the position of the engaged squad. A helo-lifted squad reaction force ("Sparrow Hawk") was ordered and it landed at (AT 947637) and advanced in a Northerly direction. Two 57mm recoilless rifles, located in the vicinity of (AT 957650) engaged the tanks and were subsequently destroyed by tank fire. Fire from the 57mm recoilless rifles caused minor damage to the tanks and wounded the platoon leader and one crewman. Two tanks from the 3d Platoon, Company "A", moved overland in a Northwesterly direction with elements of Company "A", 1st Battalion, 9th Marines who were mounted in LVT's. This force moved from a position on Hill 55 in the vicinity of (AT 970620) to engage the same VC force in the vicinity of (AT 953645). As a result of this action, 52 VC KIA (BC) were credited to tank action. (See enclosure (12) for a diagram of the action).

The use of a two pronged tank-infantry attack to encircle and destroy an enemy is not new by any means but this case is one of the few reported where it has been employed in RVN. Its usefulness and effectiveness is borne out by the toll of casualties inflicted on the VC.

ENCLOSURE (4)

1

CONFIDENTIAL

From the 1st BN / 9th Marines Command Chronologies - May 1966:

On 21 May an intelligence report from the PAT located at AN TRACH stated that two VC companies were located at LA HONG (1), AN TRACH (2), and AN TRACH (3). Around noon on the 21st elements of Company "C" and Company "A" made contact with a sizeable VC force in the vicinity of grid square (AT 9565). Contact was heavy and soon was estimated at reinforced company strength. From intelligence documents captured during the fighting, the VC units were identified as the R-21 Company and R-23 Company. The Marines killed 53 VC (body count), captured 16 weapons including a 60mm mortar, approximately 30 rounds of 60mm mortar ammunition, 35 grenades and large quantities of small arms ammunition. From the period 22-25 May, reports of enemy units and heavy small arms fire was received into that (A-3) position. At 211430Z, the remaining two platoons of Company "A" and the Company "A" Command Group were committed to the new escalating contact. Embarking on two LVT's and two tanks, Company "A" (-) was directed to depart on a heading of west-northwest to the SONG YEN thence to attack north with their left flank on the river. The Company disembarked on arrival at the river, formed with two platoons on line, and began its attack north, guiding west on the SONG YEN. Heavy contact was made within 75 meters of the dismount point and continuous fighting ensued all the way to (AT 958654) with an estimated VC company-sized unit equipped with small arms, machine guns, and mortars. Heaviest fighting and casualties took place along a trenchline on the east bank of the SONG YEN. The VC were ferreted and blasted out of holes and tunnels as well as from the trenchlines. Combat was at very close range, five meters in some instances. Tanks with each assault platoon were very effective. At approximately 211630Z communications was established between Company "A" and the remaining forces of 3d Platoon, Company "A". CO, Company "A" and the Command Group mounted on one LVT and moved east-northeast to effect physical contact with A-3. This was done by howling in on pyrotechnic signals. Company "A" and A-3 made physical link-up at (AT 963647). A-3 had not been able to move and were still under intense fire. Approximately half the platoon were casualties and most ammunition had been expended. CO, Company "A" took control, brought in MEDEVACS for remaining KIA's and LIA's, and a search of the area for any other possible casualties or equipment was immediately conducted. During the link-up with A-3,

Cumulative results of the day's action:

US MIA 31
 US KIA 12
 VC KIA (BC) 53
 VC KIA (est) 35
 VC KIA (pcss) 48
 VCS 6

>>

I Remember 21 May 1966

BY PAT ROGERS

3RD PLATOON, ALPHA CO, 3RD TANKS

19 July 1998, I was in my prep time for the 200-yard line rapid fire stage of the National Match Course “Leg Match” Vagina State Rifle Championships at Quantico, Va. The shooter on an adjacent target had been occasionally looking at me since we were squatted. Not mean looks, but inquisitive, as if he were trying to dig into the recesses of my mind. He was my age guy, wearing a Marine Corps Shooting Team sweatshirt, but obviously not on active duty. He looked vaguely familiar, after twenty plus years as a cop, most everyone looks familiar to me.

My curiosity overcame my common sense. I should have been preparing to shoot, but suddenly I had an overwhelming desire to identify this guy with the VN Vet pin on his hat. On a hunch I asked when he was in country.

“66-67” he said, “You?”

“65-66”, I replied. “Who were you with?”

“3rd Tank Bn, A Co.”

Gee, I thought, what a coincidence. “So was I. I was an 1811”.

Then his eyes got wide. The earlier confusion was gone, and a grand smile spread across his face. “You are Mouse, I’m Whitehead! We were Alpha 34!”

I remember a gangly kid from Georgia coming out to Hill 55 as a replacement on my tank. I don’t even believe that Gene Whitehead was a PFC yet. He was brand new, unbloodied, untested. His sincerity was overpowering. He was trying so hard to do everything right, that he wound up doing most everything wrong, or maybe not. I had 10 or 11 months in country, and almost three years in the Marine Corps. I had seen the elephant. I had seen Marines killed and wounded, and it was not something I wanted to see again. I expected competence in a very imperfect environment. A tank is a very intimate place. You may sink, or you may swim, but rest assured you will all get wet together. I was so far intact and wanted all in my sphere of influence to remain so. Circumstance might preclude survival, and I could accept that. However, I could not accept a Marine dying because of a lack of training.

I remember we pushed Gene Whitehead hard. He prob-

ably believed that I considered him somehow unworthy. He once stated that I did not like him, but that was not the case. For all his inexperience, he had a spark that differentiates the warrior from the rest. He had the makings of a good Marine; he just needed to survive long enough to be one.



Gene and Pat July 1998

I remember that Hill 55 was not the best place to bring someone up to speed. The OJT was, however, great. During the first Indochina war two French Battalions were wiped out on, or near this hill. The C.O. of 3/3, LtCol Muir, was killed there in September 1965. When we occupied the hill in January 1966, we had but two platoons of India 3/3, a light section of tanks, and an Ontos section. We were not on the hill for more than 5 minutes before one of our crewmen tripped a mine. In the book “Small unit action in Vietnam, Summer 1966”, the author stated, “In the late spring and early sum-

mer of 1966, the most notorious area in I Corps was the flat rice paddy and hedge row complex around Hill 55”. I concur. The hill was probed, assaulted, and mortared constantly. Weather and terrain made movement difficult. The enemy apparently had an inexhaustible selection of mines, and he employed them effectively. More importantly, the Viet Cong RC-20th (Doc Lap) Battalion had been actively engaging ARVN and U.S. Marine Units in the area. Well trained, well equipped and extremely well led, this unit would continue to be a thorn in the side of Marine operations south of Da Nang.

I remember that during the late morning of 21st May 1966 a squad of C/1/9 made contact with units of the RC-20th VC company on the west side of the Yen River, opposite the village of An Trach (1). Hard hit, they received support from two tanks and additional Charlie Co. grunts, but they too were stopped. Observing the enemy troops were also on the east side of the Yen Rive., The C.O. of 1/9 ordered my section of tanks and 2 Platoons of grunts of A/1/9 up to engage. Earlier that morning, a sparrow Hawk was deployed but landed in the middle of the enemy position. They suffered heavy casualties in a very few minutes.

I remember listening to the radio on the ride out, hearing the

frantic radio calls from these pinned down Marines, the request for air and artillery support, and more ominously, the request for multiple medevacs. Mr. Charles was not backing down. He was standing and fighting with all he possessed. It was apparent that this fight would be different.

I remember that when we made contact, it was sudden, and furious. The enemy was close. Engagement was rarely out to 100 meters, and usually significantly closer, within a few feet. We were advancing north on the east side of the Yen River. The terrain was flat, with the paddies separated by thick hedge rows. The enemy had dug trenches along the river and through some of the hedge rows. We assaulted these positions, supported by aviation, but it was the man with the rifle who had to ultimately remove the other man with a rifle from his position.

I remember at some point, I felt as if I was in a kaleidoscope. The noise of incoming and outgoing rounds; UH-1 gunships flying at tree top height, hitting positions merely 25 meters in front of us. Friendly ordnance impacting at what could only be described as “Dangerous, very close”. The constant radio noise, squawking over three channels simultaneously. The distinct whine of an OV-10, directing fast movers, and occasionally coming down to strafe positions when nothing else was available. Gene expertly maneuvered “O.G. Clank” (our tank) through the battlefield, punching holes through the hedge rows. Making it some small degree easier for the grunts to pass through.

I remember moving through one hedge row and seeing the tree line on the other side erupt in a wall of recoilless rifle, RPG, and small arms fire. I had a cannister round in the chamber of the main gun. I pressed the trigger, and for a few seconds, there was relative quiet. The grunt company commander issuing orders, calming an excited radio operator, moving his Marines, and overpowering, a powerful foe. Many years later he received a Silver Star for his actions that day. The Marine Corps got away cheap on that one. He deserved more.

I remember after several hours of heavy fighting, we were making progress, overrunning enemy positions. Moving through one trench line, we momentarily stopped to allow the grunts to catch up. I looked out to either side of the TC’s cupola and saw those wonderful, dirty, and tired warriors get online and start shooting. I looked to the front and realized that no more than 30 meters away, an enemy platoon was also giving back everything they had. The image of two groups of hard men, standing and firing almost shoulder to shoulder, neither giving nor seeking quarter, is one that I will take to my grave.

By now the enemy was endeavoring to leave, and we were not about to let him go. We pushed through another position and stopped. Murphy who thrives on close combat, paid us a visit. A cannister round had broken open in the chamber, spilling out its deadly load of 1281 pellets, locking up the breach. The coaxial .30 caliber MG had finally overheated, quitting in fiery protest. I had run the TC’s cupola mounted 50 Cal. Machine gun dry. Earlier I had shot an enemy soldier, carrying a pistol and a map case, with this weapon, at about 10 meters. The .50 cal. Mount, designed by Boeing, was difficult to reload under normal, peace-

time conditions, and impossible to load now. O.G. Clank was effectively disarmed.

I remember peering out of the TC’s hatch and seeing a large number of enemy soldiers alongside our tank. We had outrun our support. The grunts had not yet caught up with us, and we were alone. We were in the unique position of having advanced past a retreating, disorganized enemy company. I grabbed my M-14, and climbed out of the tank, one of the VC raised his K-50 mg, and at a range of 10 feet, emptied the magazine at me. Above the noise of the rest of the battle, the sound of those rounds passing by my head was easily the most distinctive. I put the front sights on his chest and shot him. He went down, but there were many of his comrades close by. Some were retreating along the trench next to our tank and some were trying to assault our vehicle, the closest obstacle to their perceived survival. I will never again hear the term “target rich environment” without thinking about this incident. I started engaging as many as I could. While changing magazines, I caught sight of movement below me, and saw Gene standing in the driver’s hatch, shooting enemy soldiers off the tank with his 45. Cal pistol, buying me time.

I remember thinking for a brief moment that this kid was going to be all right. We continued shooting as many as we could, but it became rapidly apparent that there were more of them than we had bullets for. I called Gene on the intercom and ordered him to drive forward. About this time, I ran the M-14 dry. I called into the tank for another magazine. The pistol mag I was handed did not disturb the VC I threw it at, but then I was handed a frag grenade. I pulled the pin and threw it at an enemy soldier in front of the tank. I called Gene over the intercom to get him stopped, but my dancing on top of the turret dislodged my yo-yo cord, severing communications. The grenade detonated under the tank, with no damage other than my ego, then I had to explain to the CO why I tried to blow up my own tank.

I remember Gene driving down the trench line, doing neutral steers on top of enemy soldiers, crushing them before they could hurt more Marines. Off to my left, I watched a grunt jump into the trench with several enemy soldiers who were firing a machine gun. His rifle apparently malfunctioned, because he picked up an e-tool and killed them both with it. I remember a Huey flying low up the river, shooting enemy soldiers who were swimming to the west bank, in a vain attempt to escape the carnage in the hedge rows.

I remember consolidating on the other side. Com was reestablished, malfunctions reduced, and weapons reloaded. A grunt platoon leader came alongside the tank with a map in his hand and asked if I knew exactly where we were. I didn’t have a clue at that point. He said, “To hell with it. Let’s go north and kill some more of these sons of bitches”. I remember looking at Gene Whitehead and giving him a thumbs up.

As battles go, this was not one of the big ones. It only lasted seven hours, although it seemed like seven eternities at the time. We destroyed two companies of the RC-20th Battalions, killing somewhere in between 50-130 of them. However, we >>

lost 12 Marines KIA, and 31 WIA. Things happened that day. Things I have never seen, or experienced, before or since. Forever after, I have seen life with a greater clarity, and have a much better understanding of certain emotions. I also understand completely what courage is; I saw it occur many times on that overcast May spring day along the banks of the Song Yen River.

I took the sling off my arm and stood up to hug Gene. Thirty-two years of emotions came out, and we made lots of noise, reminiscing about days gone by, much to the amusement of all the young Marines, sailors, airmen, soldiers and civilians on the firing line. Gene got down to the serious business of shooting. Already a Distinguished pistol shot, he needed four points to be among the very few who are "Double Distinguished". He held hard, and shot a 477-9X, enough to earn six point and his Distinguished Rifleman's Badge.

We went out to dinner that night and talked about what has transpired since 21 May 1966. Married with three children, he retired as a Master Sergeant of Marines with 23 years of service to his country. He became the good Marine I had hoped. A member of the USMC Rifle Team told me that Gene just received

a Bronze Star for action that occurred after my departure from Vietnam. He had picked up and returned to its original owner, a frag that had been tossed into a bunker, saving several Marines. The Marine Corps got away cheap on that one too. He deserved at least one more, for keeping his tank crew alive so many years ago.

This meeting of two broken down warriors was too providential to be mere chance. It may not have been Divine intervention, but then again. Maybe it was. It was extremely emotional for both of us and brought back a lot of memories.

I remember a time when we answered the clarions call, and strong, armed men fought a war in a country that no longer exists. I remember a time when the elected and appointed officials of a political party micromanaged its professional military and sacrificed the lives of its best. America was eating its own young.

Gene Whitehead added: My friend Pat Rogers, Chief Warrant Officer USMC (ret) went to his Glory in Heaven in May 2016. May he rest in eternal peace. ■

Our Readers Write

(Continued from page 7)

Tanks for the Memories

USMC Supporting Arms A Thing of the Past?

I read with great interest the article titled, "Warfighting Exercise Presented Leadership Opportunities for Corps Junior Leaders," in the July issue of our magazine. To me the second story about a U.S. Marine tank crew was perhaps the most impactful of the entire article. Having faithfully served as a Marine tank section leader during the Vietnam War, any and all stories about our "steel horses" is of great interest. As an aside, I am a lifetime member of both the USMC Vietnam Tankers Association as well as the Marine Corps Tankers Association. My mantra is, "Keep the Legacy of U.S. Marine Tanks Alive."

Many of your readers may not know about what the current Commandant of the Marine Corps is perpetrating on our beloved Corps. Based on a (misguided) attempt to make the U.S. Marine Corps

a "faster and lighter" fighting force, virtually all U.S. Marine supporting arms will be either drastically reduced or totally eliminated. That means that Marine tanks, artillery and "fast-mover" close air support will soon be a thing of the past. As of this summer, all U.S. Marine tank battalions will be eliminated, and the current Marine tankers will be transferred to new military occupations or released from active duty. As I understand it, in the future, if Marine grunts want or need tanks or artillery support, then a request call will be placed to the U.S. Army. And if they need CAS, a request call will be placed to the U.S. Air Force.

Sgt John Wear
USMC, 1966-1969
Elbert, Colo.

www.mca-marines.org/leatherneck

SEPTEMBER 2020 / LEATHERNECK 69

A Cam Lo Romance

BY GREG KELLEY

Aside from the occasional "boom-boom" that, if we were lucky, would happen whenever we were not in the field, I think most of us were truly love-starved Leathernecks while in 'Nam. I wonder how many of us jumped out of a slow moving six-by and wandered into "Little Dog-Patch" outside of Da Nang?

Even now I have to grin when recalling the blatant advertising written on the tin roof of the bamboo shacks that were sitting some hundred feet off the road. I remember "FUCK HERE" painted in six-foot lettering left no doubt as to what was for sale inside.

Being a new guy, and yet to be sent up to a line company, I was misled by a group of salty Marines and forced (**wink - wink**) to venture into one of those houses of ill repute with them. A pack of Kool cigarettes later and I was off with a particularly attractive young lady. I recall her being French / Vietnamese. Well, suffice to say I got the better end of the bargain. After that I always made sure that I always had a couple of packs of Kool's with me, regardless of where I found myself in-country. But I digress...

Fast forward into the summer of '67, now I have six or seven months in-country. I was gunning on A-24 and I was a pretty salty 18-year-old. We had pulled into Cam Lo for ... (memory fart) ... some whatever. A couple of weeks earlier, I had met Kim in the ville. She was young, shy and cute. She was also one of the few local females who still had brilliant white teeth. Older mama-sans ventured around flashing their pearly black beetle-nut smiles. A group of four sat around picking lice from each other's heads and cracking them dead between their teeth. I walked around for a few minutes with a Tiger beer in hand, looking for Kim. It was scorching hot, and I was still sweating from scrubbing the main gun when I saw her, standing alone under the shade of a tin roof. I spoke only a few words of

Vietnamese, and she spoke English only slightly better than my Vietnamese, but I learned that she was the daughter of a village chief. Her family had fled the North and wound up at Cam Lo as one of the several hundred refugees. I had only a half hour or so, and we spent it sitting close together holding hands. She told me she was very sad about the war, but (and I'll never forget these words) ... she told me I made her happy. That made me happy.

When I told her I had to go, she asked me where I was going. I explained to her that we were going on a 3-day sweep of the area just north east of Cam Lo. When I told her this, she grabbed my arm and tugged me back. "Beaucoup VC!!" she told me. "You not go!"

I told her we would be returning in 3 days. Well, that 3-day sweep turned into 8 days of almost constant fire-fights and other "fun" stuff. I remember most of the grunts were New Guys who had not yet become acclimated to the heat. That was a serious problem and the source of many of our casualties; heat-exhaustion took a big toll.

When we finally limped back in to Cam Lo, I jumped off the tank and replied to my tank commander to screw himself after he told me the tank comes first. I made my way down to the "ville." As soon as I entered the area, five or six little kids came running up to me. Two or three grabbed each of my hands and started pulling me over to a small hooch.

I remember verbatim what they said: "Gelly!!! Gelly!!! You come quick! Kim cry five days! You come!"

They pulled me along, and then I spied her "hiding" behind a five-inch thick support pole. She was looking down, trying to hide her embarrassment. She looked like she had been crying, but smiled as she looked up to me. She had thought the worst when, after 3 days, I hadn't returned. We spent some time together, then it was back to reality!

Months passed which, due to Operations Buffalo and Kingfisher plus the craziness at the Con Thien firebase, etc. it really seemed like years. I was up at Con Thien on December 10th. We were knee-deep in its red mud one day when the mail truck showed up. We crouched around in one of the bunkers as the mail-truck driver called out names for our mail. When he got to my name, he handed me my mail and said "Oh, Kelley... your replacement is here. You can ride back with me if you can get your gear together quick enough". My gear was like everyone's, it easily fit into my Willy-Peter bag. After my crew and I did the best we could of "men saying good-by to men," I was at the mail truck ready.

Several miles down the road back to Dong Ha, we passed through Cam Lo. I can't remember if I even told the mail guy I was jumping off, but I did.

I came to find Kim.

We sat off by ourselves. She was so happy to see me. She kept holding my hand to her cheek as she smiled and we spoke a bit. I told her I was going home. She was upset and cried. She asked me not to go. She was breaking my heart. This young Vietnamese girl (my age) was one of the "good" things I experienced during my 13 months in hell. Now, I had to leave.

She cried and told me "You stay. We start a new Vietnam!" It was hard to leave.

I have a simple old black & white picture of her tucked away, but my memories have remained clear and colorful. I have thought of her often, and always hoped she made it and has lived a long and happy life. ■



Greg Kelly



Kim

Editor's note: We had published Roger's story in a recent past issue of our magazine and for whatever reason several important paragraphs were omitted. We are sorry for the mistake and we are presenting the story in its entirety below.

Ambush at the Khe Ran Bridge "My Moment"

BY ROGER LULI

Day one was 19 April 1968. I was at the Calu firebase checking on the tanks at that position. While there, I received a call from the infantry battalion commander at that location. He wanted the tanks to assist a company of infantry as a reaction force. A bridge about 700 meters west on route 9, where the Khe Ran creek runs into the Quang Tri River, was under attack. On the way we were told that the tanks should use the bypasses around the bridges since they would not hold their weight.

As the Marines neared the ambush site, they too came under attack. Either a mine or a rocket propelled grenade (RPG) exploded by the right front of the lead tank followed by automatic weapons fire from both sides of the river. The explosion threw up a dust cloud which reduced visibility to zero. I directed the driver to back up a few meters until we could regain vision. As the lead tank backed up, the second tank also backed up and went over a steep bank on the south side of the road. About this time, a mighty mite (miniature jeep) raced out of the ambush site with the body of a Marine laying across the back. He had been hit on the right side by an RPG or claymore mine. His arm and most of the right side of his torso were gone. I learned later, he was a platoon sergeant and he must have been well liked because the company commander radioed an apology for evacuating his body in such an exposed manner.

We had to get the tanks back into the firefight so we attached cables between the tanks and began pulling the disabled tank up the embankment. As it came up, it threw the right track off the idler wheel, but at least it was up on the road. Normally, in situation like this, we would break the end connectors off the track, lever it back into position and use two track jacks to pull the track together and reconnect the ends. While we were pulling the track together, one of the jacks broke. Now we had only one track jack to pull the track back together so this was going to take a long time. We had to be careful not to disable the remaining jack as we pulled one side of the track together and attached the end connector then we switched to the other side.

Staff sergeant Jim Jewell took the lead tank forward to support the infantry. I told the gunner to man the 30 caliber machine gun and cover the north side of the road. I took a position on the road to the right front of the tank which enabled me to see the embankment down to the river, the mountainside to the north, and behind the tank. So, with the machine gun and a 45 pistol, we hoped we could prevent any assault on Cpls. Lynn Young and P.J. Pijura who were repairing the track.

We had one side connected, but before we were able to switch the jack to the other side, a forward observer ran across the road about 30 meters in front of the tank. He was attempting to get a better vantage on the enemy. He was KIA by automatic weapons fire. (For a long time I believed the observer was Lt. H.K. Persons who I knew at basic school. I found out recently he had been killed by a mine in Thua Thien on 01 02 1968 a couple of months before the ambush. He is honored on panel 36E line 58 of the memorial. I never learned the identity of the brave Marine observer.) An infantryman attempted to get the body but he was wounded in the leg in the process. Corporal Young went to assist the wounded Marine back to the rear. While he was gone, two RPG's flew past us. At the time the enemy was not able to get a clear shot at us. My concern now was that the enemy would move into a better position and disable the tank before we could finish the repairs.

When Corporal Young returned, we attached the other side of the track, mounted up, and moved to a position behind SSgt. Jewell's tank. He was firing at enemy positions in three gulleys above the bridge. We began canister and "bee hive" rounds at the enemy across the river. The tanks were told to stand down while jets were in the air bombing those positions. The loader took the opportunity to photograph the planes. In one picture, he caught an F-4 climbing while the napalm was exploding right behind it. I have attached pictures of the "snakes and napes" to the story.

Near dark, the tanks and infantry pulled into a defensive position to the east of the bridge. That night SSgt. Jewell

said that he had been wounded by shrapnel while closing the tank commander's hatch. He had cleaned his wound and seemed ok. When I called Bravo Company to report, I requested a flame tank. I was informed that both "Zippos" were unavailable. I was so frustrated by the news that I forgot to mention SSgt. Jewell's wound. For that, I later received a reprimand from Captain Claude Reinke, the bravo company commander.

On day two, the battle continued with the NVA still in bunkers up the three gully's and hidden in the tall grass and bushes on the far side of the river. While the tanks provided fire support, the infantry attempted to flank the enemy positions from above on the east and north slopes. We expended a lot of ammunition on that night so I informed Bravo Company that we needed a resupply of 90 millimeter rounds.

Early on day three, a CH 36 helicopter brought the tank ammunition. There was no room for the pilot to land so he hovered close to the road and the air crew slid the crates out the back door of the helicopter and flew it away. After instructions on how to uncrate the rounds, and being careful to protect the percussion caps, the infantry formed two chains and relayed the rounds to the two tanks. I learned later that the pilot was Lt. Richard Spohn, my fraternity brother from Penn State.

Later that day there was a lull in the fire from the NVA positions. We received orders from the infantry battalion commander to send a tank through the ambush site to see if it would "draw fire" from the enemy. I protested saying, "We would only draw RPG fire," but the commander insisted. Still not sure whether the bridge would support the weight of a tank, we were forced to use the bypass. That placed the tank in a position that rendered the main gun useless and exposed the top of the turret, the least protected by armor, from RPG fire. SSgt. Jewell, with Cpl. Young driving, took his tank through the bypass while the second tank provided fire support. He was able to cross the ambush and move to a wide spot in the road by a culvert. As they were attempting to turn around, they took some small arms and RPG fire. They returned fire, completed the turn, and came back to the bridge position. Both bridge crossings occurred without drawing fire. I never learned how the battalion commander benefitted from that fiasco unless it was to inform him that there were NVA all along the road. Since the tank received no enemy fire on the bridge, the infantry began taking positions further down the gulleys.

As the infantry was moving, two trucks approached from the west and as they crossed the bridge, the enemy opened fire destroying the trucks and killing the Marines inside. The enemy had been playing possum. I still wonder why those Marines were not warned of the situation at the bridge. As the battle continued, two tanks commanded by 2nd Lt. Ralston came from the west and provided supporting fire against the eastern side of the gulleys. He also

provided information that the bridges would support the weight of tanks. The bypass (death trap) would no longer be used.

With darkness approaching, Lt. Ralston's tanks returned to their base and we again took up a defensive position for the night. Bravo Company radioed and told me to return to Camp Carroll to go on R & R (rest and relaxation). I replied that I would not leave my tankers while they were in contact with the enemy they could give my slot to someone else.

On day four, the battalion commander wanted to move one tank and some infantry to the far side of the bridge so to surround the enemy. As SSgt. Jewell moved across the bridge, his tank was hit by an RPG. The round penetrated his fuel cell and a geyser of diesel fuel was shooting out the right side of the tank. Not wanting his tank immobilized and blocking the road, I directed him to move as fast as he could to the next defended bridge position. He moved further west on route 9 to a bridge that crossed the Rao Quan creek and moved into the defensive perimeter there. He then radioed that he had made it safely to the next bridge and was with a squad of infantry protecting the bridge.

The enemy fire was again silent so I fired a canister round into the westernmost gully and sped (as if a tank could speed) across the bridge. Fortunately there were no RPG's this time. Once across the bridge, I noticed that we were sitting at the base of a tall cliff which would provide an excellent place to fire down on the turret. The only weapon that could cover the cliff was the 50 caliber machinegun which after a few bursts, it jammed. When I tried to clear the jam, the cocking cable broke off in my hand.

As the infantry attempted to cross the bridge, the enemy opened fire again. The company commander called for white phosphorous (Willy peter) artillery on the enemy positions. As the Captain adjusted fire, I noticed that the next volley was going to land on the tank. I told the Captain to correct his fire, he did, and we averted a disaster. That Willy peter would have sucked all the oxygen out of the tank had we been hit. After the Willy peter landed, the enemy fire subsided and the infantry managed to cross the bridge and secure the west side.

As dark approached, I was told to continue on with the tank in support of the infantry, to the next bridge to assist Jewell's tank. It was now dark and the infantry was moving along the road following the trail of leaked diesel fuel. Approximately 4000 meters from the next bridge, the infantry began taking fire from another gully on the right side of the road. We moved the tank into the spot where the rounds were hitting and told the infantry commander to pull his troops back while we fired some 90 millimeter up the gully. After a couple rounds, the infantry was able cross to the left of the tank while we pinned the enemy down with the machine gun. Once across, the infantry took off running to the next bridge position. We hung back so as not to run over anyone. Soon, the infantry was out of >>

sight and we were alone on the road, moving slowly (sounds like a perfect target to me). A little further down the road, the driver said he saw an NVA soldier run behind a tree. We stopped, fired, and destroyed the tree and whatever was behind it.

This entire story was difficult for me to write but this section was the most difficult. It stopped progress many times over many years.

At this point on the road, I remember feeling in the dark, confused, and more afraid than I had been during the four day firefight. I prayed, begged and cried out, "God get me out of here." I was not miraculously transported to a safe place. Previously, I had written a prayer on my helmet. It read "God make the dark night bright to the wanderer." That was the prayer that was answered that night. I was no longer in the dark and I was no longer afraid. It was like being back in the womb, safe warm and protected. I know now the warmth I felt was in my heart like the two disciples felt when they met Jesus after his resurrection. Our pastor Brian Patchinger describes the time you first believe that Jesus Christ is the living Lord as "My Moment". This night was my moment.

The day word came that a tank retriever was on the way to collect Jewell's tank. The ambush site was secured and I was late for R & R. On the way back we saw the infantry celebrating their victory with cheers and raised fists in the air. At one point the maintenance chief on the retriever thought he saw some enemy across the river, however, through the gun sight, it was clear they were only some brown bushes bobbing up and down.

We stopped at the Rockpile long enough to give the officers of 3rd Battalion 9th Marines a report of the ambush, specifically how the enemy was positioned in the gullies. I went on to Camp Carroll to drop off the disabled tank and pick up my gear for R & R. Then it was off to Australia.

Regrets from this episode:

1. I did not write citations for Staff Sargent Jewell, Corporal Young and the other crewman that helped repair the track.
2. I did not have enough trust in God to go through the explosion and across the bridge on that first day.
3. I was not able to explain to others what had happened there in the dark and how the power of prayer helped me. ■

Editor's Note: On November 1, 2020, longtime VTA member Herb Whittington reported to "The Great Tank Park in the Sky." Since Herb was one of the few VTA members who had written a story of his Vietnam experience, we thought that we'd honor him by republishing it. His story originally appeared in Sponson Box #1 - 2015.

MY SCARIEST MOMENT IN VIET NAM

BY HERB WHITTINGTON

With a total of thirty-two months spent in-country, the first 23 were with Charlie Company, Third Tanks. The remaining nine were with H&S Co. attached to 3/26; operating as a Battalion Landing Team. That much time in-country obviously had more than a few events which burned deep into my mind. The nightmares and inability to sleep still haunt many of us as the severity of fighting for one's life leaves certain memories buried deep in a special but dark corner of our mind. Such was



and is the life of a USMC tanker. It wasn't the cold miserable winter on Con Thien when standing guard duty on our tank meant sitting covered with a poncho, not being able to see six inches away at night in a drenching rain. Nor was it the time we were ambushed on the last leg returning from a lengthy trip out in the field, in spite of having only a minute or so earlier being notified by a FAC that all was clear and we were only a mile or two from reaching the highway. All hell broke loose and before it

was over, the driver of a tank ahead of us died when an RPG came across the corner of his tank. Too graphic to describe, needless to say.

Then there was the time we were overrun at Cam Lo, gooks running through our perimeter tossing pineapple grenades; now that was a real wake up in the middle of the night! The roar and sight of "Spookies" with their constant unabated fire producing swirling streams of tracers is hard to forget. More memories fresh from only 48 years that return all too frequently. At dawn's first light they retreated heading up a mountain with Phantom F4's bombing them at every step. One sight the next morning lodged in my mind was the dead gook just beyond the wire with a dead comrade on each side, trying to recover and extract the body with meat hooks under each arm pit.

Another haunting memory is of the late afternoon when we had completed a search and destroy mission in a village, and were preparing to set up our defensive position for the night. It was looking like some serious rain was heading our way, so my driver Joe and I decided to make use of the remainder of a roof from a destroyed "hootch". Gable shaped as most, the roof seemed likely easiest to carry back to our tank for protection from the rain were we to set it up as if it were a pup tent, we first tried to fold it and carry it flat. Too bulky, too much swag, it just was not to be carried far this way. So we decided to use our heads (literally), set it up on the ground as if it were the tent, Joe under the front and myself at the rear carrying it on top of our heads. Terrible idea, the thatch on the "tent's" exterior covered our faces making it impossible to see anything while on our shoulders. So we set it down, decided the original idea of carrying it folded flat would be the only answer. Doing so, just as we reached down to begin humping it back to our tank, out crawled two krait snakes. God had been planning on us sleeping out in the open after all.

Then there was the night when an uneasy quiet allowed us to sleep, always on the edge we all experienced throughout our time in country. No wonder many of us have never had a good night's sleep regardless how many years have passed. From out in a valley ahead of our tank came the eye opening thump, thump, thump from heavy mortars directed at us. Our crew all made it into our tank and closed the hatch. Moments later a mortar landed directly on top of us, doing little more than a slight shaking of the tank. When all ended and we exited, we saw antennae and everything that had been near the top of the turret vanished. More time, more memories.

Once in the thick of the jungle during a heavy firefight, the tank I was on threw a track. For protection while we replaced a damaged tread, the T C turned the tank crosswise against the incoming from spider holes and the jungle in general. Presenting such a big target like that was unnerving, but what remained deepest in my mind from the moment was a grunt coming up to our track replace-

ment effort with a big smile on his face. He looked at us and calmly said, "I'm going home", while holding his hand up to show a middle finger severed just below the second joint. No blood, appearing to be in no pain, just a clean amputation; he knew that was his ticket out of country. Evidently he must have been in some state of shock, as his moment of truth erased the pain with the pleasure of knowing his next destination.

These are but a few of the memories I care to write about, others are too painful to reminisce over. Each and every one of us tankers have many of the same memories that still haunt us at night. The losses of best personal friends are the hardest to write about, let alone forget. How can we decide which is the scariest moment while in country?

Probably my scariest is one night sitting out on some forgotten hill which we had set up a defensive position earlier in the day. Directly out in front of us that night, an ambush along a river bordering a mountain was sprung when gooks on the other side or the river were spotted. They called on my tank to deliver some rounds to the enemy. Let me tell you, delivering rounds in the middle of the night at roughly 2,500 yards, directly OVER our own Marines was one hell of a frightening event. In spite of having fired some spotter rounds earlier in the afternoon to create an azimuth card and establish some likely grid patterns; having the numbers written on an empty C ration box lid gave me no comfort in any shape or form. Even insisting that my first rounds were going to be high intentionally just in case, there was such an overbearing thought of potential flaw in what I had written down earlier when firing for effect to establish potential targets. Thanks to God was HEAVY on my mind when we realized our numbers were right on. The thought of failing at our mission, and the inevitable realization that such would cost lives of our own Marines has yet to escape my memory. Never will I forget to appreciate Gunny Rowe's approval for us to send off some practice rounds earlier that day.

That is plenty for my first record of time served in Viet Nam. It would do all of us good to hear some of the same from others. If writing is not your thing, tell it to someone who can transcribe it and write it up for you. This won't purge you of some painful memories, but it does feel better having shared them with others who can relate to what we are discussing.

Don't get me wrong, all of us have some fond memories of the funny things that happened to us at one time or another. In the future I hope to write about the humor we also shared. Once I told John that I had begun an article entitled "PTSD from the inside Looking Out". That one still sits here incomplete. Maybe one day.

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USMC VTA History Project Podcasts

SPEAKER: FRANK “TREE” REMKIEWICZ

Hello anda brave shout out to my very first listening audience. My name is Frank Remkiewicz. And in Vietnam I was known as “Tree”. In the next episode you will learn how my name changed from Frank to “Tree”. But for now, you can just call me Frank.

This is the first episode of the USMC tanks in Vietnam Podcast. Our official title is tracking our history. If you have arrived here by accident, please stick around. We are going to discuss the Life and Times of Marine Corps tank crewmen in Vietnam. It is my pleasure to be your guide over the course of these exciting and informative podcasts. And by the way, a new podcast will arrive every two weeks, but a little more on that later.

This podcast and our subsequent podcasts will tell the story of the 1st, 3rd and 5th Tank Battalions and the quietly heroic deeds of the men that operated those tanks in Vietnam. You, the listening audience, will hear stories from the men who created them. Details will be authentic and from the heart. These experiences will be ones that the listening audience can share with their own families. The men will talk about experiences that are serious and sometimes deadly. But there are stories that are humorous, crazy, heartbreaking, dizzying and quite frankly untold. Until now, these men, my brothers, gladiators, all are quiet and humble. These tankers have gone on to live rich and full lives with families of their own and professions they are all proud of. I would like to note that among the tankers to be interviewed, there will be several authors, a few with multiple books to their credit.

Honor, duty, and commitment are not just practiced while in the Marine Corps, but rather embedded in the hearts and minds and souls of all who served. You will see these characteristics spring forth from the lives these men have led through the stories they tell.

Let's you and I look at some of the reasons this podcast was created. To record and memorialize these Marine tankers and their real stories.

The question that immediately comes to mind is why? Why are these stories so important? As we will elaborate on a separate podcast episode, the US Marine Corps has recently decided to eliminate tanks from the Marine Corps Arsenal and all future military operations.

Tanks have been critical. As successful tools in our defense, providing forward protection and necessary power for infantry and ground force or grunt battalions. And providing the essential difference in countless battles across countless landscapes where freedom has been hard fought. And as of last month the Corps has decided to call on tanks from the Army when tanks are necessary, Can you believe that... the Army?

It is our desire, along with the larger VTA organization that our stories and voices not be tossed to the winds of time as a result of this recent change to Marine Corps policy. It is our mission and our duty to not leave these men, their families, their loved ones, behind and to remember them, and their important contribution to generations to come. It is our mission to demonstrate that the Marine Corps needs tanks with Marine Corps crewmen. The stories you will find in these podcasts will demonstrate why there is no better tank crew in the world than the US Marine Corps tanker.

So let me back up and talk about some basic information. A tank is a motorized noisy, high powered, medium gunned, tracked driven vehicle designed to support infantry assaults. In Vietnam, tanks were used heavily to provide added firepower against RPG teams, machine guns and other heavy weapons. Often times it equalizes the force strength when the NVA sent out a numerically superior force to ambush a Marine squad or platoon. And even on rare occasion we would go up against NVA tanks. As you may know tanks came into regular use during the war.

Speaking of age, listen to this. When I returned from Vietnam, my now wife Kathryn and I decided to get married. When I called the County Hall of Records, I had discovered I had to appear in person and bring my mother with me. Remember now I spent 13 months in combat and was still under doctor's care for wounds that I had received on my last day in combat. But I was only 19 years old. Turns out my mom had to give her permission in writing in order for me to marry. Man was that embarrassing.

You want to take a ride, well then hop in through the loaders hatch of our own M48 tank and let me take everyone on a spin around Vietnam. Since 52 tons of homogeneous steel running on heavy track can be noisy when you get inside, put on your com helmet so we can talk without any real noise. Remember to keep your helmet on if you want to say something. This week's test drive will be a run for all of us to discover the lay of the land. When Marines speak of the I Corps portion of Vietnam, what we really mean is the country of Vietnam Beginning at Da Nang in the South and running North. It extends through Quang Tri, Dong Ha, and North to the Demilitarized Zone, geographically known as the 17th parallel. You will become intimately aware of places like Con Tien, Khe Sanh, Gio Linh, the Rockpile, Camp Carroll A4, Mutters Ridge and, Leatherneck Square will take us from 1967 through about 1972.

Since there were only two tank battalions, three if you count the portion of 5th Tanks and way more battalions of grunts, a term used affectionately to signify Marine infantry,

try, Marine tanks spent a large amount of time in the field.

Tanks were repeatedly deployed to support multiple grunt units and we were always in high frequency rotation since the quantity of tank battalions was so few compared to grunt units that needed that extra level of support and security.

In order to listen to our podcast programs, please log onto the USMC VTA website:

<http://www.usmcvta.org> and click on Podcasts with VTA Members. And enjoy!!!

Tree is conducting one podcast per month so the backlog is quite substantial but if after you have listened to one, two or all of them and you feel inspired to participate, please let Tree know. His email address is: fremkiewicz@gmail.com or his phone number is 209.996.8887.

The World War Two Combat Arms group grunts, and everyone else spent on average, about 45 days in combat. As Vietnam tankers, covering large swaths of ground, the average tank crewman spent about 270 days in the field combat. If you will, out of about 13 month. That means about 68% of the time. tank crewmen were either engaged in firefights or looking to engage in firefights.

Marine tanks rarely came out of the field; when they did. It was for some repair that had to be done in Dong Ha, which was Third Tank Battalion headquarters during the monsoon season. Tanks were frequently used for indirect fire. That is, tanks were used similarly to that of an artillery weapon. That is what was referred to as H and I, harassment and interdiction. This was designed to harass the enemy should they be out walking around generally at night. This type of tank support was usually done from a fire support base and done mostly in the wee hours of the morning.

As you suspected, guests of this podcast are all combat veterans. Among this group, there are Silver Stars, bronze stars, and a slew of Purple Hearts. There are men who have a Brotherhood stronger than any you will find anywhere else in the world. These men are my brothers, my choice, and through the crucible of combat. They have donated their

time to be with you and me in order that we all can become more aware of what Marine tankers have done in the past. In some cases how their experiences in Vietnam informed their later lives and the impact their lives have had on their families and friends.

OK, I can see the tank map insight and will be finishing up our drive now. As we are pulling into the tank park, here is a programming note. There will be a new USMC Vietnam Veterans Podcast every two weeks. The podcast is scheduled for the same time and day each week.

Now as we pull into the tank slot, make sure you have all your personal belongings. Be careful as you exit the hatches and climb down from the tank. That first step can be a real doozy. Look for a new tank drive in two weeks. The podcast will be available every other Tuesday starting at 2:00 AM.

And a critical programming note. The tunes played here are from country Joe McDonald and his Vietnam Experience album. He and his staff have graciously donated the music from that album to us to use in these podcasts, and so a huge thank you to Bill Belmont and Joe McDonald.

And on that note, my friends, I will end the 1st edition of tracking our history, USMC tanks in Vietnam. Let me remind everyone to go over to the usmcvta.org website for lots more information. Leave your comments and questions for our next time. Tell all your friends and neighbors about this podcast. We want to reach as many people as we can. It is important for both you and us. And keep in mind my friends, you are the main reason we went to Vietnam.

This is “Tree” shutting down the engine for now. Thank you for listening and we will see you next time when we interview Roger “Blues” Unland. While “Blues” was in country, he was the very best tank driver around. He was coveted by many a tank commander, sometimes being traded from one tank to another. Among other things, I am sure he can give us tips on how to drive in the midst of Los Angeles traffic and the congestion there.

Until next time Semper Fi. ■

My Time with 2nd Tanks

BY JOE TYSON

I reported into 2nd Platoon, A Co, 2nd Tank Battalion at Camp LeJeune and I was assigned to tank A-25 at the end of December 1964. SSGT Lore was our platoon sergeant. I had just made the rank of Private 1st Class (PFC) and I would be in training to be the gunner.

My first deployment with the 2nd Platoon was a six month tour of duty at Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. We up

loaded the 2nd Platoon's five gun tanks and two flame tanks from H&S Co along with a company of infantry from the 6th Marines. As an aside, the “Pogey Bait Sixth” wore the French Forager on the left shoulder of their dress uniforms which they received from the French government in WW1.

When we were all loaded on the LST, (Landing >>



2021 Providence Reunion Schedule

Wednesday, September 15 – Monday, September 20

(Revised June 2021)

Ship Tank ... I think it was the USS Lorain County). We set sail for Gitmo. Our job there was to reinforce the infantry on the ridge line which was the communist border with Gitmo. We observed a lot of Russian military there who were training the communist Cuban infantry.

We returned to Camp Lejeune in July 1965 by conducting an amphibious (wet) landing at Morehead City NC. After landing we loaded the five gun tanks and two flame tanks on to flatbed train cars. Pfc Charley During and I volunteered for train guard duty. We did not return to Camp Lejeune until four days later. We found out that train guard was good duty. The rest of the 2nd Platoon met us there to drive the tanks back to the tank park. Then we went to our barracks at Main Side on LeJeune.

Next, we had a lot of on-the-job training with tank maintenance, gunnery and with boarding amphibious ships and off-loading on to the beach. One time we even practiced climbing down the rope ladders and making an attempt to time your jump into the waiting infantry landing craft. It was very hairy when the sea was rough. I am glad we only did that once.

We had been back at Camp LeJeune for a about a month, when we were ordered to upload to a LPH for Operation Starflex which was to occur in southern Spain. The amphibious ship (Landing Platform Helicopter) was pretty much the same as LSD (Landing Ship Dock) only it had a helo pad aft of the ship over the well deck. After loading with a contingent of infantry from the Sixth Marines, the ship headed across the Atlantic to Europe. Along the way we met up with the rest of the convoy of about ninety ships; all headed for our beach landing at Seville, Spain. We were to then conduct war games with NATO forces in and around Seville and Cadiz, Spain. Spain's President Fernando Franco was still in power then. Spain was a socialist nation that was ruled by Franco, a dictator. The only thing that Franco had left out was his people. He never notified them that we were coming. Unfortunately his people thought they were being invaded. We found out that the Spanish were very wonderful Christian people but they were very poor. They welcomed us and all the NATO forces once they found out what was going on and were happy that they did not get invaded! The landing we made was the largest amphibious landing since the Normandy Invasion during World War 2.

After arriving off shore of Seville and after leaving the LPH well deck, we were circling aboard a Mike Boat. A Mike Boat (Landing Craft Medium) was capable of carrying two Patton medium gun tanks. As we waited for the flag signal from the Shore Party Marines to head to shore and land, we witnessed a tragic event. As we circled we were watching the Sixth Marines being choppered off the platform on the rear of the LPH in Chinook helicopters. Suddenly, two helicopters collided in mid-air. It was a very sad incident to witness. It appeared as if they were on their

landing approach when it happened. There were nine infantry Marines killed outright and thirteen injured.

After the operations in Southern Spain we had ten days of liberty in the Canary Islands. It was one terrific liberty and then we sailed back across the Atlantic in the same convoy of 90 ships. After going thru a horrific hurricane when we were three days out from Morehead City we then landed on the beach. We loaded the five tanks on train flat cars and we boarded buses for the ride back to Main Side, Camp LeJeune. That trip across the Atlantic had taken ten days each way. Our ship could only sail as fast as the slowest ship in the convoy.

Our next deployment from Lejeune was to Fort Drum, NY. Fort Drum was the home of the Army's 10th Mountain Division. The fort is right in the middle of the New York State Snowbelt. We were deployed there for one month of Cold Weather training. Accompanying us was another contingent of infantry from the 6th Marines from Camp Lejeune. Our tank platoon flew up to NY on a Marine C-130 transport airplane in late November, 1964. Due to the freezing conditions our plane ended up sideways in a corn field and we were the last flight in.

The Marine Corps had managed to borrow five M-48A3 Patton gun tanks, from the US Marine Reserve outfit in Syracuse, NY. We had the tanks transported up to Fort Drum by train flat cars. What a time we had getting those tanks started in subzero temps. They had no pony motors to heat the engine heads. When we finally got all five of the tanks started we had to leave them running for the entire exercise, 30 days.

After a month of Cold Weather training, we boarded a C-130 and flew back to Camp LeJeune. Then within one month, I was on my way to Okinawa and then to Vietnam. Our MEB (Marine Expeditionary Brigade) landed at Red Beach 2. We were with the 9th Marines on March 8, 1965. Which by the way was the first military combat unit to be assigned to the Vietnam "conflict."

An add-on for 2nd Tanks: I spoke to Dave Bennett by phone. He and I were on the same tank at 2nd Tanks on A-25. Dave told me he was on a Vegas Cruise before I reported in to 2nd Tanks. He could not give me exact dates but on that cruise he remembered it was when Pres. Kennedy was killed. November 1963. He told me that they had a 21 gun salute for the assassinated President,

I am still trying get ahold of Bob Haller. He was with 2nd Tanks at LeJeune after Dave and I left for Nam. I remember Bob telling me he was on a Med Cruise with 2nd Tanks right before he left for Nam and where I met up with him. Bob received three Purple Hearts in Nam.

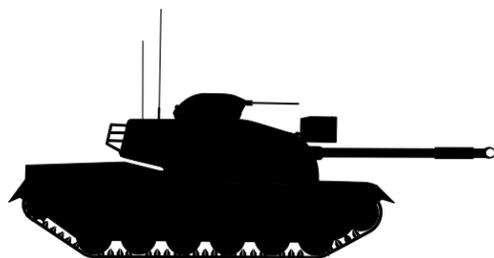
Excerpts were taken from the book "Unfortunate Sons" By Joe Tyson Sr. ■

| | | |
|--------------------------------|---|---|
| Wednesday (Sept. 15) | 0900 – 2330 | Arrival Day – Register and pickup Welcome Packet outside The Torsion Bar hospitality room (In the Atrium). Sign up for VTA History Interviews; Writing Workshops and Outside Tours |
| | 0900 – 2330 | The Torsion Bar is Open Lunch & Dinner on your own |
| Thursday (Sept. 16) | 0600 – 0815 | Complimentary breakfast buffet (In the Torsion Bar) |
| | 0830 – 1200 | Ladies Coffee (In the Torsion Bar) |
| | 0900 – 1200 | Reunion kick-off and VTA Business Meeting (In the Bristol Ballroom) <i>Enter to win a FREE hotel room for reunion!</i> <i>Must submit ticket before 0900 in the meeting room and be present for the drawing to win.</i> |
| | 1200 – 1630 | Free Time and lunch on your own |
| | 1100 – 1630 | The Torsion Bar Open |
| | 1700 – 1800 | Italian Buffet Dinner (In the Plaza Ballroom) |
| | 1800 – 2000 | Live Auction! (In the Plaza Ballroom) |
| | 2000 – 2300 | The Torsion Bar Open |
| Friday (Sept. 17) | Wear your reunion T-shirt today!!! | |
| | 0600 – 0815 | Complimentary breakfast buffet (In the Torsion Bar) |
| | 1000 – 1015 | Load buses to tour American Heritage Museum (In the front of the hotel) |
| | 1045 – 1545 | Tour Lunch on your own |
| | 1545 | Load buses for return to hotel |
| | 1600–1700 | Return to hotel |
| | 1700 – 2300 | The Torsion Bar Open Dinner on your own |

(See reverse side)

2021 Providence Reunion Schedule

| | | |
|-------------------------------|--------------------|--|
| Saturday (Sept. 18) | 0600 – 0815 | Complimentary breakfast buffet (In the Torsion Bar) |
| | 0930 – 0945 | Load buses to tour Battleship Cove (In the front of the hotel) |
| | 1030 - 1400 | Tour Battleship Cove (Lunch on your Own) |
| | TBD | Load buses to return to hotel |
| | 1400 | Final Bus Return to Hotel |
| | 1600 – 2300 | Torsion Bar Open Dinner on your own |
| Sunday (Sept. 19) | 0600 – 0815 | Complimentary breakfast buffet (In the Torsion Bar) Open Day – All Day Interview Schedule Posted in Torsion Bar Lunch on your own |
| | 1000 – 1600 | The Torsion Bar Open |
| | 1630 – 2130 | FAREWELL BANQUET (PLAZA BALLROOMS) <i>NOTE: Dress for this function is a shirt with a collar, dress slacks, shoes and socks. Coat & tie optional. Wearing of military ribbons or medals on a jacket is highly encouraged.</i> |
| | 1630 – 1745 | Cocktails – Cash Bar |
| | 1800 – 1815 | Presentation of Colors and remarks |
| | 1815 – 1900 | Dinner Served |
| | 1900 – 1905 | 05 minutes – Head Call |
| | 1905 – 2130 | 30 minutes – Guest Speaker 45 minutes – Fallen Heroes 05 minutes – 2023 Reunion |
| | 2130 – 2400 | The Torsion Bar Open – Last Call. |
| Monday (Sept. 20) | | Departure Day |



OFFICIAL REGISTRATION FORM 2021 Providence Reunion

Crown Plaza

Warwick September 15 – 20



Want to save \$30?
Mail your registration before July 30

Please Print all information

Member's Name: _____

Guest's Name (s): _____
and relationship _____

Address: _____

Town: _____ State _____ Zip Code _____

Cell Phone: _____ Home Phone: _____

E-mail Address: _____

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

Are you a first time attendee? YES _____ NO _____ MOS _____

Would you like to participate in our personal interview program? YES _____ NO _____

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

Reunion Refund Policy: If you find that you cannot attend the reunion after you have pre-paid your reunion fees, the USMC VTA will refund your total reunion fees if you notify us prior to July 30, 2021. If you notify us of your cancellation after that date, we are sorry but we cannot make any refund offer.

PROVIDENCE 2021

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

- _____ ○ SHIRT SIZE _____

TOTAL REUNION FEES

My Registration Fee: \$170 \$ _____
 (After July 30th the late registration fee is \$200 each)

My T-Shirt \$15/\$20 \$ _____

Number of guests _____ X \$170 = \$ _____
 (Early registration fee for each guest is \$170.00 and late registration is \$200 for each guest)

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

SUB TOTAL = \$ _____

Optional: Would you like to donate a few dollars to help with expenses? \$ _____

TOTAL AMOUNT ENCLOSED: \$ _____

You must make your own hotel room reservations by August 30th to get the low room rate! Call: **1-800-2CROWNE** or **1- 800.227.6963** and be sure to mention both the “**Crowne Plaza Warwick**” and “**USMC Vietnam Tankers Reunion**” for the special room rate of \$119.00 per night. The special room rate is good for three days prior and three days after the reunion dates as well. Please note the regular hotel room rate is \$190 per night.

CAUTION: Do not confuse the above hotel booking deadline date with the early registration offer which has an July 30th deadline.

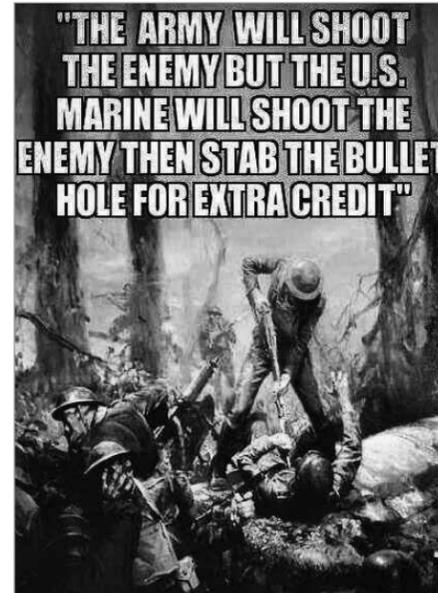
YOUR HOTEL ROOM RESERVATIONS MUST BE BOOKED BY AUGUST 30, 2021

HOW YOU CAN SAVE \$30.00

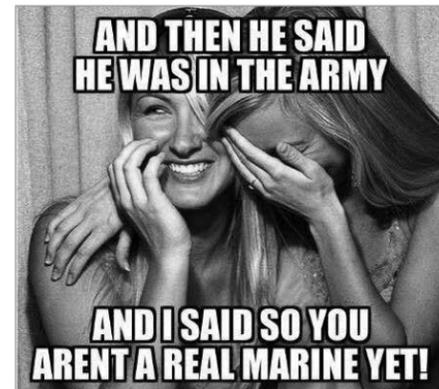
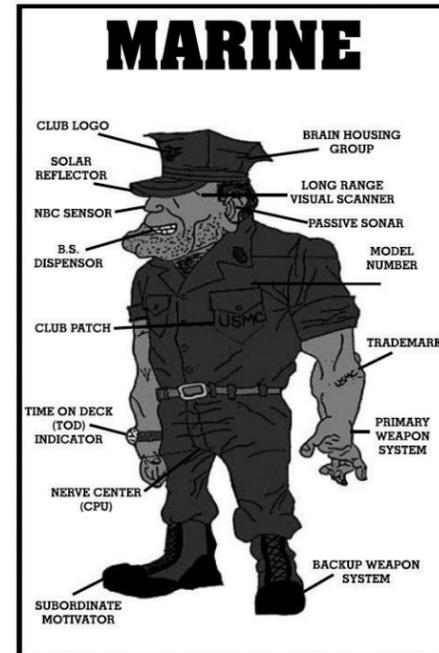
Submit this form along with your payment by July 30th to purchase a reunion t-shirt and save \$30 off of the “Late” Reunion Registration Fee of \$200.

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

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



| 1958 COST OF LIVING | |
|-------------------------------|---------------------|
| <i>LIVING</i> | |
| New House | \$11,975.00 |
| Average Income | \$4,650.00 per year |
| New Car | \$2,155.00 |
| Average Rent | \$95.00 per month |
| Tuition to Harvard University | \$1,000.00 per year |
| Movie Ticket | \$1.00 each |
| Gasoline | 24¢ per gallon |
| United States Postage Stamp | 4¢ each |
| <i>FOOD</i> | |
| Granulated Sugar | 89¢ for 10 pounds |
| Vitamin D Milk | \$1.01 per gallon |
| Ground Coffee | 93¢ per pound |
| Bacon | 62¢ per pound |
| Eggs | 28¢ per dozen |
| Fresh Ground Hamburger | 57¢ per pound |
| Fresh Baked Bread | 19¢ per loaf |



USMC Vietnam Tankers Association

16605 Forest Green Terrace, Elbert, CO 80106-8937

Please note: If the last two digits of "EXPIRES" on your address label is "20" then your 2021 Membership Dues are payable now.

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

USMC VTA c/o Bruce Van Apeldoorn, 99 Shoreline Drive, New Bern, NC 28562-9550

*Over & Above donations are always gratefully appreciated.

